

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Effective: July 1, 2023

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I. Policy Value Statement

The Board of Education of Howard County (Board) is committed to ensuring that each student in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) meets rigorous academic standards and is prepared to enter postsecondary education or employment. 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 HCPSS that are consistent with the regulations of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

III. Standards

- A. Graduation Requirements
 - 1. Enrollment Requirement:

The student will satisfactorily complete four years of approved study beyond the eighth grade unless one of the alternatives in Section D. is satisfied.

2. Credit Requirements – Beginning with Students Who Entered Grade 9 in 2021-2022 School Year:
 - a. To be awarded a diploma, a student will have earned a minimum of twenty-two credits.
 - b. A student will earn the following specified core credits as part of the twenty-two credits requirement:
 - i. English Language Arts – 4 credits, including one credit that addresses standards tested by the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) assessment for English.
 - ii. Fine Arts – 1 credit in visual arts, music, theatre, and/or dance.
 - iii. Computer Science, Engineering, or Technology Education – 1 credit that includes the study of computers and algorithmic processes or the application of knowledge, tools, and skills to solve practical problems and extend human capabilities.
 - iv. Mathematics – 4 credits, including one credit with instruction in algebra aligned with the MCAP for algebra 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 credit.
 - vii. Science – 3 credits designed to develop scientific literacy with all courses integrating the application of the science and engineering practices, the crosscutting concepts, and each containing a laboratory component, including one credit in life science aligned to the MCAP for life science; one credit in physical science (including chemistry, physics, or integrated physical science); and one credit in Earth/space science or a course with the topics of Earth/space science integrated.
 - 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 aligned with the MCAP for government.
 - c. A student will also earn one of the following as part of the twenty-two credits requirement:
 - i. World Language or American Sign Language – 2 credits in one language.
 - ii. State-approved Career and Technical Education (CTE) Career Academy– 3 or more credits as determined by the specific program.

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- d. Students must complete a locally designed high school program of environmental literacy.
 - e. Students may also earn credits from other available elective courses published in the HCPSS Catalog of Approved High School Courses.
3. Credit Requirements – Students Who Entered Grade 9 Prior to 2021-2022 School Year:
- a. To be awarded a diploma, a student will have earned a minimum of twenty-one credits.
 - b. A student will earn the following specified core credits as part of the twenty- one credits requirement:
 - i. English Language Arts – 4 credits, including one credit that addresses standards tested by the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) assessment for English.
 - ii. Fine Arts – 1 credit in visual arts, music, theatre, and/or dance.
 - iii. Computer Science, Engineering, or 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, including one credit of Algebra I (aligned with the MCAP assessment for Algebra I), one credit of Geometry, and one or more credits in courses such as Algebra II and subsequent mathematics courses that utilize algebra in a substantive way, so that the student does not lose the algebraic and numerical skills achieved in earlier courses. Students must be enrolled in a mathematics course in each year of high school that the student attends in the HCPSS, for a maximum of four years attendance, unless in the 5th or 6th year a mathematics course is needed to meet graduation requirements.
 - v. Physical Education – 1/2 credit.
 - vi. Health – 1/2 credit.
 - vii. Science – 3 credits of organized instruction that integrate laboratory components in each. Each credit engages students in the application of the science and engineering practices, the crosscutting concepts, and the disciplinary core ideas of Earth/space science, life science, physical science (chemistry and physics), engineering, and technology; and life science aligns to the MCAP for science.
 - 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 aligned with the MCAP for government.
 - c. A student will also earn one of the following as part of the twenty-one credits requirement:

- i. World Language or American Sign Language – 2 credits.
 - ii. Advanced Technology Education – 2 credits.
 - iii. State-approved Career and Technical Education (CTE) Career Academy – 3 or more credits as determined by the specific program.
 - d. Students must complete a locally designed high school program of environmental literacy.
 - e. Students may also earn credits from other available elective courses published in the HCPSS Catalog of Approved High School Courses.
4. State Assessment Requirements
 - a. Each student must take the MCAP assessments for English 10, Algebra I, life science and government to fulfill Maryland graduation requirements.
 - b. Students who passed English 10 or Algebra I courses in the 2019-2020 school year are waived from respective assessment requirements.
 - c. Students who passed American government courses in the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school year are waived from the MCAP government requirement.
 - d. Assessments for first time test takers in the 2023-2024 school year for Algebra I, English 10, life science, and government will account for 20 percent of the student's final grade in the respective high school course.

5. Student Service Learning Requirement

Students will 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.
6. Career Preparation Requirement

A student must participate in an approved program of career preparation.

B. Elective Programs

HCPSS 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. HCPSS may provide summer school programs as determined by the needs of students for either credit recovery (review credit in COMAR) or original credit. Credit recovery and original credit courses will meet the requirements specified for regular school year courses.
2. Credit may be given for summer courses offered by approved public and nonpublic institutions in or outside of Maryland. Summer courses taken outside of HCPSS summer school programs will be reviewed using the transcript review process. Students are encouraged to review summer courses with their home school counselor in advance. Requirements for awarding credit for courses are listed in Section III.E.
3. HCPSS may provide extended day programs outside of the regular school day for credit recovery or original credit as determined by the needs of students. Requirements for those subjects being used by students for diploma credit will be the same as those listed in Sections III.A.2., III.A.3., and III.A.4. above.
4. Work-based learning 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. No more than nine elective credits toward meeting graduation requirements may be granted to a student for approved and supervised work or experience.
5. Credit may be earned in grades 9–12 for independent study or internships in which students successfully demonstrate locally established curricular objectives.
6. With prior approval of the Superintendent/designee, credit may be given for courses taken at accredited colleges, MSDE-approved fully online course providers, and other accredited institutions and counted toward the requirements for a diploma.
7. 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.
8. Credits may be earned for designated high school level courses taken at the middle school level.

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 by meeting COMAR requirements of an early college admission program.

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

A student may receive a diploma by meeting COMAR requirements of an early admission program to an approved vocational, technical, or other postsecondary school program.

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 for the year of entry into high school. 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 Credits

1. Awarding of Credit

The principal/designee will ascertain the type of school(s) attended to determine how to evaluate credits. This includes home instruction programs under the supervision of accredited schools or institutions which award high school credit. If in doubt, school staff should direct questions to the Office of Home and Hospital Teaching and Home Instruction. If there is any doubt on this point, the Office of Home and Hospital Teaching and Home Instruction will send an official inquiry to the State Department of Education in the state in which the school or schools are located.

a. Maryland Public Schools

If transferring from another Maryland public school, credits must be awarded to the student in the subjects the other public school system awarded credits.

b. Schools in Other States and Non-Public Maryland Schools

If the school or schools are approved by ~~that~~ other states or are private schools accredited by Maryland, credits may be awarded to the student in the subjects which the student has completed successfully. See Section III.E.2. below for courses which are part of the Maryland State Assessment Program.

c. Other Schools

If an official transcript from a school is not available or a student is enrolling from another school, the Superintendent/designee will determine placement within the high school program and credits to be awarded by an evaluation of the student. This evaluation will 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.

Home Instruction is either passed or not passed; P for passed is the only grade recorded.

2. Maryland State Assessment Requirements

- a. If transferring outside of a Maryland Public School, to award credit for Algebra I, English 10, government, and life science, a principal/designee will 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 and who has been awarded credit for Algebra I, English 10, government, or a life science credit, is exempt from the MCAP assessment in the associated course(s).
- c. A student who transfers from a nonpublic school or from a school out of state into the HCPSS after the first semester of their senior year is exempt from the MCAP 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 will 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.
- 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, will 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. Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion

This certificate will 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 IEP Team, with the agreement of the student and 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, with the world of work including but not be limited to:
 - i. Gainful employment;
 - ii. Post-secondary education and training;
 - iii. Supported employment; and
 - iv. Other services that are integrated in the community; or
- b. The student has been enrolled in an educational program for four years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent and has reached the age of 21 by the end of the student's current school year.

3. The Maryland Summary of Performance that describes the student's skills will accompany the Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion.
4. The final 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.

IV. Responsibilities

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

V. Delegation of Authority

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

VI. Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. Credit – Unit of achievement awarded for the completion of a course and/or the successful demonstration of mastery of the curricular standards.
- B. Home Instruction – A program under which students are provided regular, thorough instruction, by their parent(s) during the school year in the studies usually taught in the public schools to students of the same age.
- C. Individualized Education Program (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 in the least restrictive environment.
- D. Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) – Required Maryland state assessments that are aligned to the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards.
- E. 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.

- F. Maryland High School Diploma (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.
- G. Mastery – Comprehensive knowledge or skill in a subject.
- H. 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 responsibilities.
 - 4. Guardian – A person who has been placed by the court in charge of the affairs of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.
 - 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, as long as the person satisfies the requirements of the Education Article, §7-101 (c) (Informal Kinship Care) or has been issued a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Verification of Release form entering into a custodial arrangement with the federal government.
 - 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 the Family Law Article, §5-507.

VII. References

- A. Legal
 - COMAR 13A.03.02, Graduation Requirements for Public High Schools in Maryland
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.03, Enrollment and Credit Requirements
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.04, Other Provisions for Earning Credit
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.05, Student Service
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.06, Maryland High School Assessments
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.09, Diplomas and Certificates
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.10, Alternatives to 4-year Enrollment Requirement
 - COMAR 13A.03.02.12, General Provisions (Transfer Students)

- B. Board Policies
 - Policy 8010 Grading and Reporting: Prekindergarten Through Grade 5
 - Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School
 - Policy 9010 Attendance
 - Policy 9070 Academic Eligibility for High School Extracurricular Activities
- C. Relevant Data Sources
(none)
- D. Other
HCPSS Catalog of Approved High School Courses

VIII. History¹

ADOPTED: February 13, 1986
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MODIFIED: April 12, 2007
April 10, 2008
March 13, 2014
April 10, 2018
November 5, 2020
August 12, 2021
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May 12, 2016
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¹ Key: *Adopted*-Original date the Board took action to approve a policy; *Reviewed*-The date the status of a policy was assessed by the Superintendent's Standing Policy Group; *Modified*-The date the Board took action to alter a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee did not require a comprehensive examination; *Revised*-The date the Board took action on a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee needed a comprehensive examination; *Effective*-The date a policy is implemented throughout the HCPSS, typically July 1 following Board action.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTSEffective: July 1, 2023

I. Graduation Information

Each principal will inform all students and their parents at least annually of the following:

- A. Maryland's graduation requirements.
- B. The student's progress toward fulfilling the graduation requirements in:
 - 1. Course credits,
 - 2. Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP),
 - 3. Service Learning,
 - 4. Applicable Individualized Education Program (IEP) requirement for graduation.
- C. The results of each MCAP assessment taken by the student.
- D. A plan for appropriate assistance, if applicable.
- E. Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)'s schedule for MCAP assessment administration.

II. 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**

A student may participate in an early college admission program if:

- a. The student is accepted for early admission to an accredited college before high school graduation;
 - b. All MCAP and student service requirements have been met;
 - c. A written request by the student and parent is made to and approved by the local Superintendent of Schools certifying the early admission acceptance;
 - d. The student's program for the first year of college is approved by the local Superintendent of Schools if this program is included toward the issuance of a diploma; and
 - e. At the conclusion of the program or after one year, a written request for a Maryland High School Diploma is 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

A student may receive a diploma by meeting COMAR requirements of an early admission program to an approved vocational, technical, or other postsecondary school program if:

- a. The student is accepted for early admission by an approved vocational, technical, or postsecondary school program before high school graduation;
- b. All MCAP and student service requirements have been met;
- c. A written request by the student and parent is made to and approved by the local Superintendent of Schools certifying the early admission acceptance;
- d. The student's program for the first year of the postsecondary program is approved by the local Superintendent of Schools if this program is included toward the issuance of a diploma; and
- e. At the conclusion of a full year of study, a written request for a Maryland High School Diploma is 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 schoolwork.

3. Other

Beyond those procedures specifically listed in policy, these procedures, or the Catalog of Approved High School Courses, the principal will prescribe all rules and regulations for students involved in any exception to the four-year high school attendance requirement. This is especially true with respect to the procedures by which a student may enter and leave the school 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 from the parent and student must be made to the principal.
2. It is recommended, but not required, that this request be made during the fourth marking period of the sophomore year. Approval must be given by the Superintendent/designee or principal. An approval process will be published in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses. High school students will be informed of this and other alternatives to the traditional high school graduation and attendance requirements as a normal part of the school counseling program.
3. Students who are graduating early are considered eleventh graders until the beginning of the fourth marking period when they will be moved to twelfth grade. Student eligibility for the State Merit Scholastic Awards is calculated in October and early graduates will not be considered.

D. A student who enters the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) in the twelfth grade will 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 will be entitled to participate in athletic and extracurricular activities subject to Section II.B.3. above and Policy 9070 Academic Eligibility for High School Extracurricular Activities.

III. 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 are eligible for high school credit:

1. The student's passed course will count toward the credits for graduation requirement.
2. The student's course grade will be recorded on the high school transcript.
3. The student's grade will not be calculated into the high school grade point average.

If a student re-takes one of the high-school courses taken in middle school for which credit was earned:

- a. The high school grade will be calculated into the GPA, and
- b. Only one credit will be awarded.

B. Credit for Courses Through Colleges or Other Institutions

1. One high school credit will be awarded for completion of each course offered through a college or other institution, provided the course is substantially equivalent to a course in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses. Students will seek approval from the principal/designee prior to taking the course and provide a course syllabus. Providing a course syllabus is not required from Howard Community College. The principal/designee will make final decisions as to credits awarded after consultation with appropriate curriculum staff.
2. Credit toward high school graduation will be given for courses offered by accredited colleges that: (1) meet the local school system policies and procedures; (2) have prior approval of principal/designee; (3) are aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards or an elective credit for graduation requirements; and (4) prepare students to earn an industry-recognized credential or college credits.
3. In addition, students who wish to pursue a course that is not offered at their high school or that does not appear in the Catalog of Approved High School Courses may do so by enrolling in an approved course at a 2- or 4-year college or online institution provided prior approval is obtained from the high school principal/designee. One high school credit in the specific language will be awarded for each college course successfully completed.
4. The credits awarded toward high school graduation will be recorded as transfer credits on the transcript in accordance with Policy 8020 Grading and Reporting: Middle and High School.
5. Students who are awarded credits in courses which are part of the MCAP must still meet applicable MCAP requirements for those courses.

C. Home Instruction

While enrolled in Home Instruction, students do not receive grades, credits, or a public school diploma. If a student previously in Home Instruction enrolls in HCPSS, the school will assess the student in accordance with COMAR 13A.10.01.05 (Placement in Public School) to determine appropriate instruction and if any credits are to be awarded for the time in Home Instruction. Students requesting high school credits who did not attend an MSDE approved nonpublic school, must provide a portfolio documenting mastery of content to be evaluated by appropriate curriculum staff to determine if credit is awarded. Refer to Policy 8020 for grading of Home Instruction credits.

D. Credit by Exam

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

IV. Assistance for Graduation

Appropriate Assistance Programs To Assist Students In Meeting Graduation Requirements

A. Assistance programs may include:

1. Specifically designed programs offered by the school system as part of the school day during the regular school year.
2. Specifically designed programs offered by the school system as an after school program.
3. Summer school courses.
4. Other programs offered outside of the school system, provided the programs have prior approval by the principal/designee.

B. Cost

1. Tuition may be charged for original-credit programs offered outside the school day or beyond the school year.
2. In the event that this causes undue hardship, the Superintendent/designee may grant a waiver of tuition associated with any option offered by the school system.

V. Monitoring

Policy 8030 implementation procedures will be overseen by the Division of Academics.

VI. History¹

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¹ Key: ***Adopted***-Original date the Board took action to approve a policy; ***Reviewed***-The date the status of a policy was assessed by the Superintendent's Standing Policy Group; ***Modified***-The date the Board took action to alter a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee did not require a comprehensive examination; ***Revised***-The date the Board took action on a that policy based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee needed a comprehensive examination; ***Effective***-The date a policy is implemented throughout the HCPSS, typically July 1 following Board action.