



Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 410-767-0100 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Bill Reinhard, 410-767-0486

MORE THAN EIGHT IN TEN SUPPORT HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS

SURVEY FINDS RESIDENTS THROUGHOUT THE STATE, ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC LINES FAVOR THE TESTS

BALTIMORE (March 15, 2007) – An unexpectedly high level of support for strengthened high school standards and testing in Maryland is revealed in a newly released University of Baltimore survey of state residents.

Eighty-five percent of Maryland residents support the idea that high school students take and pass a series of assessments in key academic subjects in order to be eligible to receive a high school diploma, according to the results of a new statewide survey. Slightly more (85.2 percent) agree that high school students need a higher level of skills for college or the job market than they did a decade ago.

More than 19 of 20 Maryland residents (95.7 percent) agree that high school students should be required to reach a minimum level of skill in English, math, and other academic subjects before they can graduate.

“Public sentiment in favor of stronger graduation standards has been growing, and now represents a public mandate,” said State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. “Maryland residents are telling us that the high school diploma should be more than a piece of paper distributed to students who simply show up to class the required number of days. The high school diploma must mean something.”

The Schaefer Center for Public Policy at the University of Baltimore included three questions about high school standards on the Center’s “Maryland Policy Choices: 2007 Telephone Survey of Maryland Residents.” Survey results are being released to the General Assembly this session. MSDE worked with Schaefer Center researchers to construct survey questions in an effort to determine public support of the High School Assessment (HSA) program. More than 800 people responded to the telephone survey, administered in December.

Endorsement for high school assessments is evident statewide and across all demographic groups:

(more)



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- More African American residents than White residents (93.5 percent to 86 percent) believe that there has been an increase in the skills necessary to compete in the job market or be successful in college.
- Maryland residents across-the-board believe that high school students should be required to reach a minimum level of skill in English, math, and other academic areas before they graduate. Slightly more African American respondents than White (97.4 percent to 96.6 percent) believe this to be the case.
- Support for a testing program also is high across demographic and racial lines. Slightly more white respondents than African-Americans (87.3 to 84.4) favor the assessments.

The Maryland State Board of Education in 2003 initiated a new graduation requirement: students in the class of 2009—this year’s sophomores—would need to pass four end-of-course assessments in order to receive a Maryland high school diploma. The state began studying graduation tests in 1993, based on a reform initiative put forth in 1989 by the Sondheim Commission on School Performance. The HSAs in algebra/data analysis, biology, English, and government cover academic material mandated statewide through the Maryland Content Standards, which have been in place since 1996. Students have at least to three times each year to take and pass the exams. Those who struggle will receive additional assistance and be provided with online tools.

Under regulation, State Board members will review the High School Assessment plan in 2008 to make certain students are making progress before finalizing the assessments as a graduation requirement. Dr. Grasmick has indicated she may ask the State Board to delay the requirement for students in special education, English Language Learners, and code 504 programs.

The Maryland survey results are consistent with findings in other states. Maryland is among more than 20 states that have—or soon will have—exit exam programs, with other states considering proposals to strengthen standards.

Public support for the HSAs found in the survey confirms the backing the State Board has already received from a variety of organizations, including the Maryland Business Roundtable and the University System of Maryland.

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