

High School Assessments Tests (HSAs)

Statement by the Maryland PTA

Maryland PTA and its 215,000 members believe that a quality education incorporates multiple measures of performance such as student grades, teacher evaluations, and assessment tests. These combined indicators provide a balanced picture of student knowledge, skills and abilities, and can provide an objective way to broaden access to educational opportunities. However, using any one of these indicators alone as a measure of attainment falls short of providing a complete picture of student achievement. Therefore, the use of High School Assessment Tests (HSAs) should not be used as the sole determinant of a student's academic achievement or graduation requirement.

National PTA believes that the overall goal of student assessment and testing programs should be to identify how instruction can be improved and learning increased. A valid assessment of a student's academic performance does not consist of a single test score. Additionally, the development of indicators such as equity, the quality of teaching staff, adequate facilities, class size, instructional methods, accountability and parental involvement are important in providing a balanced representation of educational quality in school districts.

Since the adoption of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), progress has been made by local school districts to implement interventions that address the needs of students at risk for failure. But there currently lacks a standardized program of initiatives that address HSA test failures that provide timely remediation for students in order to satisfy assessment requirements and graduation requirements. Based on the 2006 test results of the 63,000 students in the class of 2009, as many as 25,000 students dispersed statewide are at risk of failing one or more of the HSA tests.

At the time of its adoption, the Bridge to Excellence Act (BEA) and Thornton Commission did not include the financial resources necessary to address the mandates outlined in NCLB and Maryland State Department of Education's requirement for students to pass HSAs. Inadequate funding results in the inability to administer intervention and remedial programs necessary to prepare students to meet the academic standards of NCLB and BEA.

In conclusion, the members of the Maryland PTA on behalf of all children attending Maryland Public Schools are in full support of implementation of assessments that prepare students to move forward in their educational pursuits, as well as identify struggling students to assist them overcome the barriers that impede their learning. However, we have reservations about HSAs use as the basis for withholding diplomas. Our efforts should be geared toward initiatives that address timely remediation for test failures coupled with educational funding that equitably supports the needs of all children in Maryland Public Schools.

Approved by MDPTA Executive Committee 1/24/07