

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 771 (Delegate Rudolph)
Ways and Means

**Education - Passage of Examinations or Assessments - Graduation Requirements -
Alternative Means to Demonstrate Attainment - Diplomas**

This bill requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to provide an alternative means to demonstrate student attainment of State standards before the passage of a single examination or series of examinations may be used to determine eligibility for graduation. The bill also prohibits SBE from establishing county-based high school diplomas and from providing a different type of diploma based on a student's county of residence.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2004.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures could increase significantly beginning in FY 2005, depending on the alternative assessment method that is established. New costs could be avoided by eliminating the requirement that students pass tests in order to graduate. Revenues would not be affected.

Local Effect: It is assumed that the State would cover the costs of any alternative method that is established for determining students' attainment of State standards.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The promotion and graduation of public school students are in accordance with policies established by the local boards of education and the rules and

regulations of SBE. Each student who graduates from a public high school must receive the same type of diploma or certificate, regardless of the high school attended or the course taken. Students must pass functional tests in reading, mathematics, and writing in order to graduate from public high schools in Maryland.

Background: Over the past several years SBE has been contemplating the possibility of using passage of the Maryland High School Assessments (HSAs) as a graduation requirement. The most recent round of considerations began in December 2003 when SBE was presented with a proposal to have students in the class of 2009 be the first who would be required to pass the tests in order to obtain a Maryland high school diploma. The proposal also provided for other paths to high school completion, including a less prestigious local high school diploma, a diploma for certain students with disabilities, and a certificate of program completion. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) advises that a more recent proposal eliminates the different categories of diplomas.

HSAs, which have been administered for the last two years, are composed of tests in algebra/data analysis, biology, English I, and government. The tests are considered much more difficult than the Maryland functional tests that are currently used to determine eligibility for graduation. Results from last year's HSAs are shown in **Exhibit 1**.

State Expenditures: Depending on the alternative assessment method, general fund expenditures could increase significantly beginning in fiscal 2005. An existing alternative assessment method for the Maryland School Assessments involves scoring portfolios of students' work. MSDE advises that the per student cost of scoring portfolios, which is contracted to private companies, is approximately \$170. This cost would increase if the HSAs become graduation requirements because student portfolios would have to be scored at least twice in order to ensure the validity of the results.

Approximately 300,000 students take HSAs annually, and approximately 50% do not pass the tests. If these 150,000 students could opt for the alternative assessment method, scoring costs could total \$25.5 million or more. If the number of students taking an alternative assessment method is lower, this cost estimate would decrease accordingly. Likewise, if some other less expensive alternative assessment method is used, costs could be lower. If passage of tests is eliminated as a graduation requirement, no alternative method would be needed and any new costs would be avoided.

Prohibiting the establishment of county-based high school diplomas would not have a fiscal impact.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 22, 2004
mam/hlb

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Exhibit 1
Percentage of Students Passing the Maryland High School Assessments

<u>County</u>	<u>English I</u>	<u>Biology</u>	<u>Government</u>	<u>Algebra/ Data Analysis</u>
Allegany	35.2	57.7	47.0	40.8
Anne Arundel	40.6	58.2	59.6	55.6
Baltimore City	17.7	26.7	42.0	22.5
Baltimore	36.8	52.8	60.3	57.9
Calvert	48.5	67.8	50.0	64.7
Caroline	25.9	48.2	49.8	33.5
Carroll	51.9	71.8	76.1	66.0
Cecil	34.8	51.4	60.3	66.2
Charles	40.8	58.5	59.8	50.8
Dorchester	23.3	45.9	41.3	47.6
Frederick	45.3	63.7	64.5	64.2
Garrett	32.7	50.8	60.0	63.6
Harford	47.0	59.4	66.2	63.6
Howard	61.5	73.3	78.5	69.4
Kent	33.6	52.1	53.2	44.2
Montgomery	56.3	71.3	77.3	67.1
Prince George's	23.2	31.1	41.0	28.1
Queen Anne's	57.0	63.2	62.9	45.4
St. Mary's	36.8	58.7	56.1	47.5
Somerset	22.1	50.0	44.9	31.7
Talbot	40.1	64.9	77.5	46.1
Washington	41.2	57.6	60.3	68.7
Wicomico	37.8	48.1	61.8	46.6
Worcester	41.1	57.9	67.4	58.0
State	39.8	54.3	60.2	53.2

Source: Maryland State Department of Education
