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TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools
DATE: September 23, 2008
SUBJECT: High School Assessment Updates

PURPOSE:

To provide Board members with an update on the 16 year history of the High School Assessments (see attached document), a preliminary look at what to expect in the results of the 2008 HSA administration, and progress with HSA supports such as the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation and the supports developed for Special Education students.

BACKGROUND:

The 2008 administration of the High School Assessments represents the latest mile marker for the long and carefully charted course of action taken to implement the critical high school reform program. The assessment program was recommended by a 1992 Task Force that also recommended upgrading high school credit requirements to include more rigor in the high school program. In 1989, Maryland high school graduates for the first time had to pass basic skills tests (Maryland Functional Tests) in reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship to receive a high school diploma. It was only three years later that the graduation requirements task force recognized that basic skills tests were failing Maryland graduates at the college and work place levels.

Maryland was one of the first states, as a result of the Task Force recommendations, to begin moving toward end-of-course tests instead of comprehensive end-of-high school tests. Sixteen years later Maryland students are among the majority of students in the nation with diploma requirements that include assessments. We now have multiple alternatives to passing the High School Assessments and numerous State and local student supports. Maryland is nearing the spring of 2009 when students entering high school in fall 2005 will need to meet the assessment requirements to graduate.

The 2008 results are currently being compiled and will be presented in detail at the October State Board meeting, but in the interim, a general description of what Board members should expect will be provided during the Board's September discussion.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

For more than three decades, high schools have been a focus of reform efforts in states across the nation and at the national level as policy makers struggled to respond to numerous reports and studies that outline increased expectations of graduates as they enter the workplace and the university level. Basic skills testing in Maryland during the late 1980s through around the turn of the new century began to fail the State as virtually all students were passing the assessments in middle school.

Once the 1992 Task Force recommended end-of-course assessments, Maryland began planning for a deliberate implementation of the proposal with a very significant amount of lead time to adjust curriculum and teaching for five years or more prior to building and field testing the assessments, which began in 2001. Several years of administration of no-fault administration of tests familiarized students and teachers to the assessments themselves while MSDE built an extensive reservoir of on-line supports and professional development offerings for teachers and principals statewide. The content standards tested in the High School Assessments were distributed to schools for implementation in 1996—the year that the class of 2009 entered kindergarten.

The introduction of No Child Left Behind in 2001 resulted in the assessments being folded into the school and school accountability programs, and the introduction of Bridge to Excellence in 2002 resulted in the assessments becoming a part of the accountability program for the new funding law. Meanwhile, High School Assessments have become embedded in other State and federal reporting and accountability requirements as lawmakers and educators sought to have meaningful and appropriate measures of student performance.

In the past year, Maryland has built the Modified High School Assessments into the program for those students with disabilities who qualify to take the test under federal law. We have also expanded the use of the assessments for students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) who otherwise do not qualify for the assessments for federal AYP purposes, a group we have named Mod-Plus+ students.

Lastly, like many states with tests tied to graduation, Maryland has adopted an alternative pathway to meeting testing requirements called the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation. Piloted successfully this past summer, the program this year will assist many students unable to meet testing requirements by either passing all four tests, achieving a combined score of 1602 points, or passing the Modified High School Assessments as either Mod-HSA students or Mod+Plus students.

The presentation to the State Board will outline the development of the High School Assessment program, our current progress with instruction, interventions, and student performance.

ACTION:

For information only.

NSG:sk
Attachment