

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 806 (Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

State Board of Education - High School Assessment - Government

This bill requires the State Board of Education to require each student to take a standardized government high school assessment in order to graduate from high school. Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, the government high school assessment (HSA) must include at least 10 of the 100 questions used for the civics portion of the naturalization test administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS).

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) can include 10 questions from the civics portion of the naturalization test administered by CIS using existing resources due to a previously scheduled revision of the government HSA.

Local Effect: Local school systems may need to adjust their curriculums to include the 100 questions used for the civics portion of the naturalization test administered by CIS, but it is assumed it can be handled with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires annual assessments of all students in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. Since 2008, ESEA also requires students to be tested in science at least once in grades 3 through 5, 6 through 8, and 9 through 12. ESEA does not require a government or civics test.

The State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools are required to implement assessment programs in reading, language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Assessments are required annually. At the middle school level, the assessment program must be a statewide, comprehensive, grade band program that measures the learning gains of each public school student towards achieving mastery of the standards set forth in the State's adopted curricula or the common core curricula. At the high school level, the assessment program must be a statewide, standardized, end-of-course assessment that is aligned with and that measures each public school student's skills and knowledge of the State's adopted curricula.

The State Board of Education sets statewide graduation requirements and local school systems may add additional graduation requirements. According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 13A.03.02.09), students must achieve a passing score on the Maryland HSAs for algebra, biology, English, and government or meet one of the alternative methods of meeting the requirement such as achieving a combined score as set by MSDE or completing Bridge Plans. However, students entering grade 9 in the 2012-2013, 2011-2012, 2010-2011, or 2009-2010 school years do not need to pass the government HSA to graduate but may use it if they pursue a combined score to satisfy this requirement. Students entering grade 9 in the 2013-2014 school year and beyond must either pass the government HSA or include the government HSA score to meet a combined score of 1602.

Background: To become a naturalized U.S. citizen, qualified applicants must pass a civics test in addition to English speaking, reading, and writing tests. During an applicant's naturalization interview, the applicant is asked up to 10 questions from a list of 100 history and government questions. An applicant must answer correctly 6 of the 10 questions to pass the civics test. The list of 100 questions from which the interviewer may choose are provided by the federal government on its website so that applicants can learn the material.

The questions are asked and must be answered orally. The 100 questions have set answers, although some answers such as, "Who is one of the applicant's U.S. Senators?" change due to elections, and some questions such as, "What is *one* right or freedom from the First Amendment?" have multiple answers (*i.e.*, speech, religion, assembly, press, and petition the government). The 100 questions and answers can be found on CIS's [website](#). CIS also has developed a quick civics lessons [handbook](#) that explains the answers.

State Expenditures: MSDE can include 10 questions from the civics portion of the naturalization test administered by CIS using existing resources. The government HSA is scheduled to be revised at the end of the 2015-2016 school year; therefore, changes to the assessment can be incorporated into the revision at no additional cost.

Local Expenditures: Local school systems may need to adjust their curriculums to include the 100 questions used for the civics portion of the naturalization test administered by CIS. Since the questions are relatively straight forward and study material is provided by CIS, it is assumed that the material can be incorporated into the curriculum using existing resources. However, time and resources may be diverted from topics currently covered in the curriculums.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1200 (Delegate Kittleman, *et al.*) - Rules and Executive Nominations.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Legislative Services

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min/rhh

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