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**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education  
**FROM:** Nancy S. Grasmick   
**DATE:** August 26, 2008  
**SUBJECT:** Standards Setting for Modified High School Assessments

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**PURPOSE:**

To request State Board approval for recommended standards for the Mod-HSA assessments, which were administered in Maryland in spring 2008 for the first time. The assessments are alternative tests administered under the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, used with approximately two percent of students, who are students with disabilities meeting specific federally prescribed criteria. The standards must be ready for federal Peer Review by early fall 2008.

**BACKGROUND:**

Federal requirements stipulate that each state establish performance standards for their assessments to gauge performance of students, schools, school systems and the state. These standards reflect high academic expectations that all students in all subgroups are expected to achieve. The states are mandated to report student performance on state assessments classified by three performance levels – basic, proficient, and advanced. Adopting student performance levels for Maryland’s Mod-HSA is necessary to continuing our progress in meeting Maryland’s accountability requirements, and the State’s ability to maintain compliance with federal and state laws. The State will also be able to communicate to educators and the public about the performance and progress of all students and schools.

The Mod-HSA assessments were administered in spring 2008 in most Maryland schools as an on-line assessment using a less complex assessment design. The items are designed consistent with federal guidelines to maintain the same grade level content expectations of students. However test questions are written to reduce distractors that might impede a student’s ability to recognize and select correct responses to demonstrate their knowledge of the content. Federal guidelines anticipate that the eligible students will have met detailed criteria, which include extensive interventions over time and documented difficulty in achieving expectations. Approximately two percent of students nationally, according to federal guidelines, may participate in the assessment and be included each state’s accountability status.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

*No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) requires that all students be assessed using a measure that is appropriate for them. For many years, Maryland has had alternative assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are receiving services in special education. These are students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) developed by a team including teachers, other school staff and the student's parent or guardian. The team determines which assessment (the regular test or one of the alternative assessments) is appropriate for each student. As new options for assessments are added to those required for NCLB, Maryland must develop those assessments to meet the needs of specific students in the special education subgroup. Both of the assessment programs requiring standard setting this summer (Mod-HSA and the Alt-MSA) are specifically for students with disabilities.

The standard setting process was completed just prior to the August State Board Meeting during the week of August 18. Maryland, like most states, uses a carefully managed standard setting process that incorporates prescribed procedure. Though there are some variations in the standard setting procedures, pending the assessment design, certain procedures can be described generically. Any nuances made necessary because of the nature of these particular assessments or how the process unfolds will be described in detail during the report to the Board.

Performance standards must be adopted by the State Board of Education at this time so that Maryland can meet the expectations of the school systems and federal law in a timely fashion. The standards recommended are the result of a deliberative and inclusive process and establish the means by which the State will measure the performance of specific students with disabilities in all school systems.

## **ACTION:**

The Maryland State Board of Education is requested to approve the recommended standards for Mod-HSA assessments.