

Task Force for the Review of High School Assessment Options



Maryland State Department of Education
September 5, 2007

Report of the Task Force for the Review of High School Assessment Options

Introduction

By regulation, the State Board of Education is required to review the High School Assessment (HSA) program in 2008 as the class of 2009 approaches graduation. The State Board has conducted reviews of the HSA test results each year in order to track progress and has determined it will continue to review this issue. Specifically the State Board is most concerned about the impact upon certain subgroups, specifically students with disabilities, students with Section 504 Plans, and English language learners.

To assist the Maryland State Board of Education in their review of information and data, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, requested input from a wide range of stakeholders to review the data, legal considerations, and impact on the quality of instruction in high schools. To facilitate this process the Task Force for the Review of High School Assessments Options was convened. Dr. Carol Ann Baglin, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services and Dr. Leslie Wilson, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Accountability and Assessment served as the co-chairs. The membership of the Task Force was comprised of representatives of local school superintendents, instructional personnel, educational organizations, parents, and advocates to review the implications. Please refer to Appendix B for more information.

Charge

The charge of the Task Force was to consider possible options relative to High School Assessments for students with disabilities, students with 504 plans, and English language learners. The Task Force was asked to submit their recommendations to Superintendent Grasmick for consideration in the broad context of input on this issue. The Task Force recommendations were to follow their collective review and consideration of available options that are considered credible and fair in order to provide students flexibility in order to demonstrate their achievement of State content standards. Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the charge.

Initial Options

As part of the charge to the task force, the membership considered the following options:

- **A waiver option**
 - Students will continue to take HSAs, participate in interventions until final year
 - Students will apply for a waiver for each HSA not passed

- **A variance option**
 - Altering the manner in which a test is presented or administered, or in how a test taker is permitted to respond, such as Comp-HSA, Mod-HSA, or other
 - Use of Comp-HSA in place of passing the HSA

- **Delay of all requirements**
 - The implications of delaying, for a period of time, the linkage of passing the HSAs as a graduation requirement for specific subgroups
 - Length of delay
 - Which subgroups

- **Adjustment of passing scores for HSA**
 - Modify the passing score
 - Set one minimum score and one graduation score
 - Composite score
 - For some of the subgroups or all of the subgroups?
 - For how long?

- **Consider expanding the Mod-HSA assessment in place of the HSA assessment for specific subgroups**
 - Eliminate the percentage limit of students taking and passing the Mod-HSA for graduation purposes

- **Differentiated Diplomas**
 - Completion of course requirements and service learning hours, excluding passing the HSA
 - Use of endorsements

Task Force Meetings

The Task Force for the Review of High School Assessment Options met on May 23, June 19, and July 11, 2007. Meeting Agendas and Meeting Minutes are included in Appendix C for your review.

May 23, 2007

The Task Force was provided an overview of High School Assessments and Dr. Leslie Wilson reviewed current available data on the performance of students who have taken the HSAs. In 2006 far more students passed the High School Assessments than in any past year. Overall results include students in middle school and grade 9 who must pass tests to graduate and students in grades 10, 11 and 12 who do not need to pass tests to graduate. The data included graphs of pass rate trends and improved by subgroups for algebra/data analysis, biology, and government.

Data and information on what other states are doing to address exit exam options for students was provided to the Task Force. In reviewing this information, it was noted that states have

often made changes when faced with data that indicate students and schools are not ready for the test in its current form and the accompanying consequences. The types of changes noted include the following:

- Delays of 1 to 4 years in consequences for all students or just for students with disabilities;
- Phasing in tests over time rather than having accountability for all at the same time;
- Permanent exemptions for certain groups of special education students;
- Lower cut scores (sometimes permanent and sometimes higher cut scores are phased in over time);
- Removal of more difficult items on the exams such as writing items or higher level algebra;
- Alternate routes to a regular diploma; and
- Granting of certificates or special diplomas to students who are unable to pass the exams.

Task Force members were asked to break into six groups to discuss one of the options identified within the charge. For the group's option, members were to consider the following five questions and to identify any advantages or disadvantages of the option:

- How will the option support improved instruction for students?
- How will the option benefit students?
- How will the option enable students to pursue post-secondary education?
- What possible unintended consequences for students may result from the use of this option?
- What additional information, if any, is needed?

June 19, 2007

The Task Force was pleased to have Dr. David Conley, Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership in the College of Education, University of Oregon as a guest speaker. Dr. Conley is the founder and director of the Center for Educational Policy Research (CEPR) at the University of Oregon and the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC). Currently, CEPR and EPIC have grants and contracts with national and state educational agencies and organizations to perform research on a variety of issue related to college readiness standards, high school-college articulation and transition, state high school exit examinations, and state adequacy funding models.

Dr. Conley spoke on his experiences with the State of Washington. He conducted research on alternatives to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and considered options for Washington alternative assessments (WAA).

His research applied to all students who did not pass the WASL test twice. This included special populations. Special population groups are not homogeneous. These groups include a wide range of students. There isn't one population and a continuum of students and needs. The range of abilities and issues and needs and backgrounds, to fit all into one system is not possible. There are three dimensions of a High Stakes System of Assessment: content; standard; and measurement.

July 11, 2007

Each of the options from the Task Force charge and the current status was reviewed. A discussion of any issues for each option and specific recommendations for each option were presented for further consideration.

Beliefs

To facilitate discussion the Task Force for the Review of High School Assessment Options developed the following twelve guiding beliefs to provide the framework to guide the recommendations:

1. Options should be available to students with disabilities, students with Section 504 Plans, and English language learners, since students need another way to show their knowledge.
2. The HSAs have led to positive changes in the classroom and more attention for underserved students.
3. Standards for instruction and assessments should be maintained and not relaxed.
4. Any solution must be free of complexities so that parents, teachers, and students within the subgroups can understand it and that the reasoning behind the solution is apparent.
5. Quick turnaround should be a goal of any option. The sooner that information is available the sooner students and schools may start working toward improving their performance.
6. Students' self esteem should be taken into account. We know that repeated retesting is unlikely to help students but rather lessen their motivation and sense of self.
7. Options should allow for individualization of incentives and interventions because students demonstrate success in a variety of ways. Local districts must be included in decisions related to individualization of options.
8. The state should set reasonable parameters and controls to ensure consistency and reduce subjectivity so that the standard is not lowered.
9. Options must continue to provide interventions and incentives for:
 - a. Improving instruction
 - b. Students to achieve at the highest levels they can
 - c. Positive behaviors and participation in learning and the school community.

10. Students should be able to use their many strengths to compensate for areas where their performance is not as strong and not be penalized for taking extra courses in order to continue working toward a high school diploma.
11. Students should be rewarded and recognized for their continued efforts to learn the material and pass the exams.
12. Options should not simply be separate routes to show achievement.

Table of Recommended Options

In keeping with the charge to the Task Force, the membership suggests the consideration of the following revisions to the original options:

Options within Task Force Charge	Recommendations Considered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A waiver option <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students will continue to take HSAs, participate in interventions until final year ○ Students will apply for a waiver for each HSA not passed 	<p style="text-align: center;">July 11, 2007</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A waiver option <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students will continue to participate in interventions until final year ○ Students will apply for a waiver for each HSA not passed ○ Expand to include other eligibility <p>The Task Force made several suggestions for further investigation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variance option <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Altering the manner in which a test is presented or administered, or in how a test taker is permitted to respond, such as Comp-HSA, Mod-HSA, or other ○ Use of Comp-HSA in place of passing the HSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variance option <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Altering the manner in which a test is presented or administered, or in how a test taker is permitted to respond, such as Comp-HSA, Mod-HSA, or other ○ Use of Comp-HSA for algebra/data analysis will be piloted in three local school systems: Howard, Prince George's, and Talbot <p>The Task Force recommends the continuation of the Comp-HSA option</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay of all requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The implications of delaying, for a period of time, the linkage of passing the HSAs as a graduation requirement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay of all requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being considered in conjunction with a waiver for a length of time <p>No consensus of the Task Force</p>

<p>for specific subgroups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Length of delay ▪ Which subgroups 	
<p>Options within Task Force Charge</p>	<p>Recommendations Considered July 11, 2007</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment of passing scores for HSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Modify the passing score ○ Set one minimum score and one graduation score ○ Composite score ○ For some of the subgroups or all of the subgroups? ○ For how long? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment of passing scores for HSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being considered in conjunction with a waiver to expand range of scores – <p>Not supported by the Task Force</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider expanding the Mod-HSA assessment in place of the HSA assessment for specific subgroups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eliminate the percentage limit of students taking and passing the Mod-HSA for graduation purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the Mod-HSA assessment in place of the HSA assessment for specific subgroups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider eliminating the 2 percent limit of students taking and passing the Mod-HSA for graduation purposes; ○ Consider using the Mod-HSA assessment for students with 504 Plans and English language learners <p>The Task Force recommends this option for further consideration</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated Diplomas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Completion of course requirements and service learning hours, excluding passing the HSA ○ Use of endorsements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated Diplomas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Change to an Endorsement Model for higher levels of student performance <p>Not supported by the Task Force</p>

Final Recommendation

Following an in-depth discussion and review, the Task Force recommends the following options for further consideration:

- **A waiver - for three subgroups**
The Task Force made the following suggestions:
 - MSDE research the Indiana model

- Limit HSA retakes to two per assessment.
- A smaller work group of practitioners (High School Principals) should be asked for their suggestions on how this option could be implemented
- This could possibly be a temporary option while other measures/options are under construction.

The Task Force members recommend an investigation into the use of the Indiana waiver model with additional input and review of legal requirements as informed by a review of case law. The object is to implement an option that will withstand review by the courts. The waiver option should be used only for a finite period of time.

- **A variance option**

The Task Force members recommend continuing Comp-HSA development.

- **Delay of all requirements**

There was no consensus from the Task Force members.

- **Adjustment of passing scores for HSA**

The Task Force members reject this option.

- **Consider expanding the Mod-HSA assessment in place of the HSA assessment for specific subgroups**

The Task Force members recommend this option.

- **Differentiated Diplomas**

The Task Force members reject this option.

Conclusion

The Task Force came to consensus on a series of beliefs applicable to all students which established a foundation for dialog relative to the specific subgroups of students. There was consensus that the Superintendent needed to consider the development of additional options for all students. Further development and future implementation must address the consideration of several issues, including the:

- Individualized nature of student performance;
- Importance of a variety of instructional interventions and assessment options for all students; and
- Requirement that all students must meet local requirements.

The Task Force for the Review of High School Assessment Options understands that there are other forums through which the Department is seeking broad stakeholder input from across the state and there will be additional opportunities for input. The Task Force understands that not all students will be able to pass all HSA tests even with a wide range of options and quality interventions. The Task Force raised issues of the lack of adequate instruction and Highly Qualified Teachers for some students. These issues are systemic issues that this group has not been asked to address, but which must be considered by the Superintendent.

Appendix A

Charge

TASK FORCE FOR THE REVIEW OF HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, requested a broad range of stakeholders comprised of representatives of local school superintendents, instructional personnel, educational organizations, parents, and advocates to review the implications and to consider possible options relative to delaying the requirement of passing the High School Assessments in order to graduate for students with disabilities, students with 504 plans, and English language learners.

PURPOSE:

The Task Force is to provide recommendations to Dr. Grasmick following their collective review and consideration of available options that are considered credible and fair in order to provide students flexibility in order to demonstrate their achievement of State content standards.

CHARGE:

The Task Force shall consider:

- A waiver option
 - Students will continue to take HSAs, participate in interventions until final year
 - Students will apply for a waiver for each HSA not passed
- A variance option
 - Altering the manner in which a test is presented or administered, or in how a test taker is permitted to respond, such as Comp-HSA, Mod-HSA, or other
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- Differentiated Diplomas
 - Completion of course requirements and service learning hours, excluding passing the HSA
 - Use of endorsements

APPENDIX B

Membership

Task Force Members

Name	Position	Organization
Esther Adams	Curriculum Coordinator, Harbour School	Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities (MANSEF)
Selene Almazan	Director, Advocacy Services	Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education (MCIE)
Supreet Anand	Specialist, English Language Learners, Division of Instruction	Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)
Carol Ann Baglin, Co- Chair	Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services	MSDE
Steve Bounds	Director of Legal & Policy Services	Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE)
JoAnne L. Carter	Deputy State Superintendent, Office of Instructional and Academic Acceleration	MSDE
Linda Carter Ferrier	Parent	Anne Arundel County Chapter, Autism Society of America
Charlene Cooper Boston	Interim Superintendent	Baltimore City Public School System

Name	Position	Organization
Dan Cunningham	Deputy Superintendent (until July 1, 2007)	Frederick County Public School System
Michelle Daley	Mod- MSA Specialist, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services	MSDE
Sonia Diaz	Chief Academic Officer	Baltimore County Public Schools
Lynne Ewing	English Language Learners Specialist	Kent & Queen Anne's Counties
Mary Ann Fairchild	Director of Education Policy	Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD)
Thomas Field	Interim Superintendent	Wicomico County Public Schools
William Fields	Assistant Attorney General	Office of the Attorney General
Clara Floyd	President	Maryland State Teachers Association (MSTA)
Jodi French	Director of Special Education	Cecil County Public Schools
Mary Gable	Director of Instructional Programs, Division of Instruction	MSDE

Name	Position	Organization
Debi Gartland	Public Policy Committee-Co-Chair	Maryland Chapter, Council for Exceptional Children (MD-CEC)
Keith Gayler	Policy Analyst, Office of Academic Policy	MSDE
Erin Gibson	Director of Public Policy, Education & Children Issues	The ARC of Maryland
Allan Gorsuch	Executive Director	Eastern Shore Consortium
Barbara Granger	Family Advocate	Maryland Coalition of Families for Children's Mental Health
James Gresham	Assessment Specialist	Baltimore City Public School System
Gloria Maria Grimsley	Supervisor, ELL & World & Classical Languages,	Washington County Board of Education
Jacqueline Haas	Superintendent of Schools	Harford County Public School System
Patrick McCormick	Partner, Hunton & William LLP	Maryland Business Roundtable
Mary Jo Neil	President	Maryland Parent Teacher Association
Kelli Nelson	Parent Advocate	Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Name	Position	Organization
Ron Peiffer	Deputy State Superintendent, Office of Academic Policy	MSDE
Catherine A. Raggio	Secretary	Maryland Department of Disability (MDOD)
Donna Riley	Policy & Resource Specialist, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services	MSDE
Joan Rothgeb	Supervisor, Special Education	Prince George's County Public Schools
Karen B. Salmon	Superintendent of Schools	Talbot County Public Schools
Leslie Seid Margolis	Managing Attorney	Maryland Disability Law Center (MDLC)
Jack R. Smith	Superintendent of Schools	Calvert County Public Schools
Gene Streagle	Executive Director	Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals
Wendell Teets	Superintendent of Schools	Garrett County Public Schools
Shelley Tinney	Single Point of Entry Manager	Governor's Office for Children

Name	Position	Organization
Jane Walker	Executive Director	Maryland Coalition of Families for Children's Mental Health
James Walsh	Director of Special Education	Howard County Public Schools
Leslie Wilson	Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Accountability and Assessment	MSDE
Lois Wions	Supervisor, ESOL Instruction Programs	Montgomery County Public Schools
Sheree Witt	Director of Pupil Services/Special Education	Allegany County Public Schools
Carey Wright	Associate Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services	Montgomery County Public Schools
Marie Yuran	Executive Director	Maryland Middle School Association

APPENDIX C

**Meeting Agendas
and
Meeting Minutes**