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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE BOARD REAFFIRMS HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT PLAN

CLASS OF 2009 REQUIRED TO PASS EXAMS FOR GRADUATION; PROJECT OPTION IS PROVIDED

BALTIMORE (October 31, 2007) – The Maryland State Board of Education today voted to maintain the High School Assessment program as a graduation requirement for the class of 2009. The Board also approved the additional measure of a senior project for those students for whom passing the HSAs has proven difficult even after remediation.

The HSA program was reaffirmed by an 8-4 vote. Today's action followed many months of Board debate, public hearings, and detailed presentations.

“The State Board today, after deliberating for an extended period of time, made the difficult and important decision to continue Maryland’s educational progress,” said State Board President Dunbar Brooks. “The HSA program begins to put us on the path toward where we need to be. It is not a panacea.”

State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick, who has championed improved educational standards since taking office in 1991, said that the State Board has taken a strong stand for Maryland children.

“It is never easy to raise standards, but the State Board has made a courageous decision,” Dr. Grasmick said. “Our students will rise to the occasion.”

Maryland’s High School Assessments are four end-of-course exams—one each in algebra/data analysis, biology, government, and English—that all students must take and pass in order to graduate, beginning with the class of 2009 (this year’s juniors). The HSA exams are based on the Maryland High School Core Learning Goals, incorporated into the state’s public school curricula in the 1990s. The freshman and sophomore-level tests were developed by Maryland teachers.

Students take each assessment as they complete the related course. Passing the tests is one of several high school graduation requirements, which also include passing each

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course, earning state-specific credits, completing service-learning requirements, and fulfilling attendance requirements.

Maryland students will have as many as five times per year to take the exam. Students having difficulty will be provided with online tools and other targeted assistance to strengthen their ability to pass each exam.

The State Board today amended the original HSA regulation to include the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation for those students who have been unable to pass the test despite remediation. Dr. Grasmick proposed the Bridge Plan in August, noting that test data had indicated some students were having difficulty passing the exams despite an understanding of the material.

The Bridge Plan grew out of the work of two panels—the Task Force on Comparable Testing Methods for the Maryland High School Assessment and the Task Force for Review of High School Assessment Options. The plan also reflects research into similar alternatives to passing State assessments currently in place in numerous states across the country.

Under the Bridge Plan, students who have passed all of their other requirements could pass the HSA by completing a rigorous Academic Validation project. State-developed project modules would address the tested content areas where a student has demonstrated a deficiency. For example, a student unable to pass the biology assessment might develop a project delving into the structure and function of molecules, or the inheritance of traits. Projects would be administered locally, but state managed and assessed to assure consistency and difficulty level.

Nearly half the states have instituted some form of graduation assessment, and more than 60 percent of all high school students in the nation must pass a series of exams in order to graduate.

For further information about the HSA Program, please go to MSDE's dedicated HSA site (www.HSAexam.org).

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