



## High School Graduation Requirements Questions & Answers

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### LATEST NEWS

#### **Government High School Assessment (HSA) Eliminated**

The last administration of the Government HSA was in May 2011. This document has been updated and pertains to students graduating in the class of 2012 and beyond.

The following information contains answers to the most frequently asked questions related to high school graduation in Maryland. Questions are categorized by topic as much as possible; however, some questions may be related to more than one topic. Answers will be updated as new information becomes available and new regulations are adopted. The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) is available on line at

<http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comar.aspx>.

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### Maryland Requirements for High School Graduation

1. *Can a local school system have local graduation requirements beyond the minimum requirements established by the state?*

**Yes.** For specific graduation requirements, contact the appropriate school system personnel listed at the end of this document. See COMAR 13A.03.02.01C.

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2. *How does a student meet both the Maryland and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) high school reading requirement for graduation?*

### **For Students Who Entered Grade 9 in the 2005-06 School Year and Later**

To fulfill the Maryland High School Assessment requirement for graduation, the student must **pass** the English assessment. The English course is defined as the second year of high school English, typically taken after the student completes the grade 10 English course. The assessment will be scored and reported in two ways: Basic, Proficient, or Advanced for NCLB accountability and numerically for the HSAs.

3. *What are the graduation credit requirements for students with disabilities who are placed in non-public schools?*

The answer to this question was the subject of a memo to local school superintendents from Dr. Grasmick dated November 14, 2005 regarding Graduation Requirements for Students in Non-Public Placements. State regulations address disparities between local school system graduation requirements and those of non-public special education schools. COMAR 13A.03.02.08B requires students in a non-public special education school to meet the graduation requirements of the placing local school system. There are alternative ways to do so. COMAR 13A.03.02.11 provides local school systems with an opportunity to develop "alternative ways for individuals or groups of students to fulfill graduation requirements."

Local school systems can work with the non-public school to agree on a curricular program that meets the instructional needs of the student and addresses the normal content specified generally in the local school system's graduation requirements. The curricular program for these students can include fewer than the requisite number of credits in the local school system graduation requirements, but no fewer than the state minimum of 21 credits as identified in COMAR 13A.03.02-.04A. The student must also meet the service learning requirement, and he or she must take and pass the Maryland High School Assessments as appropriate to the date of entry into grade 9 or satisfy the HSA graduation requirement by achieving the required combined score or successfully complete the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation (see section on High School Assessments).

4. *What notification must parents or guardians and students receive?*

In accordance with COMAR 13A.03.02.12(C), each principal shall inform all students and their parents or guardians annually of no less than the following:

- Maryland's graduation requirements and any local graduation requirements;
- the student's progress on fulfilling the credit, HSA, service, and any applicable IEP requirements for graduation;



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- the schedule for administering the HSA, the results of each HSA taken by the student; and
- a plan for appropriate assistance or remediation for the student if he or she did not pass the HSA.

5. *Up to what age may a student remain in school if he/she is working to complete the requirements for a high school diploma?*

A student may remain in school if he/she is working to meet the requirements for a high school diploma until the age of 21. As defined in COMAR 13A.02.06.02B(4), age 21 means the student is not 21 years old on the first day of the school year. See also COMAR 13A.02.06.03A(1) and §7-101(a) of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

## Graduation Credits: Defined/Earning

1. *How are units of high school credit defined?*

A credit means successful demonstration of a specified unit of study. See COMAR 13A.03.02.02B(2).

2. *Can high school credits be earned in ways other than going to school during regular days/year?*

**Yes.** See COMAR 13A.03.02.05 Other Provisions for Earning Credit.

3. *Can a student earn a Maryland High School Diploma online?*

**No.** The Maryland Virtual Learning Opportunity (MVLO) program has a state-run virtual school project, Maryland Virtual School (MVS) that is managed by MSDE. MVS is primarily used for supplemental instruction. Students cannot earn a high school diploma by solely completing online courses. MVS does not offer a high school diploma online. The majority of students served take one or two online courses to supplement their traditional school program. Enrollment in MVS online courses requires local school system approval.

4. *Can online courses be accepted for credit by a school? Is there a criterion by which these courses are evaluated?*

For students currently enrolled in a Maryland public school, credit can only be awarded for MSDE-approved online courses. See COMAR 13A.03.02.05D. Correspondence and Online Courses. An online course is a course provided through the Internet and other technologies



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in which 80% or more of the instruction is conducted online with the teacher and student separated by distance or time or both and in which two-way communication between the teacher and student is required. For online courses, COMAR 13A.03.02.05D(1) specifies that

“Consistent with local school system policy and procedure, credit may be given...for Department-approved online courses. If credit is to be applied toward minimum graduation requirements, the...Department-approved online course shall be provided by the local school system.”

The State Department of Education has developed an approval process for online courses that are administered by a local school system. This approval process helps ensure the quality of the online courses offered by our public schools and ensures that such courses align with state content standards and core learning goals. A list of MSDE-approved online courses is updated periodically and available on the MVLO website at <http://www.mdk12online.org>.

For students transferring into a Maryland public school, see Question 2 under Transfer Students.

5. *Can a local school system award high school credit to a middle school student who completes a high school course?*

**Yes.** See COMAR 13A.03.02.05I(2) and (3).

6. *Can a student exclude from the transcript an 8th grade course for which high school credit was received?*

**No.** If a student receives credit, the credit needs to be on the transcript.

7. *What alternatives can local school systems offer/provide students so they can fulfill graduation requirements?*

At the discretion of the local school superintendent an alternative plan to fulfill graduation requirements may be developed as described in COMAR 13A.03.02.11 Alternatives For Structuring Programs. In addition, graduation requirements may also be fulfilled through the Early College Admission Program or the Early Admission to Approved Vocational, Technical or Other Postsecondary School Program as described in COMAR 13A.03.02.10. See also COMAR 13A.03.02.05 Other Provisions for Earning Credit.



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8. *Can students receive credits for subjects taken previously from a school when no official transcript is available?*

**Yes.** There are several ways as described in COMAR 13A.03.02.12B(4) Unavailability of Official Transcript. A local superintendent of schools shall determine by an evaluation of a student whether credits earned at a high school will be accepted at the public high school to which the student transfers. This evaluation may include administration of standardized tests and examinations, observation of student in a classroom setting, and the use of interviews, as well as the inspection of transcripts, report cards, and other documentation.

9. *Is biology required?*

**Yes,** since 2001. Students are required to take both the biology course and the High School Assessment for biology. See COMAR 13A.03.02.04(A)(6). Also, see question 2 under Transfer Students.

10. *Is algebra/data analysis required?*

**Yes.** Students are required to take both the algebra/data analysis course and the High School Assessment for algebra/data analysis. See COMAR 13A.03.02.04(A)(3).

11. *Do credits in American Sign Language satisfy the requirement for credits in foreign language?*

COMAR 13A.03.02.04, adopted by the State Board of Education in 2007, allows students to earn two credits in foreign language or two credits in American Sign Language. The COMAR regulation does not allow students to meet the graduation requirement by taking one credit in foreign language and one credit in American Sign Language.

12. *Can local school systems add endorsements to the Maryland High School Diploma to recognize students for achievement?*

**Yes.** Local school systems have the option to add endorsements to the diploma as incentives for students to meet locally established requirements and outcomes in instruction beyond the minimums specified by the State. See COMAR 13A.03.02.08D and COMAR 13A.03.02.09E.



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### Graduation Records

1. *How can I obtain my student records or a duplicate high school diploma?*

Contact the student records department in the local school system where you (the student) attended high school to request a copy of the transcript or a copy of the diploma. All school systems may not have copies of the diploma. There may be a fee for copies. (See the list of school system contacts at the end of this document.)

2. *How can a foreign student receive a translated transcript?*

Call World Educational Services at (212) 966-6311 for assistance.

### High School Assessments

1. *When do students take the High School Assessment?*

Students who take high school level courses take the Maryland High School Assessment after the student completes the required course. See COMAR 13A.03.02.07. Awarding credit for the course is the acceptable definition for completing the course. Some students enrolled in HSA courses may show indications they will not receive credit for the course before the HSA is administered. In such cases, the school system will determine whether it is in the best interest of the student to sit for the test prior to completing the course or to take the HSA at a later date following the student's successful completion of the course.

2. *Do students who take "on-line" or "virtual" courses have to take the High School Assessments?*

**Yes.** If the student receives credit and the course is one of the courses for which the high school assessment is given, the student must take the high school assessment regardless of how the student received the instruction for the course. See COMAR 13A.03.02.05J.

3. *Is a student required to take the High School Assessments if the student is home-schooled, moves here from another state or foreign country, or transfers from a private school, and is granted credits in the HSA-aligned courses?*

Transfer students who receive credit for HSA-aligned course(s) taken prior to enrolling in a Maryland public school do not have to take the assessment for those courses. See COMAR



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13A.03.02.12B(2). The Maryland public school principal makes the decision on whether or not to award credit.

4. *Are students who are on home and hospital instruction required to take HSA exams if they are taking/enrolled in an HSA course? Who administers the exam(s)?*

Students on home and hospital teaching who are completing a course for which there is a High School Assessment must participate in the HSA testing. These students would take the test on the same primary administration or make-up testing day as students attending school but would have the test administered in their home and hospital setting. The test examiner administering the test in the home and hospital setting, just like an in-school test examiner, must meet all the qualifications to be a Certified Test Examiner as outlined in the *Test Administration and Coordination Manual (TACM)* for the High School Assessments.

5. *Is a student required to take the HSA if the student transfers from one public school to another in Maryland and the student's record indicates the student took an HSA-aligned course but there is no record of taking the HSA?*

**Yes.** Check the roster for the names of students who took the test at the school. The school must maintain a roster of who took the HSA. Students who entered grade 9 in the 2005-06 school year or later are required to pass the High School Assessments to graduate. Students may also satisfy the HSA graduation requirement by achieving the required combined score or successfully completing the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation (see questions 20 and 21 later in this section).

6. *Does a public school student who takes an HSA-aligned course at a private school during the summer term still have to take the HSA?*

**Yes.** See COMAR 13A.03.02.05J.

7. *Does a foreign exchange student enrolled in an HSA-aligned course have to take the HSA?*

**No,** as long as the student is definitely returning to his/her own country and has **no expectation** of receiving a Maryland diploma. If, however, the student requests a Maryland High School Diploma, the student must satisfy the applicable assessment requirements.

8. *Does a student have to retake the HSA if the student is repeating an HSA-aligned course?*

The high school graduation regulations passed by the State Board specify testing requirements for students. Students who entered ninth grade in the fall of 2005 and later must pass the High School Assessments to receive the Maryland High School Diploma.



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There are multiple options available to help students meet the passing requirement. A student who passes an HSA test but fails the corresponding HSA course does not have to take the HSA test again.

### 9. *What are the passing scores for the HSA?*

The HSA passing scores are:

Biology 400    Algebra/Data Analysis 412    English 396

For information about HSA scores and scoring, contact your school counselor.

### 10. *Do students have to pass all HSAs?*

Students who entered grade 9 in the fall of 2005 and later (COMAR 13A.03.02.09) must obtain either a passing score on all HSAs or obtain an overall combined score. Students who meet specific criteria may use the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation to meet the passing requirement. See questions 20 and 21 for information about the Bridge Plan option.

### 11. *Can a student who has met all other graduation requirements except passing an HSA be kept from graduation?*

**Yes.** Students who entered grade 9 in the fall of 2005 and later are required to pass the HSA. Students may also satisfy the HSA requirement by obtaining the combined score or successfully completing the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation.

### 12. *Must a middle school student take the HSA even if the school system does not award credit for the course?*

Any student who takes a high school course based on the Core Learning Goals must take the HSA regardless of whether or not the student receives credit for the course.

### 13. *Are students who do not pass the HSA required to attend remediation?*

School systems are required to *offer* remediation to students. Students and their parents should be made aware of the availability of different types of remediation, the benefits of remediation, and the risks of choosing not to attend remediation. There is no Maryland law or regulation that requires students to attend remediation. However, school systems can develop their own local policy about participation requirements related to remediation. School systems will need to maintain documentation that remediation was offered to students who did not pass any or all of the HSAs.



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### 14. *What is the combined-score option?*

The combined-score option allows a student to offset lower performance on one test with higher performance on another. Students who use the combined-score option must obtain an overall combined score on the Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology and English HSAs to meet the HSA passing requirement. The student does NOT have to attain a minimum score on each test.

### 15. *Can a student take an HSA multiple times in order to raise his/her score to meet the combined score passing option?*

**Yes**, but there is no mandate to provide additional instructional assistance if the student has already passed the HSA. Additional instructional assistance must be offered to students who do not achieve the passing score on the HSA before they can retake the test.

### 16. *When a student retakes an HSA and scores lower than the first time, which score counts toward the combined score?*

The higher score counts toward the combined score.

### 17. *Can a student use the combined-score option regardless of how many assessments the student actually passes?*

**Yes.**

### 18. *Is the local school system required to offer the combined-score option for students?*

**Yes.** COMAR 13A.03.02.09B(3)(b) provides the combined-score option for students. All students must have access to options provided under the regulations.

### 19. *Can high school students opt to substitute certain AP and IB tests for High School Assessments?*

**Yes.** Students can substitute certain AP and IB tests for the HSA in English, algebra/data analysis, and biology if they achieve specific scores on the AP and IB tests. See the following table:

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<b>High School Assessment</b>		
Allowable substitute tests for students who entered grade 9 in or after 2005-06 school year		
<b>HSA</b>	<b>AP exam</b> (must have score of 3, 4 or 5)	<b>IB exam</b> (must have score of 5, 6, or 7)
Algebra/data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calculus AB</li> <li>• Calculus BC</li> <li>• Statistics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematical Studies SL</li> <li>• Mathematics SL</li> <li>• Mathematics HL</li> </ul>
English 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Language</li> <li>• English Literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English A1</li> </ul>
Biology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology SL</li> <li>• Biology HL</li> </ul>

### 20. *What is the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation?*

The Bridge Plan for Academic Validation offers students the opportunity to complete an Academic Validation Project package that is selected to help the student demonstrate the content and skills related to one or more HSAs that the student has failed to pass after at least two attempts. Participation in the Bridge Plan is voluntary.

### 21. *Who can participate in the Bridge Plan?*

Participation in the Bridge Plan is earned by students as they work toward their high school diploma. To participate, students must:

- \* have passed or be enrolled in the HSA-related course, taken the specific HSA or Mod-HSA test twice without passing or earning a score that would satisfy the combined-score option (juniors and seniors may begin Bridge Plan projects and submit them for scoring before results are received from a second HSA administration),
- \* be firmly on the path to completing other graduation requirements,
- \* have participated in approved assistance, and
- \* have met the local school system's attendance requirement.

### 22. *Is a student who has not passed an HSA exam or met the testing requirement using the combined-score or Bridge options required to retake the exam every time it is offered?*

**No**, once a student has failed an HSA twice, the student has the option of retaking the exam, but the student is not required to take the exam every time it is offered. Students may satisfy the HSA graduation requirement by the combined-score or Bridge options. However, school systems may encourage students to retake HSAs to achieve the passing score.



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### Transfer Students

1. *Do students transferring to another high school have to be in attendance at the new school a certain period of time before they can receive a high school diploma from that school?*

**Yes.** Students must attend the new school for one full semester preceding graduation to receive a high school diploma from the newly attended school. Exceptions may be made if this creates undue hardship for a transferring student or for special education students in state-approved, non-public programs. See COMAR 13A.03.02.12B(1) Transfer Students. A school superintendent may arrange for students to have credits transferred back to their prior high school in order for the students to graduate from their prior high school. This option would have to be approved by the prior system/school.

2. *Can students be admitted to a public high school if transcript records or report cards are not available?*

**Yes.** A local school superintendent or the superintendent's designee shall make this determination. See COMAR 13A.03.02.12B(4) Unavailability of Official Transcript or School Report Card. See also question 6 under **Graduation Credits: Defined/Earning**. Student transcripts that contain out-of-state or non-MSDE approved online courses should be reviewed based on Local School System policies.

3. *Can a 19 year old who has not earned a diploma return to school to earn a diploma?*

A person who is a bona fide resident of Maryland and under 21 years of age can return to school to earn a diploma. Also, persons 16 years of age who have dropped out of school and want to earn a diploma by examination may enroll in a GED preparation program. A third option is the Adult External Diploma Program. Persons 18 years of age may be eligible to enroll in the Adult External Diploma Program. See COMAR 13.A.03.03.01 for information about the GED and Adult External Diploma programs.

4. *Do transfer students who complete algebra/data analysis in a middle school outside the Maryland Public School System or who complete algebra/data analysis in a Maryland non-public school and who do not receive a credit have to take the algebra/data analysis High School Assessment?*

Students who have completed and passed algebra/data analysis in a non-public middle school or out-of-state middle school and have mastered the core learning goals as evidenced from (1) the successful completion of subsequent mathematics courses **or** (2) through an evaluation of the acquisition of the core learning goals are exempt from the algebra/data



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analysis HSA. These students may fulfill the state graduation requirements by earning three credits in subsequent mathematics courses for which algebra/data analysis was a prerequisite.

5. *Can a student use the combined-score option to meet the graduation requirement for passing the high school assessment if the student completes algebra/data analysis in a middle school outside the Maryland Public School System or completes algebra/data analysis in a Maryland non-public school, does not receive a credit, and does not have to take the algebra/data analysis High School Assessment (see previous question)?*

**Yes.** If the student chooses to use the combined-score option, the student will be assigned the passing score for the algebra/data analysis High School Assessment for the purpose of calculating the combined score.

### Other

1. *Can a student complete high school graduation requirements by attending an accredited college or approved vocational, technical or other postsecondary school program?*

**Yes.** A student may receive a Maryland High School Diploma through acceptance in the early college admission program when:

- All Maryland High School Assessment and student service learning requirements have been met; **and**
- A written request by the student and parent or guardian is made to and approved by the local superintendent of schools; **and**
- The student's program for the first year of college is approved by the local superintendent of schools if this program is included toward the issuance of a diploma; **and**
- At the conclusion of the first year of study, a written request and a transcript is submitted to the local superintendent requesting a Maryland High School Diploma. (COMAR 13A.03.02.10 Alternatives to 4-Year Enrollment)

2. *Can a student attend high school and college simultaneously?*

**Yes.** Students may opt for a dual enrollment program during their junior and/or senior year of high school. Dual enrollment is defined in COMAR regulations governing higher education. COMAR 13B.07.01.02B(10) defines a "dual enrollment student" as a "secondary student who is enrolled in college courses and receives high school and college credit for the courses completed."



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3. *Can a student complete “dual enrollment” if he or she is enrolled in online college courses?*  
**Yes.** Credit can be awarded for college online courses that are MSDE-approved. See COMAR 13A.03.02.05D. Correspondence and Online Courses. Higher education institutions must have online courses reviewed and approved by MSDE. See also question 4 under Graduation Credits: Defined/Earning.

4. *Can a student attend college after the junior year if all graduation requirements have been met?*

**Yes.** Local school systems may develop alternative plans for students who have completed all credit, assessment, and service learning graduation requirements, which may include a waiver of the fourth year of high school if the local superintendent of schools or designee determines that his waiver is in the best interest of the student. (COMAR 13A.03.02.11B Alternatives Structuring Programs)

5. *Can a non-failing student opt to spend five years in high school to gain extra credits and become better prepared for college?*

**No.** Once a student has fulfilled all state and local credit, assessment, and service-learning requirements, the student is eligible for a high school diploma and can no longer be enrolled in high school. See COMAR 13A.03.02.01-.12.

6. *What options are available to permit a student to graduate early?*

COMAR 13A.03.02.03 specifies “The student shall satisfactorily complete 4 years of approved study beyond the eighth grade unless one of the alternatives in Regulation .10 or .11 of this chapter is satisfied.”

COMAR 13A.03.02.10 Alternatives to a 4-year Enrollment Requirement recognizes that four-year enrollment in a public high school may not serve the best interests of some students and allows for early college admission and early admission to approved vocational, technical, or other postsecondary school program. See the regulation for specific details.

COMAR 13A.03.02.11 Alternatives for Structuring Programs permits a local school system to develop alternative ways for individual or groups of students to fulfill graduation requirements. This includes a waiver of the fourth year enrollment requirement if all credit, assessments, and student service requirements are met and if the local superintendent of schools or designee determines that the waiver is in the best interest of the student. See the regulation for specific details.



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7. *Can a military veteran who withdrew from school to enlist in the armed forces obtain a high school diploma?*

Maryland Education Code Annotated § 7-206.1 permits the awarding of a high school diploma to certain individuals who were unable to complete their high school graduation requirements because they enlisted in the armed forces. An individual honorably discharged from military service may apply to obtain a diploma if the individual withdrew from a regular full-time public or private high school accredited by the State Board to enlist in the armed forces during World War II, The Korean Conflict, or The Vietnam Conflict. The individual shall apply to the county board in the county where the individual resides or where the school from which the individual withdrew was located. Each county shall adopt rules and regulations to establish procedures for awarding diplomas under this section.

8. *Who is eligible to take the GED examination?*

The GED Tests offer an alternate and acceptable way for an individual to earn a high school diploma by written examination. An applicant is eligible if the applicant is a resident of Maryland, at least 16 years old, and not currently enrolled in school. For more information, call the GED testing office at 410-767-0538.

9. *How does someone become eligible for the Maryland Adult External High School Diploma Program?*

The Maryland Adult External High School Diploma is designed to recognize demonstrated competence in adults regardless of whether the knowledge and skills were acquired in a formal school setting. Residents of Maryland 18 years old or older who are not currently enrolled in a high school, who are not high school graduates, and who pass a screening test, are eligible to register for the program. See COMAR 13A.03.03.02. For more information, call 410-767-0334.

10. *Do students who complete their high school education through home schooling receive the Maryland High School Diploma?*

**No.** For additional information about home schooling, contact the Student Services and Alternative Programs Branch at MSDE at 410-767-0288.

11. *Is Maryland a member of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children?*

**Yes.** For more information, go to <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/brac/ic> .



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## High School Graduation Requirements Questions & Answers

(For information about local high school graduation requirements, contact the local school system counseling office.)

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## High School Graduation Requirements Questions & Answers

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## High School Graduation Requirements Questions & Answers

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