

BILL: Senate Bill 263
TITLE: Education - Maryland High School Diploma - Civics Test Requirement
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 1, 2017
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, opposes Senate Bill 263, which would mandate that in order to receive a Maryland diploma and graduate from high school each student would be required to pass a statewide civics test.

Generally, MABE opposes efforts by the General Assembly to legislate curriculum, courses of instruction, assessments, or graduation requirements, firmly believing that this role belongs to local boards of education in conjunction with the State Board of Education. Exceptions to this rule are rare. In creating the State Board and local boards of education, the General Assembly has delegated to them the responsibility for guiding and delivering a high quality statewide system of public education through state standards and accountability measures, and locally governed and administered curriculum, teaching, and learning.

Maryland continues to implement the statewide student assessments aligned with the Common Core and Maryland's College and Career Readiness Standards, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments.

In Maryland, the NCLB-mandated tests have been referred to as the Maryland School Assessments (MSAs), with the exception of the high school level tests in reading (English), math (Algebra), and science (Biology), which are referred to as High School Assessments (HSAs). For many years these three HSAs served two purposes: as components of the federal accountability requirements, and as components of the state diploma requirements adopted by the State Board of Education in regulation.

The fourth HSA required for graduation has been in Government, and this assessment has no corresponding federal mandate. As a non-mandated assessment, funding for the Government HSA was eliminated in the FY 2012 state budget submitted by the Governor and the test was not administered in the 2011-2012 school year. 2012 legislation, sponsored by the Senate President and Speaker of the House, was enacted to restore the Government HSA as a graduation requirement beginning with students entering grade 9 in 2013-2014 (SB 293/HB 1227, Chapters 476/477, 2012 Laws of Maryland).

During the transition from the previous HSA program, Maryland's high school students were not required to pass either of the PARCC exams in English/Language Arts or Algebra as high stakes graduation requirements. However, the Biology and Government assessments continued to be administered as HSAs. In this light, MABE is confident that the Government assessment will remain a rigorous and meaningful component of Maryland's high school assessment program.

As Maryland continues to implement reforms in standards and assessments relating to College and Career Readiness, MABE looks forward to the General Assembly's support for sustaining the State Board and local board of education partnership that has served Maryland and our students so well.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 263.