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How will the Maryland High School Assessments affect my child?

If you're the parent or guardian of a Maryland student, you're probably wondering how the Maryland High School Assessments affect your child. The questions and answers below will explain the testing program and what it means for your child. If you don't find the answers to your questions here, ask your child's teacher or principal for help. Also, the www.marylandpublicschools.org Web site is a good source of information.

1. What are the HSA?

The abbreviation HSA stands for *Maryland High School Assessments*. The HSA are a series of four tests. There is one test each for English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. Your child will take each test as he or she completes the course. If your child takes a high-school-level course while in middle school, then he or she will take the HSA in that subject while in middle school.

Although the content and skills measured by the HSA are important, they do not represent all that a student will learn in a course, only the minimum. For information on the content that your child will be taught in a class, contact his or her teacher.

2. Does my son or daughter have to pass the HSA in order to graduate?

The answer to this question depends on when your child will graduate.

Students graduating from high school before 2009 are not required to pass the HSA in order to earn a Maryland High School Diploma. They are required to take the tests, and their scores will be reported on their high school transcripts so that future employers and colleges will be able to review their performance on the tests. Students must also meet the state's credit, service-learning, and attendance requirements as well as any local school system requirements. Talk with your guidance counselor to make sure your child is on track to meet all requirements.

Students graduating from high school in or after 2009 are required to earn a satisfactory score on the HSA in order to earn a Maryland High School Diploma. Your child has several options in fulfilling this requirement:

- Pass all four HSA. The passing scores are: algebra/data analysis (412), government (394), biology (400). The English 2 passing score will be set Oct. 25-26, 2005.

OR

- Earn passing scores on state-approved substitute tests and substitute one or more of those scores for passing scores on the HSA. The state has yet to name acceptable substitute tests, but possibilities include the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests.

OR

- Earn a minimum score on each test **and** earn the minimum combined score. The minimum score for each test will be lower than the passing scores. The minimum combined score will be equal to the total of all HSA passing scores. The Maryland State Department of Education has not established all of the minimum scores yet, but is scheduled to do so by early November 2005. The combined-score option allows your child to offset lower performance on one test with higher performance on another test.

Your child must also meet all credit, service-learning, and attendance requirements as well as any local school system requirements. Talk with your guidance counselor to make sure he or she is on track to meet all requirements.

3. Is my child still required to pass the Maryland Functional Tests?

No. The last graduating class required to pass the Maryland Functional Tests was the class of 2004. The Functional Tests have been replaced by the HSA.

Maryland's Functional Tests were created in the 1980s to measure basic skills. In fact, most students took the Functional Tests in middle school. Your child may have taken one or more of the Functional Tests before they were discontinued. The purpose of these tests was to make sure Maryland graduates had the skills necessary to complete activities like balancing a checkbook or following directions in a cookbook.

As a high school graduate in the 21st century, your child will need to know more and be able to do more than basic tasks if he/she is to succeed in life. Today's colleges and employers expect more from high school graduates, and Maryland wants to prepare children for success, whether they plan to go on to college or begin their careers immediately. The HSA make sure students graduate with higher skills and knowledge than the Functional Tests required.

4. If my child isn't required to pass the HSA, does it matter how well he/she does on the tests?

Even if he/she is not required to pass the tests, your child's HSA performance will be included on his/her high school record card. But remember, all students are required to pass the tests beginning with ninth-graders in 2005-2006 (the graduating class of 2009).

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5. When will I see my child's scores?

Approximately 9 weeks after the test is given, the state will send all students' scores to their local school system. The school system will then send the scores to parents. However, scores from the 2005 test administration will be delayed until the English 2 passing score is set on Oct. 25-26, 2005.

6. How should my child prepare for the HSA?

Keeping up with classwork and homework, participating in class, and studying hard will prepare students for the HSA. It will also improve their grades and performance on class and school system tests.

Here are a few additional ways that your child can prepare for the HSA.

- **Pay attention to organization and study skills.**
The HSA cover content from an entire course, so students will want to organize all their notes for the year and be able to make connections between the information covered in each unit.
- **Brush up on writing skills.**
Portions of the HSA require a written answer. Plus, no matter what students' plans are after graduation, they'll need to know how to write well.
- **Manage time carefully.**
One study found that good time-management predicted good grades in college better than SAT scores.
- **Take the Maryland School Assessments seriously.**
The Maryland School Assessments, given in grades 3-8 and 10, are good practice for the kinds of skills students will need in high school.

7. What if my child doesn't pass one or more tests?

If your child doesn't pass an HSA, contact his/her teachers. They will explain how your child can receive extra help. Once your child has had an opportunity to review the material and has received extra help in the subject, he/she may retake the test the next time it is being given.

High School Assessments from previous years are posted on the Web at www.mdk12.org. The state also has developed online courses that teachers may use to provide students extra help and practice.

8. What if my child is absent during testing?

Students absent during testing must make up the test during the make-up test window. (Your child's teacher or principal will tell you when this is.) Unless your child is sick, he or she should make every effort to come to school during testing.



9. My child has a disability. What plans are being made to help special education students be successful?

Beginning with the graduating class of 2009, all students, including special education students, must fulfill the HSA testing requirement in order to earn a Maryland High School Diploma. At this time, there are no alternative assessments for the HSA available to students with disabilities. However, a state task force is exploring possible testing options that Maryland could make available for students having difficulty with traditional pencil-and-paper tests. The task force began working on the issue in fall 2004 and will produce recommendations by 2007. This work may result in alternative assessments that would be comparable to the current High School Assessments and particularly helpful for students with disabilities.

Many special education students have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that documents their need to have accommodations during daily instruction and during testing. The Maryland State Department of Education publishes a manual to guide educators in making decisions about accommodations on state tests. The manual is called *Requirements for Accommodating, Excusing, and Exempting Students in Maryland Assessment Programs*, and it is available on the Web at www.marylandpublicschools.org. (The exact Web address is www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/earlyinterv/Special_Ed_Info.htm.) Your child's teacher or principal can also help you understand what accommodations are allowed on state tests.

If you have specific questions about your child, contact his/her teacher or IEP team members.

For more information, visit www.marylandpublicschools.org. From the testing menu at the top of the page, choose High School Assessment.



www.marylandpublicschools.org

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