

Maryland's Action Plan
for the
American Diploma Project

January 19, 2006



The Challenge

Today's high school graduates will come face-to-face with a new reality. Unlike their parents and grandparents, they will find intense competition from young people across the nation and around the world as they go on to college or enter the workforce directly. Their ability to be successful will be determined by the quality of their high school experience – the rigor of their coursework, the depth of their knowledge, and the value of their high school diploma.

Billions of dollars are being spent annually by businesses and colleges to provide employees and students with knowledge and skills they should have acquired prior to graduation from high school. High school graduates say they are not prepared for college work or for entry into the workplace, and nearly one-third of our nation's high school graduates who go on to college each year are immediately placed in remedial courses. Employers report that a significant number of graduates hired right out of high school are seriously deficient in mathematics, reading, and writing skills.

Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist and author of the recently published book *The World Is Flat*, predicts serious consequences for America and Americans if value is not restored to the high school diploma and graduates are not fully ready for postsecondary education and the workplace.

America's share of the rapidly expanding global economy is dwindling. The supply of scientists, engineers, and mathematicians from other countries such as China and India is exceeding those graduating from our own postsecondary institutions, and foreign students no longer depend on American universities to educate them or American companies to hire them. Experts seem to agree: America is just not prepared to compete in this "flattened" world. They further agree that education -- specifically higher standards and more accountability for meeting them -- is the only way to turn around our dwindling economic dominance permanently.

The time has come. We must begin now to restore value to the high school diploma if we are to ensure that our graduates are ready for postsecondary education and the workplace.

Maryland's Response to Date

Maryland is ready to do more to prepare all students for college and the workplace – to take the State's high school reform effort to a higher level – and, at the same time, work to ensure that more students stay in school and earn a Maryland High School Diploma.

Over the past decade Maryland has established a solid foundation for raising expectations for high school achievement and has established transitions and pathways to move students from school to college or the workforce. Beginning with the Class of 2009 students must pass the end-of-course Maryland High School Assessments to graduate. While these High School Assessments are a strong step in the right direction, they establish *minimum* expectations for all graduates and are not of the rigor needed to ensure college or career-readiness.

The K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning, a partnership among the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, is already addressing the need to better prepare high school graduates for transition into college and the workforce. The Partnership has produced the Maryland Bridge Goals and the Bridge Goals Assessment in Algebra II. The Bridge Goals define what mathematics students need beyond the Maryland Core Learning Goals to be successful in their first credit-bearing mathematics course in a Maryland public college or university. The prototype assessment of the Bridge Goals verified this alignment. The Partnership also has an English alignment subcommittee that has been working on alignment between high school English and expectations of college English instructors. Colleges and universities have agreed to a statement of expectations for first-year college composition. They have also agreed to a rubric that describes what a “C” composition should look like for a student completing freshmen composition. The next step is for the K-12 community to do likewise for graduating seniors.

Additionally, the K-16 Partnership recognizes that high quality professional development for teachers is imperative if there is to be meaningful improvement in student achievement. An agreement signed by the primary members in June 2005 commits the partners to sharing responsibility for promoting high quality professional development for all of Maryland’s teachers.

Maryland aggressively stated its commitment to raising expectations for all students when it adopted five priority goals as Maryland’s plan for every student, *Achievement Matters Most*, following recommendations from a State Visionary Panel for Better Schools in January 2002. The State’s five public education priorities are: improving achievement for each student; building educators’ capacity to improve achievement; building an aligned, understandable system of instruction, curriculum, and assessment; fostering positive school environments; and involving families in education.

Maryland has received national attention for the bold Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, passed by the General Assembly in 2002, that restructured public elementary and secondary education finance and dramatically boosted funding to all of the State’s 24 school systems. Once fully implemented in 2008, Maryland schools will receive an additional \$1.2 billion in annual funding, with the extra funding targeted toward economically disadvantaged systems. The Act requires school systems to develop detailed, five-year Master Plans, indicating how each system will close the achievement gap and reach other educational goals.

Maryland has a record of demonstrated success for bringing together the business community, secondary and postsecondary education to develop initiatives and goals to enhance student achievement. Schools and businesses are connected through the State’s Career Clusters system that makes curriculum relevant and reflective of the real world. Career Clusters create smooth educational pathways students can follow through grade 12, on to college or other postsecondary education, and into the workplace.

A Memorandum of Understanding in support of Maryland's participation in the American Diploma Project has already been signed by the Governor; State Superintendent of Schools; Chancellor, University System of Maryland; Secretary, Higher Education Commission; Chairman, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education; and President, Achieve, Inc.

Maryland's Next Steps

Maryland continues its high school improvement efforts as the State joins with 21 other states in the American Diploma Project (ADP) to raise expectations and achievement in high schools so that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college and work.

Over the next three years, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick and leaders from the K-12 and postsecondary education communities, the business community, and the civic community will use their already strong partnerships to take the following steps on behalf of Maryland's students:

- **Alignment:** Review and, as necessary, augment high school standards and consider content refinements so that high school academic standards will put students on the proper trajectory for success at the college and workplace levels so that all students who meet the standards are prepared for their next steps in life.
- **Local Graduation Requirements:** Identify and work with local school systems interested in reviewing and updating their own system's local graduation requirements to better prepare students for entrance into college or the workforce.
- **Maryland Graduation Requirements:** Examine current Maryland high school course requirements for those local school systems participating in the American Diploma Project so that all students would be expected to participate in a college- and work-ready curriculum that leads to a Maryland diploma. Parents in participating school systems who do not want their child to participate in the American Diploma Project requirements because of the student's learning goals will need to utilize an opt-out provision. Maryland will work with all stakeholders to determine the policies and procedures that will need to be developed for implementation of the project.
- **Timetable for Statewide Implementation:** Begin a dialogue with local school systems, higher education, and employers about the most viable options for expanding the graduation requirements to include other school systems statewide. Along with the development of a plan for broadening participation of school systems, Maryland will devise an appropriate timetable for expansion that meets the requirements of local school systems.
- **Voluntary Assessment:** Examine current assessments at the high school level to determine what modifications may be made or what supplementary tools may be developed to focus accurately on student academic achievement and readiness for college and work. Explore possible ways to make assessments or additional

supplementary tools acceptable to postsecondary institutions for placement of students into credit-bearing courses, and determine if consensus can be reached on the use of these assessments or tools to aid in postsecondary decisions. Identify local school systems interested in participating in the voluntary Algebra II assessment and begin preparation for the use of a test with the identified systems.

- Maryland's Bridge Goals Project on Algebra II standards will form the core of any assessment or supplementary tools that are used with Maryland schools. Among the options to be discussed could be the use of an Algebra II assessment that is recognized by higher education and employers as an accurate measure of student knowledge. A dialogue would then need to proceed to identify the most appropriate use of an Algebra II tool or assessment.
- **Accountability:** Work with K-12 and postsecondary representatives to identify ways that information about student preparedness for college and the workplace could be used to inform policymakers at the state, local, and school levels as well as the higher education level for improvement in programs.

An ADP Action Team will guide the changes in policy and practice necessary to improve the preparation of high school students. This team will include representatives of higher education, K-12 education, the business community, and civic and community organizations. The Action Team will help shape the Maryland ADP agenda and be committed to its implementation and to incorporating the concerns of stakeholders into decision-making.

SUMMARY OF MARYLAND’S ADP ACTION PLAN

Alignment of High School Expectations with Demands of College and Work

Maryland will review the alignment of its high school diploma requirements with the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education and work (August 05 – January 07). This review will result in a full understanding of any enhancements that need to be made to better prepare the State’s graduates for postsecondary education and work. The work will include:

- **Challenging Curriculum.** Ensuring that high school course curriculum requirements (courses and respective academic standards) are challenging enough to prepare students to succeed in college and high skills jobs. If they are not, a deliberate process will be initiated to investigate curriculum options, and a thoughtful implementation plan will subsequently be put in place.
- **Voluntary Implementation.** Establishing a college and work-ready high school curriculum that local school systems can volunteer to implement. Students will be enrolled in the college- and work-ready curriculum unless they opt out with parental permission.
- **Smoother Transition.** Making completion of the college- and work-ready curriculum a requirement for college admission so that students who are admitted to college are prepared to succeed. Devise a statewide implementation plan.
- **Employer Commitment.** Obtaining commitments from major regional employers in the state to recognize and value completion of the college- and work-ready high school curriculum in making hiring and salary/benefits decisions. The state’s small size and its close proximity to other states make this a complex issue.
- **Streamlining College Admissions.** Working with postsecondary representatives and regional employers to streamline the processes for college admissions and the hiring of employees who have completed the college- and work-ready curriculum.
- **Expansion.** Beginning dialogue with representatives of local school systems, higher education, and employers on an appropriate approach for expanding the ADP statewide.

Testing and Accountability

Maryland will develop a system of assessments and incentives to help ensure that high school graduates are prepared for college and work and that postsecondary institutions ensure students are successful once they are enrolled. Maryland will complete the preparation necessary to have an Algebra II assessment available for voluntary local

school system implementation by Fall 2008 involving those school systems that are most prepared to participate by the 2008-2009 school year.

This system of assessments and accountability will build on the existing Bridge Goals work and will include:

- Exploring the feasibility of administering tests of college-readiness that high school students in participating school systems can take to ensure they are prepared with the academic content necessary for their success in college and the workplace. The numerous requirements for validity and timeliness of such assessments require a careful dialogue about the feasibility of this approach.
- Linking and reporting data across the K-12 and postsecondary systems in ways that improve the transition from high school to college, including sharing college persistence data with respective feeder high schools to inform instructional practice and curriculum alignment. The Maryland State Department of Education is already working with the Maryland Higher Education Commission to improve data on the preparation of students for college and to better coordinate and expand the data that is shared with local school systems and schools.
- Working to improve the experiences students have after they arrive in college—the full range of institutional policies and practices that support achievement, persistence, and success.

MARYLAND’S PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING ADP IMPERATIVES ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS BY 2008

Alignment of High School Expectations with Demands of College and Work

Maryland will begin implementation with voluntary participation by those school systems that are most prepared to participate by the 2008-2009 school year. Efforts will be made to move to full-scale, statewide implementation in 2011, with a careful attention to the obstacles that must be confronted to ensure successful implementation in the initial voluntary participant school systems. The phase-in of the implementation will be carefully planned considering factors such as the local school system’s progress on Maryland High School Assessments, local and state college- and work-ready curriculum development, and local school system instructional programs.

Maryland will take the following steps to ensure its high school standards and course requirements are aligned with what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in college and the workplace:

Academic Standards for College and Work

- Launch the process with the K-12, postsecondary and business communities to define the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in credit-bearing courses in Maryland colleges and universities and in high growth industries. Use Maryland’s Bridge Goals, High School Core Learning Goals, and national ADP benchmarks for college and work to identify gaps in existing high school standards and to revise those standards as necessary.
 - Involve high school teachers and college faculty, as well as business and industry representatives.
 - Use the ADP benchmarks and other national models as starting points for this work.
 - Revise high school standards as appropriate to align with college- and work-ready benchmarks.
 - Solicit public input on academic standards drafts.
 - Commission external review of standards by Achieve.
- Work with representatives of postsecondary education and business communities to validate that students who meet the State’s academic standards will be ready for success in college and careers.
- Bring final recommended standards to the State Board of Education, the K-16 Council, and the Higher Education Commission, or other governing bodies, as appropriate, for adoption.

Course Requirements

- Determine the default core college- and work-ready curriculum (courses/credits and clearly articulated academic standards for courses). Agree on an appropriate provision for parents and students to opt-out of the program and process. Solicit input and support from policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public.
- Draft the State Board rules and legislation necessary to make the core college- and work-ready curriculum the default for all students. Solicit input and support from the legislators, state board members, and the general public.
- Identify state policies and programs needed to support implementation of the new requirements, including professional development and curriculum resources. Determine reasonable timelines for policy implementation.
- Develop communications plan to inform and engage key stakeholders throughout the process. Communicate policy changes widely and consistently.

Testing and Accountability

Maryland will develop a fair system of high school and postsecondary supports, assessments, and other incentives to provide accountability for ensuring that graduating students are college- and work-ready and that graduates are successful after they enroll in postsecondary education.

Testing

- Dialogue with local school systems to determine supports and accountability efforts that will help them assure that high school graduates are well prepared for college and the workplace.
 - Determine if new assessments are to be given at the state level, including the type of test (end-of-course, end-of-grade, or cumulative survey test) and the subjects to be tested.
 - Determine if improvements should be made to existing State high school assessments.
 - Develop timeline for making improvements to testing, test development, piloting, and administration as appropriate.
 - Ensure alignment of assessments with Maryland academic standards for college and work.
 - Include previous work on Bridge Goals and Bridge Goals Assessment in this effort.
- Identify changes necessary to streamline student assessments across K-12 and postsecondary systems. Review current college admissions and placement processes. Develop plan for using new high school exams for college placement purposes where possible.
- Consider additional means for making high school tests more valuable for students and educators.
- Dialogue with stakeholders on ways of making existing assessments provide more useful and informative results.

Accountability

- Engage in discussion of ways to make Maryland's core college- and work-ready curriculum (or documented equivalent) the minimum academic requirement for admission to Maryland's colleges and universities. Ask college boards of trustees to adopt this policy effective no later than with the first graduating class held to the required (default) core curriculum. Seek legislative action if necessary to ensure this alignment for students.

- Consider ways to link and report data across the K-12 and postsecondary systems to foster improved student achievement. Establish longitudinal data system to track student progress from elementary through middle and high school and into postsecondary education. Share college persistence and success data with high schools to inform instructional practice and curriculum alignment.
- Identify possible college success strategies to improve the experiences students have after they arrive at college. Consider changes in State and institutional policy and practice that might be necessary to support positive student outcomes.
- Consider identification of performance indicators and publication of these indicators in high school and college report cards to highlight progress and challenges.
- Develop communications plan to inform and engage key stakeholders throughout the process. Communicate policy changes widely and consistently.

Maryland ADP Action Team

Members

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor

Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools

William Kirwan, Chancellor, University System of Maryland

Calvin Burnett, Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission

Raymond A. Mason, Chairman, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education

Maryland Legislative Representation from the Senate and House

Maryland Chamber of Commerce Representative

June Streckfus, Executive Director, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education,

Robert Barnes, Executive Director, Maryland World Class Manufacturing Consortium

Mike Galiazzo, Executive Director, Regional Manufacturing Institute

Aris Melissaratos, Secretary, Maryland Department of Business and Economic
Development

Key Business and Industry Representatives

Edward Root, President, K-12 State Board of Education

University System of Maryland Representative

William AuMiller, Maryland Public School Superintendents Association

Maryland Secondary School Principals Association Representative

Maryland State Teachers Association President (currently Patricia Foerster)

Baltimore Teachers Union President (currently Marietta English)

Maryland Association of Boards of Education President (currently Patricia O'Neill)

Tina Bjarekull, President, Maryland Independent College and University Association

Maryland School Counselors Association Representative

Maryland Professional Standards and Teachers Education Board Representative

Leslie Margolis, Managing Attorney, Maryland Disability Law Center

Gifted and Talent Advocacy Representative

Maryland PTA President (currently Mary Jo Neil)

Additional members will be identified as appropriate