

BILL: House Bill 1157
TITLE: Education - Maryland High School Diploma - Civics Test Requirement
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 17, 2021
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, opposes House Bill 1157, 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 statewide student assessments aligned with the Common Core and Maryland's College and Career Readiness Standards, now moving on from administering the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments to the new Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) tests. This transition has been frustrated, complicated, and delayed by the COVID pandemic and resulting school closures, and MABE does not support adding to the array of standardized State tests or graduation requirements at this time.

For many years, Maryland's federally mandated standardized tests were 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 were referred to as High School Assessments (HSAs). 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. Under the newer MCAP program, the Algebra and English assessments are the same, and the science assessment has been transitioning to the Maryland Integrated Science Assessment (MISA).

The fourth high school level assessment required for graduation has been in Government, and this assessment has no corresponding federal mandate. The Government HSA has been a graduation requirement beginning with students entering grade 9 in 2013-2014.

During the transition from the previous HSA program to PARCC, and again to MCAP, high school students were not required to pass the exams in English/Language Arts, Algebra, or science as high stakes graduation requirements until the reliability and validity of the newer versions of these tests could be established over time. However, the Government assessment has continued to be administered as a graduation requirement. In this context, MABE is confident that the Government assessment will remain a rigorous and meaningful component of Maryland's high school level comprehensive assessment program.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1157.