



Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools

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

**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education  
**FROM:** Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*  
**DATE:** December 17-18, 2008  
**SUBJECT:** Update on Bridge Plan Option

---

**PURPOSE:**

The Bridge Plan for Academic Validation, first implemented in the summer of 2008, is enabling Maryland students who are challenged with traditional assessments to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and consequently meet the HSA testing graduation requirements. During the first several months of implementation, Maryland State Department of Education staff has found the assessment alternative working successfully in Maryland school systems. State Board members will receive information regarding the statewide implementation progress to date.

**BACKGROUND:**

Successful implementation of the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation has important implications for the graduating class of 2009 and beyond, with the High School Assessments now a requirement for graduation for the first time. In 2007, with the culmination of two years of work by the Assessment Alternative Task Force, MSDE began work on the design of an alternative to the High School Assessments that would take into consideration the group's recommendations. It was expected that the alternative would be of value to students with disabilities and English language learners particularly, since schools report that assessments are not always the best tools for measuring the performance of these and other students challenged by traditional assessment settings. However, the Task Force was very strong in its insistence that the alternative not represent a lower standard for these students.

Following months of collaborative design work, local superintendents, their staffs, and principals advised MSDE on the components of the Bridge Plan and mechanisms by which school systems could comfortably assure security of materials, consistency of

training, and consistency in implementation. However, equal consideration was given to assuring that students would be able to access all of the appropriate supports associated with classroom instruction to students working with Bridge Plan projects and that Bridge Plan work would represent an appropriate volume of work for affected students.

The summer 2008 pilot work and the large-scale implementation in the fall of 2008 has provided a strong start for the program, and it is now fully implemented in all twenty-four school systems.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Based on the recommendations of local superintendents and State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick, the State Board of Education approved the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation in Fall, 2007. It was introduced as an alternative route for students graduating in the class of 2009 so that students not successful with the High School Assessments could demonstrate their content mastery in order to earn a high school diploma. During the 2007-2008 school year, MSDE worked with local school system leadership and staff to finalize design features and state policy so that school systems could begin pilot implementation in the summer of 2008.

Great care was taken to assure the integrity of the Bridge Plan as a viable assessment alternative while developing implementation procedures collaboratively so that local school systems could adapt the program to meet local needs. During the summer of 2008, local school systems conducted training for school staff engaged in monitoring and scoring Bridge Plan projects using MSDE staff and MSDE-developed training materials and media. Eleven school districts subsequently conducted successful pilot programs during the summer, helping to fine tune both State and local implementation procedures so that in the fall of 2008, schools would be prepared to bring implementation up to full scale. Currently, an estimated 2,300 students in all twenty four jurisdictions in Maryland are working on Bridge Plan projects during the first semester.

MSDE staff members have provided technical assistance to every school system in the State regarding all aspects of the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation implementation. They have also conducted training in systems across the state. Their work has included problem-solving with staff at both the school system and school levels, and they have helped systems fine tune their designs for training, student project assignment and oversight, and project scoring. Meanwhile, MSDE content specialists have worked with

teachers and content specialists from local school systems to develop Bridge Plan projects that are appropriate in scope and design and focused on High School Assessment indicators.

Local implementation designs vary widely across school systems, but MSDE and local school systems have worked to assure that expectations for students would remain as consistent as possible across schools and school systems. In some school systems, Bridge Plan work is scheduled into specific classes, while in others, students are working more independently. Supports for students with disabilities and students learning English for the first time are in place as well.

It is critical that school districts identify students eligible to participate in the bridge plan, assist students in completing bridge projects, and conduct review panels to score projects and provide feedback to students regarding completed projects. Students unable to achieve passing scores on HSAs need to complete, on average, no more than two Bridge Plan projects per test not passed to date. With an average of eight to twelve hours of student work required per project, it is anticipated that the diploma is now well within reach for all students.

Since every student who receives a Maryland diploma in 2009 must meet the HSA graduation requirement, and the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation represents an alternative pathway that many students will utilize, it is critical that the members of the State Board of Education remain informed regarding implementation. Information from MSDE staff members responsible for providing technical assistance, plus information provided by a panel of individuals from one local school district will provide members of the State Board important updates.

**ACTION:**

No action required, for discussion only.

**Attachments:**

Sample projects  
Administrative Manual

NSG/RSP