

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 557

(Senator Pinsky)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

Education - Alternate Maryland School Assessment - Review

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to review the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA) by July 1, 2011 with the goal of reducing the time required to administer the assessment. By October 1, 2011, MSDE must report to the Governor; the House Committee on Ways and Means; and the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee regarding the review.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2010.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MSDE can review the Alt-MSA using existing resources.

Local Effect: Reviewing the Alt-MSA will not materially affect local school system finances; however, any changes made to the Alt-MSA procedures may increase or decrease the workload for special education teachers.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: As part of the review, MSDE must survey teachers of severely disabled students and students who are to be impacted by the Alt-MSA and solicit recommendations for improving the Alt-MSA. MSDE must also consider:

- providing greater guidance and taking primary responsibility for the creation of the Alt-MSA while allowing modification to be effectuated by the special education instructor;

- reducing the number of master objectives that are currently required for each student in each year; and
- creating State-approved artifacts for each mastery objective, including tasks, products, and actions.

Background: The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that all students be assessed and that students receive an individual score in reading and mathematics in grades 3 - 8 and in high school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, also requires that states provide an “alternate assessment” when implementing statewide accountability systems. An alternate assessment is an assessment designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in a regular assessment, even when accommodations are provided.

In Maryland, students with disabilities participate in one of the three following assessments:

- the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) for mathematics and reading in grades 3 - 8, with or without accommodations as appropriate, or the High School Assessment (HSA) end-of-course assessments in Algebra/Data Analysis, English, and Biology, with or without accommodations as appropriate;
- the Alternate Maryland School Assessment based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards (Mod-MSA) for mathematics and reading in grades 3 - 8 or the Modified High School Assessment (Mod-HSA) end-of-course assessments in Algebra/Data Analysis, English, and Biology; or
- the Alternate Maryland School Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (Alt-MSA) for mathematics and reading in grades 3 - 8, 10 and for science in grades 5, 8, and 10.

The assessment a student participates in is determined by the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The Alt-MSA is intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

The Alt-MSA is different because it is not given one time during the year. Instead, the student’s IEP team chooses reading and math learning objectives (known as mastery objectives) tailored to the student. From the beginning of the school year in September through March, the student is instructed on these objectives. When the student masters the objective, evidence of the student’s mastery is placed in a portfolio. The portfolio is then scored by a contractor and combined with results from the standard MSA. MSDE reports that the instructional model of testing that allows teachers to choose the mastery objectives that are appropriate for each student was developed in response to criticism

from teachers and parents that standard mastery objectives dictated by MSDE did not accurately reflect a student's knowledge.

MSDE reports that there are currently 2,908 mastery objectives in its Alt-MSA test bank. These mastery objectives correspond to the hundreds of indicators and objectives in the State curriculum and are set by MSDE based on input from teachers. Artifacts are the test items used by the teachers that test the students. Artifacts may be a picture, video, or a "manipulative" depending on the mastery objective being tested and the particular response modes of the student.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Montgomery and Somerset counties, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 2, 2010
ncs/mwc Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 27, 2010

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