



**I. Policy Statement**

The Board of Education is committed to ensuring that each student in the Howard County Public School System meets rigorous academic standards and is prepared to enter postsecondary education, employment, or both. The Board further recognizes that fulfilling this commitment requires effective instruction and flexible programming that address the unique needs and interests of students. Within the high school program, students will have access to a wide variety of course offerings, including work-based learning experiences that meet and supplement academic requirements, to prepare them to be responsible members of a global society.

**II. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish requirements for graduation from high school in the Howard County Public School System.

**III. Definitions**

- A. Bridge Plan for Academic Validation (Bridge Plan) – An alternative pathway to meeting Maryland High School Assessment requirements. Regulations and procedures governing the Bridge Plan are determined by the Maryland State Department of Education.
- B. Combined Score – The total of the passing scores established by the Maryland State Department of Education on the Maryland High School Assessments in algebra/data analysis, biology, English, and government.
- C. Credit – Unit of achievement awarded for the completion of a course and/or the successful demonstration of established learning goals. Course credits will be published in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses.
- D. Diploma – See Maryland High School Diploma.
- E. Home Instruction – A program under which children are provided by their parent(s) regular, thorough instruction during the school year in the studies usually taught in the public schools to children of the same age.
- F. Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team) – A group of individuals responsible for identifying and evaluating students with disabilities. The IEP

Team develops, reviews, and/or revises an IEP for a student with a disability and determines placement.

- G. Maryland High School Assessments – The culminating tests required by the Maryland State Department of Education that are aligned with content standards and measure a student's skills and knowledge.
- H. Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion – The official state document issued to students with disabilities who cannot meet the requirements for a diploma but who have completed the identified standards in a special education program.
- I. Maryland High School Diploma – The official state document issued to a student indicating fulfillment of the minimum enrollment, credit, state assessment, student service learning, and career preparation requirements.
- J. Merit Course – A course that includes more content or the study of content in greater depth than other courses with the same course title at the same grade level, or other courses in the same subject area at the same grade level. In mathematics, merit courses require the study or application of mathematics concepts beyond the level of geometry. In world language, the course must be at Level III or beyond. Merit courses are designated in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses.
- K. Parent – Any one of the following, recognized as the adult(s) legally responsible for the student:
  - 1. Biological parent – A natural parent whose parental rights have not been terminated.
  - 2. Adoptive parent – A person who has legally adopted the student and whose parental rights have not been terminated.
  - 3. Custodian – A person or an agency appointed by the court as the legal custodian of the student and granted parental rights and privileges.
  - 4. Guardian – A person who has been placed by the court in charge of the affairs of the student and granted parental rights and privileges.
  - 5. Caregiver – An adult resident of Howard County who exercises care, custody or control over the student, but who is neither the biological parent nor legal guardian.
  - 6. Foster parent – An adult approved to care for a child who has been placed in their home by a state agency or a licensed child placement agency as provided by section 5-507 of the Family Law Article.

#### **IV. Standards**

- A. Graduation Requirements

1. Enrollment Requirement

The student shall satisfactorily complete 4 years of approved study beyond the eighth grade unless one of the alternatives in section D is satisfied.

2. Credit Requirements

- a. To be awarded a diploma, a student shall have earned a minimum of twenty-one credits while enrolled in grades 9 through 12.
- b. A student shall earn the following specified core credits as part of the twenty-one credit requirements:
  - i. English Language Arts – 4 credits, including one credit that addresses standards tested by the Maryland High School Assessment for English
  - ii. Fine Arts – 1 credit in visual arts, music, theater, and/or dance
  - iii. Technology Education - 1 credit that includes the application of knowledge, tools, and skills to solve practical problems and extend human capabilities
  - iv. Mathematics – 3 credits, while enrolled in grades 9-12. Overall math credits must include one credit with instruction in algebra aligned with the Maryland High School Assessment for algebra/data analysis or one or more credits in subsequent mathematics courses for which Algebra I is a prerequisite, and one credit with instruction in geometry aligned with the content standards for geometry
  - v. Physical Education – 1/2 credit
  - vi. Health – 1/2 credit
  - vii. Science – 3 credits of which one addresses standards tested by the Maryland High School Assessment for biology and two are from the earth, life, or physical sciences, or all of the above, in which laboratory experiences are an integral component
  - viii. Social Studies – 3 credits including one credit in U. S. history, one credit in world history, and one credit in local, state, and national government which addresses standards tested by the Maryland High School Assessment for government
- c. In addition, a student shall earn one of the following:
  - i. World Language or American Sign Language – 2 credits while enrolled in grades 9-12
  - ii. Advanced Technology Education – 2 credits

- iii. State-approved Career and Technology Completer Program – 4 credits

3. State Assessment Requirements

- a. Students who entered grade 9 prior to the 2005-2006 school year shall take the Maryland High School Assessments for algebra/data analysis, biology, English, and government.
- b. Students entering grade 9 in the school year 2005-2006 and beyond shall take the Maryland High School Assessments for English, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. The student must achieve one of the following:
  - i. the passing score on each test
  - ii. a combined overall score
  - iii. a specific score on (an) MSDE-approved comparable assessment(s),  
or
  - iv. a passing score on the four High School Assessments by a combination of bullets (1) and (3).
- c. Retaking Maryland High School Assessments
  - i. Students who do not achieve a passing score on a Maryland High School Assessment shall be provided the opportunity to retake the appropriate assessment in accordance with the testing schedule issued by the Maryland State Department of Education.
  - ii. In order to retake a Maryland High School Assessment, students must participate in an approved assistance program to strengthen areas of weakness.
- d. Bridge Plan for Academic Validation

A student may participate in the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation if the student has met all of the requirements set forth by the MSDE.

4. Student Service Learning Requirement

Students shall complete one of the following programs which include preparation, action, and reflection components:

- a. A locally designed program in student service learning that has been approved by the State Superintendent of Schools and is usually completed in middle school.
- b. 75 hours of student service learning which may begin during the middle school years.

5. Career Preparation Requirement

The student must participate in an approved program of Career Preparation (similar to the former World of Work program).

B. Elective Programs

Howard County Public Schools will provide elective courses in a variety of areas which are open to enrollment for all students and which focus on in-depth study in required subject areas, exploration, or application/integration of what has been learned.

C. Alternative Sources of Credit

1. Howard County Public Schools may provide summer school programs as determined by the needs of students for either original or review credit. Original credit courses shall meet the requirements specified for regular school year courses. Requirements for review credit shall be developed for individual students after determining the student's proficiency in the subject.
2. Credit may be given for acceptable summer study offered by approved public and nonpublic institutions in or outside of Maryland, provided the principal of the student's home school authorizes the study in advance.
3. Howard County Public Schools may provide evening school programs as an extension of the regular school day for original or review credit as determined by the needs of students. Requirements for those subjects being used by students for diploma credit shall be the same as those listed above.
4. Extenuating circumstances may necessitate the assistance of tutors for certain students. However, tutoring should be considered only after all the resources of the school system have been used fully and when it is felt definitely that the best interests of the students are being served. If tutoring is recommended by the school and approved by the school system for credit to be applied toward minimum graduation requirements, then the tutor, the program of study, and examination shall be financed by the school system.

5. Work and experience outside the school are recognized as valid ways of learning. Time spent in such activities may be counted as a portion of the requirements for credit when identified as an integrated part of a planned program. Not more than nine elective credits toward meeting graduation requirements may be granted to a student for approved and supervised work or experience.
6. Credit may be earned in grades 9-12 for independent study or internships in which students successfully demonstrate locally established curricular objectives.
7. With prior approval of the Superintendent/designee, credit may be given for courses taken at accredited colleges and other accredited institutions and counted toward the requirements for a diploma. The cost of such approved courses shall be borne by the student.
8. Courses will be identified for which students in grades 9-12 may earn credit toward graduation by passing an examination that assesses student demonstration of locally established curricular objectives.
9. For students entering grade 9 in the SY 2005-2006 and beyond, credits may be earned by taking designated high school level courses at the middle school level and passing an exam that assesses student demonstration of locally established curricular objectives.

D. Alternatives to 4-Year Enrollment

In recognition of the fact that four-year enrollment in a public high school may not serve the best interests of some students, the following alternatives are made available:

1. Early College Admission Program

A student may receive a diploma after completion of grade 12 through participation in the early college admission program.

2. Early Admission to Approved Vocational, Technical, or other Postsecondary School

A student may receive a diploma after completion of grade 12 through participation in an early admission program of an approved vocational, technical, or other postsecondary school.

3. Request for Early Graduation Option

Students have the option to graduate after three years of attendance provided all state assessment, credit, student service learning, and career preparation requirements have been met. This option is subject to approval by the Superintendent /designee. An approval process will be developed and published in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses.

E. Transfer Students

1. Awarding of Credit

The principal shall ascertain whether or not the school or schools previously attended by the student are accredited. This may include home instruction programs under the supervision of accredited schools or institutions which award high school credit. If there is any doubt on this point, an official inquiry should be addressed to the State Department of Education in the state in which the school or schools are located.

a. Accredited Schools

- i. If the school or schools are approved by that state, credits may be allowed the student in the subjects which the student has completed successfully. See paragraph 2 in this section for courses which are part of the Maryland State Assessment Program.
- ii. Credits for AP courses which have been awarded by accredited schools will be counted toward the requirements for diploma endorsements. The number of merit courses required for diploma endorsements will be reduced by three for each full high school year that the student did not attend Howard County Public Schools.

b. Nonaccredited Schools

If an official transcript from an accredited school is not available, the Superintendent/designee shall determine placement within the high school program and credits to be awarded by an evaluation of the student. This evaluation shall include one or more of the following: administration of standardized tests and examinations; the use of interviews that are focused around the student's demonstration of course content knowledge and performance levels; and the inspection of transcripts, report cards, and other documentation. The student will be notified in writing of the reasons for any denial of transfer credits from nonaccredited schools.

2. Maryland State Assessment Requirements

- a. To award credit for algebra/data analysis, biology, English I, and government, a principal shall determine through the following considerations whether the transfer student demonstrates subject matter knowledge aligned with the content standards for the subject: administration of standardized tests and examinations; observation of the student in the classroom; use of interviews that are focused around the student's demonstration of course content knowledge and performance levels; and inspection of transcripts, report cards, and other documentation.
- b. A student who transfers from a nonpublic school or a school out of state is exempt from one or more of the Maryland High School Assessments if the principal awards the student credit for algebra/data analysis, biology, English I, or government, or all of these.
- c. A student who transfers from a nonpublic school or from a school out of state into a local school system after the first semester of his or her senior year is exempt from the Maryland High School Assessment Requirements. This exemption does not apply to a student with disabilities in a State-approved nonpublic program.

3. Awarding of a Diploma

- a. To receive a diploma, a student shall be in attendance at a Maryland public high school one full semester immediately preceding graduation in addition to meeting the other diploma requirements. In cases where this requirement creates an undue hardship for a student transferring to or from a Maryland nonpublic school or from an out-of-state school and wishing to receive a Maryland High School Diploma, the Superintendent may waive the one full semester attendance requirement. Exception shall be made for a student with disabilities in a state-approved nonpublic program.
- b. Students transferring from one Maryland public high school to another during the second semester of their senior year, and meeting all requirements for graduation, shall be given the option of graduating from either high school by agreement of the Superintendent/designee or the respective local superintendents when more than one school system is involved.

F. Diplomas and Certificates

1. Maryland High School Diploma

A Maryland High School diploma will be awarded to any student who fulfills the minimum enrollment, credit, state assessment, student service learning, and career preparation requirements.

2. Diploma Endorsements

The following diploma endorsements are granted by the Howard County Public School System to students who, while meeting all graduation requirements, successfully complete rigorous programs of study.

- a. The Howard County Public School System Certificate of Merit is granted to students who earn a minimum of 12 credits in merit courses and who achieve an unweighted cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.
- b. The Howard County Public School System Certificate of Merit with Honors is granted to students who earn a minimum of 15 credits in merit courses, at least one of which is a GT or AP level course, and who achieve an unweighted cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.4 on a 4.0 scale.
- c. The Howard County Public School System Certificate of Merit with Distinction is granted to students who earn a minimum of 15 credits in merit courses, at least three of which are GT or AP level courses, and who achieve an unweighted cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.75 on a 4.0 scale.

3. Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion

This certificate shall be awarded only to students with disabilities who cannot meet the requirements for a diploma but who meet one of the following standards:

- a. The student is enrolled in an education program for at least four years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent and is determined by an Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team), with the agreement of the parents of the student, to have developed appropriate skills for the individual to enter the world of work, act responsibly as a citizen, and enjoy a fulfilling life. The world of work shall include but not be limited to gainful employment, work activity centers, sheltered workshops, and supported employment.

- b. The student has been enrolled in an educational program for four years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent and has reached age of 21 by the end of the student's current school year.
- c. The decision to award a student with disabilities a Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion will not be made until after the beginning of the student's last year in high school unless the student is participating in the Alternative Maryland School Assessment Program (ALT-MSA).

**V. Compliance**

- A. The Superintendent/designee is responsible for ensuring that the curriculum meets state standards for graduation.
- B. The principal is responsible for ensuring that the approved curriculum is implemented.
- C. The principal/designee is responsible for monitoring student schedules to provide feedback to students and parents regarding progress toward the fulfillment of graduation requirements.
- D. The principal/designee is responsible for reviewing student records to determine eligibility for graduation.

**VI. Delegation of Authority**

The Superintendent is authorized to develop procedures for the implementation of this policy.

**VII. References**

- A. Legal  
COMAR 13A.03.02, Graduation Requirements for Public High Schools in Maryland
- B. Other Board Policies  
Policy 8010 Grading and Reporting: Pre-Kindergarten Through Grade 8  
Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: High School  
Policy 9070 Academic Eligibility for High School Extracurricular Activities

ADOPTED: February 13, 1986

AMENDED: October 26, 1989

June 27, 1996

May 26, 2005  
April 12, 2007  
April 10, 2008  
EFFECTIVE: April 10, 2008

**I. Enrollment**

**A. Course Load**

Students are expected to enroll in a full schedule of courses each year that they are in attendance, with the exception that students in their fourth year of attendance may take less than a full schedule in order to work or attend college, provided they have prior permission of the principal.

**B. Alternatives to 4-Year Enrollment Requirement**

**1. Early College Admission Program**

In order to participate in the Early College Admission Program, students must be accepted for early admission to an accredited college before high school graduation and must have met all state assessment, student service learning, and career preparation requirements. A written request by the student and parent must be made to, and approved by, the Superintendent certifying the early admission acceptance, and the student's program for the first year of college must be approved by the Superintendent if the program is to be included toward the issuance of a diploma. At the conclusion of a full year of study, a written request for a diploma must be submitted to the Superintendent together with a transcript or letter from the college to the high school principal indicating that the student has successfully completed a year of college work.

**2. Early Admission to Approved Vocational, Technical, or Other Postsecondary School Program**

In order to participate in the Early College Admission Program, students must be accepted for early admission by an approved vocational, technical, or postsecondary school program before high school graduation and must have met all state assessment, student service learning, and career preparation requirements. A written request by the student and parent must be made to, and approved by, the Superintendent certifying the early admission acceptance, and the student's program for the first year of the postsecondary program must be approved by the Superintendent if the program is to be included toward the issuance of a diploma. At the conclusion of a full year of study, a written request for a diploma must be submitted to the

Superintendent together with a transcript or letter from the postsecondary school to the high school principal indicating that the student has successfully completed a year of postsecondary school work.

3. Other

Beyond those procedures specifically listed in policy, these procedures, or the Catalog of Approved High School Courses, the principal shall prescribe all rules and regulations for students involved in any exception to the four-year high school attendance requirement. This is especially true in respect to the procedures by which a student may enter and leave the building when the school is in session.

C. Early Graduation Option

1. Students have the option to graduate after three years of attendance provided all state assessment, credit, student service learning, and career preparation requirements have been met. A written request must be made to the principal along with a portfolio which contains:
  - a. A resume
  - b. A written statement of career plans which includes how early graduation will enhance career plans
  - c. Four teacher recommendations
  - d. A written request from parents stating their agreement with the student's request
  - e. An academic package which includes transcript, test scores, and attendance
2. It is recommended, but not required, that this request be made during the fourth quarter of the sophomore year. Approval must be given by the Superintendent/designee. An approval process will be developed and published in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses. High school students shall be informed of this and other alternatives to the traditional high school graduation and attendance requirements as a normal part of the guidance program.

D. A student who enters Howard County Public Schools in the twelfth grade shall be granted a waiver from locally established graduation requirements unless the student chooses to fulfill the requirements.

E. Eligibility for Athletic and Extracurricular Activities

Senior students who have not waived the fourth year of attendance shall be entitled to participate in athletic and extracurricular activities subject to paragraph B.3 above and the eligibility policy.

## **II. Alternative Sources of Credit**

### **A. Credit for High School Courses Taken in Middle School**

High school courses which are offered at the middle school level and are eligible for credit under this provision will be brought to the Board of Education for approval. Grades earned under this provision will be recorded on the middle school report card and passing grades (as determined by Policy 8010) will be recorded as a “pass” on the high school transcript.

### **B. Credit for Courses Through Colleges or Other Accredited Institutions**

1. One high school credit will be awarded for completion of each college course which is equivalent to (or beyond) a course in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses. Within these guidelines and policy, high school principals will make final decisions as to credits awarded.
2. One high school credit will be awarded for completion of each course offered through other accredited institutions, provided the course is substantially equivalent to a course in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses. Students must seek approval from the principal prior to taking the course and provide a course syllabus. The principal will make final decisions as to credits awarded after consultation with appropriate curriculum staff.
3. Students who are awarded credits in courses which are part of the Maryland State Assessment Program must still meet applicable Maryland State Assessment Requirements for those courses.

### **C. Credit by Exam**

Courses for which credit by examination is available will be brought to the Board of Education for approval. Courses for which credit by examination is approved will be designated in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses.

## **III. Maryland High School Assessments**

### **A. Appropriate Assistance Programs**

1. Assistance programs may include:

- a. Specifically designed programs offered by the school system as part of the school day during the regular school year
- b. Specifically designed programs offered by the school system as an after school program
- c. Summer school courses
- d. Other programs offered outside of the school system, provided the programs have prior approval by the principal.

.2. Cost

- a. Tuition may be charged for programs offered outside the school day or beyond the school year.
- b. In the event that this causes undue hardship, the principal may grant a waiver of tuition associated with any option offered by the school system.

B. Eligibility for Participating in the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation

A student may participate in the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation if the student has met all of the following conditions based on the requirements set forth by the MSDE:

1. The student has failed one or more High School Assessments at least twice and has received a passing grade and earned credit in the course(s) related to the assessment(s)
2. The student was not chronically absent as defined in Policy 9010, Attendance, in the most recent school year completed. A student who was chronically absent may request a waiver of this provision for good cause from the Administrative Director.
3. The student has demonstrated satisfactory progress toward achieving high school diploma requirements by earning at least fourteen (14) credits.
4. The student has received a passing grade in an appropriate assistance program, if applicable, or a letter of approval from the principal indicating successful completion of approved appropriate assistance.

ADOPTED: October 26, 1989

AMENDED: June 27, 1996  
March 13, 1997  
May 26, 2005  
June 27, 2005  
April 10, 2008

EFFECTIVE: April 10, 2008