

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2007 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Revised

Senate Bill 475

(Senator Pinsky, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

**Task Force on the Policy and Funding Implications of Requiring Passage of the
High School Assessment for Graduation**

This bill establishes a task force to evaluate the use of the Maryland high school assessments (HSAs) as a diploma requirement and suggest targeted interventions to increase the HSA passage rate. The task force may hold public hearings, invite academic experts and other witnesses to submit testimony, and contract with experts and consultants as necessary in consultation with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) must provide staff support for the task force. A final report is due by January 1, 2008.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2007 and terminates June 30, 2008.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: If a consultant is hired by the task force, general fund expenditures would increase by an estimated \$50,000 in FY 2008. DLS could staff the task force with existing personnel and resources. Revenues would not be affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	50,000	0	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$50,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: Local school personnel appointed to the task force could participate without affecting local school system budgets.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

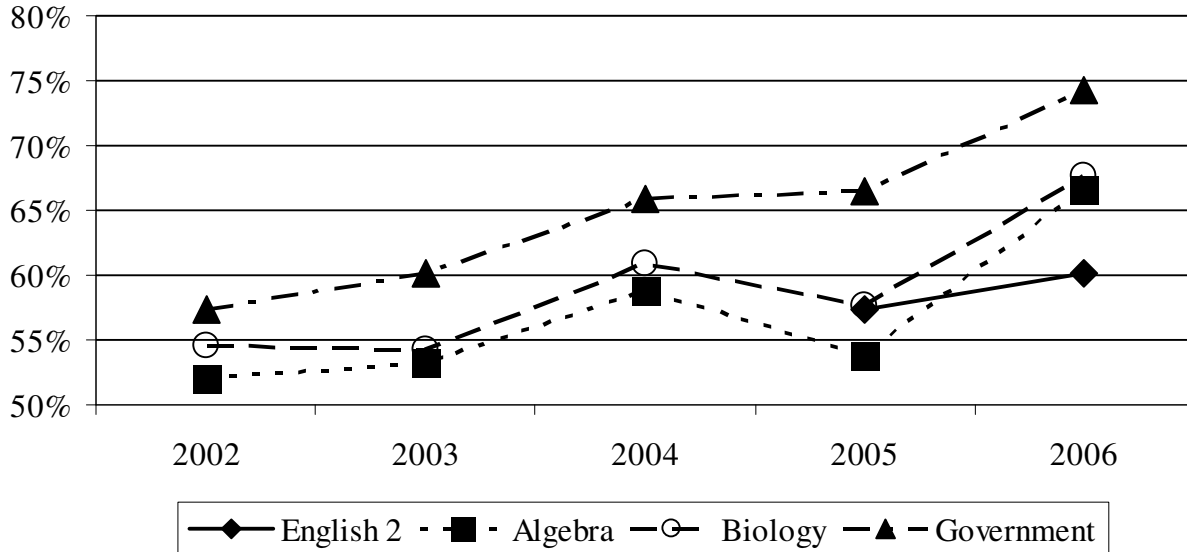
Current Law: Policies, rules, and regulations for the graduation of students from Maryland public schools are established by local boards of education and the State Board of Education.

By regulation, a student must complete the credit requirements established by the State Board of Education, a student service requirement, and any local school system requirements to qualify for graduation from a public high school in Maryland. Beginning with the cohort of students who entered grade 9 in the 2005-2006 school year, each student will also be required to pass the HSAs or achieve a combined total score on the assessments in order to qualify for a Maryland high school diploma. The State Board of Education is required to review this requirement before the end of 2008. The State Board of Education recently allowed certain scores on Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate tests to substitute for a required HSA.

Background: After many years of consideration, the State Board of Education decided in 2004 to make passage of the HSAs mandatory for high school graduation beginning with the class of 2009. HSAs are end-of-course tests taken in four subject areas: algebra, biology, government, and English. Students take each HSA after completing the applicable course and may subsequently take the test up to three times per year until a passing score is achieved.

Students who are sophomores in the current school year will be the first cohort required to pass the HSAs. Last year, when many of these students took the HSAs for the first time, scores improved in all four subjects. **Exhibit 1** shows the percent of students passing the HSAs in each of the years that HSA results have been reported. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) advises that freshmen who took the tests last year did even better than the student population as a whole, with 71.5% of freshmen passing the algebra test, 79.4% passing the biology test, and 77.8% passing the government test as of the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

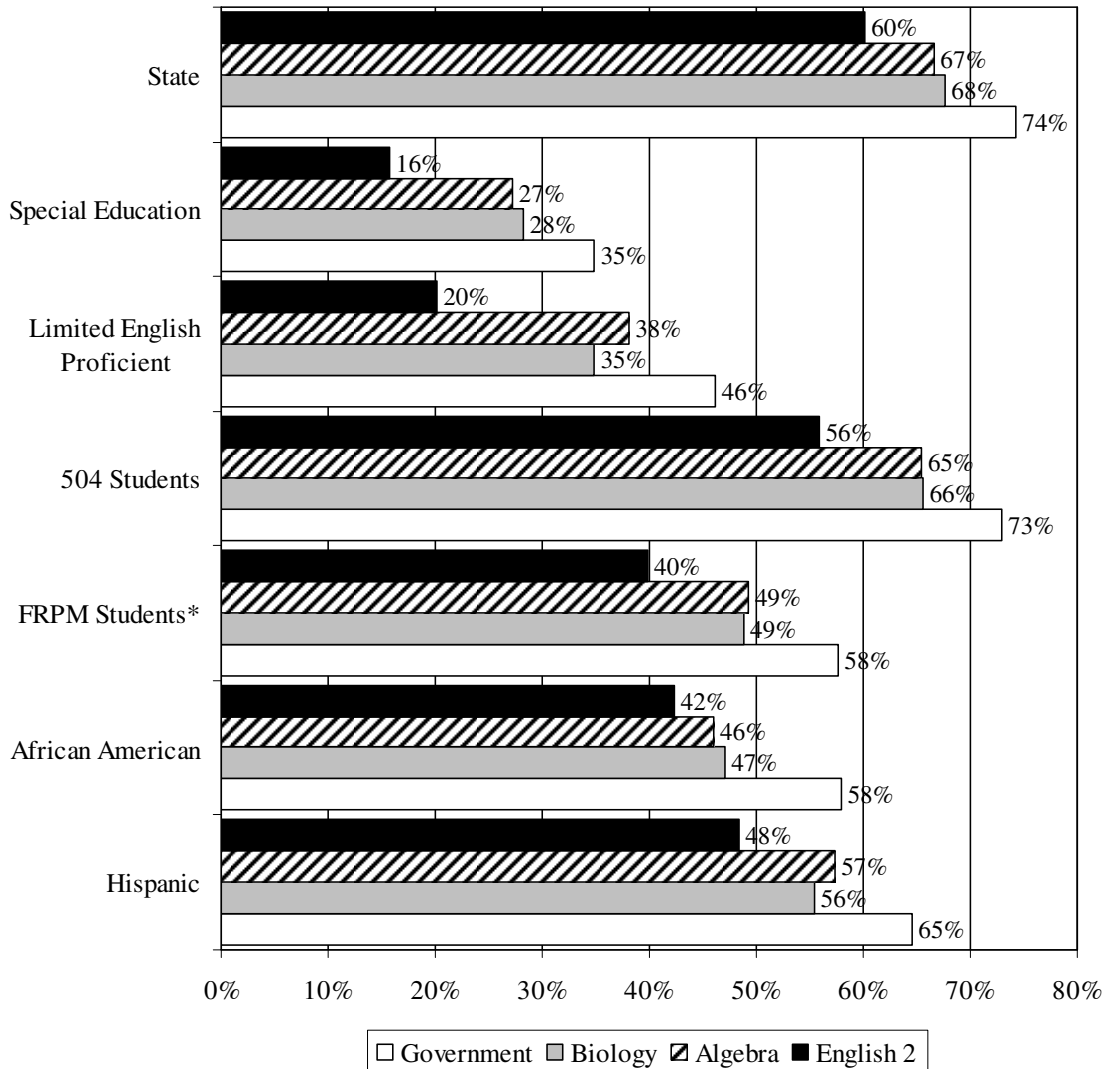
Exhibit 1
Percent of Students Passing the High School Assessments
2002 to 2006



Note: The English 2 test was only administered in 2005 and 2006.
Source: Maryland State Department of Education

On February 28, 2007, the State Superintendent of Schools announced that she intends to recommend to the State Board of Education that the HSA requirements be adjusted for special education students, limited English proficient students, and students who have physical or mental impairments that substantially limit one or more major life activities (“504 students”). The MSDE press release notes that many of the students in these subgroups may not be prepared to pass the HSAs by 2009 without “extraordinary intervention on the part of local school systems.” The preamble to the bill notes that other student subgroups, specifically economically disadvantaged students, African American students, and Hispanic students, also have lower HSA passage rates. **Exhibit 2** compares the 2006 HSA passing rates of various student subgroups to the statewide passing percentages.

Exhibit 2
Percent of Student Subgroups Passing the High School Assessments
2006



*Students eligible for free and reduced price meals.
 Source: Maryland State Department of Education

State Expenditures: The bill authorizes the task force, in consultation with DBM, to contract with experts and consultants as necessary to inform its work and recommendations. If the task force finds that a short-term consultant is needed to research the impact of high school exit exams and targeted student interventions, general

fund expenditures would increase in accordance with the contract in fiscal 2008. A reasonable estimate of the contract cost is \$50,000.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 994 (Delegate Walker, *et al.*) – Ways and Means.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 5, 2007
mll/rhh Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 27, 2007

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