

REGULATION MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Related Entries: CGA-RA, IED, IHC-RA, IKC-RA, IOE-RA, IOF-RA, JEB-RA, JEC-RA
Responsible Office: Chief Academic Officer

High School Graduation Requirements

I. PURPOSE

To publish procedures for the implementation of the State of Maryland and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) graduation requirements

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. *An eligible student*, for the purposes of this regulation, is a student who is 18 years of age or older.
- B. *Maryland High School Assessments (MHSA)*s are those tests developed for, or adopted by, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) that are aligned with and measure a student's skills and knowledge as set forth in the content standards for specified courses. The term "MHSA" encompasses both the High School Assessment (HSA) developed for Maryland, as well as tests developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and other tests MSDE may develop or adopt in the future. Students take these assessments as they complete the corresponding courses.
- C. The *MHSA Bridge Plan for Academic Validation (Bridge Plan)* is an MSDE option that allows identified students to meet certain MHSA requirements in a way other than traditional tests.
- D. The *MCPS High School Course Bulletin* is an annual publication that lists and describes all high school courses offered in MCPS, as well as the most current information about graduation requirements, assessments, internships, opportunities for dual enrollment, and special programs. The *MCPS High School Course Bulletin* is distributed in printed form as are subsequent addenda. The *MCPS High School Course Bulletin* and updated addenda are also published on the *MCPS High School Course Bulletin* website.

- E. *Original credit* is earned for the successful completion of a high school course for which a student has not received prior credit, regardless of a student's previous enrollment.
- F. *Student service learning (SSL)* is an unpaid activity completed by the student within the school or community that provides service to an individual or group to address a school or community need. The activity, as well as the individual/group sponsoring the activity, must be approved by MCPS.
- G. *Transfer credit* is high school credit awarded to a student enrolling from a school outside of MCPS for prior coursework, based on the determination of the principal/designee of the MCPS school in which the student enrolls. The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) §13A.03.02.12 establishes additional transfer criteria, including criteria for exempting a transfer student from MHSAs in associated courses.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Enrollment

1. A student must satisfactorily complete four years of an approved program of study beyond Grade 8 unless an MCPS alternative program is approved. (Refer to Alternatives to Four-Year Enrollment in Section III.F.)
2. A student who has fulfilled all state and local credit, assessment, and SSL requirements may not remain enrolled in high school for more than four years beyond Grade 8.
3. Beginning with students entering ninth grade for the first time in the 2014-2015 school year or later, each student shall enroll in a mathematics-based course each year the student attends a Maryland public high school, up to four years. This requirement is not waived for students enrolled in high school mathematics courses in middle school. MCPS courses that satisfy this requirement are published annually in the *MCPS High School Course Bulletin*. Students may also fulfill this requirement via dual enrollment, as set forth in section III.C.3.

B. Maryland High School Diploma in Montgomery County

Students who fulfill the requirements listed below will be awarded a Maryland High School Diploma. The *MCPS High School Course Bulletin* and associated addenda contain all state and local requirements for graduation, which may vary by a students' first year in ninth grade.

1. Credit, Student Service Learning (SSL), and Maryland High School Assessment (MHSA) Requirements
 - a) Credit
 - (1) As stated in Maryland law and Montgomery County Board of Education Policy IED, *Framework and Structure of High School Education*, the Board has the authority to specify graduation requirements beyond minimum state requirements.
 - (a) MCPS requires 22 credits, of which 19.5 must be earned through successful completion of specified credits in English, social studies, science, mathematics, physical education, health education, fine arts, and technology education.
 - (b) Specified credits and courses that satisfy each requirement are published annually in the *MCPS High School Course Bulletin*.
 - (c) Additional elective credits may be chosen from offerings in any curricular area.
 - (2) Each community college, college, or university to which a student may seek admittance has the authority to establish its own admission requirements, which may differ from MCPS graduation requirements. Students and their parents/guardians are cautioned to examine carefully any additional admission requirements that may be in effect at prospective postsecondary programs or schools of interest.
 - (3) Credit/No Credit Courses and Replacement Grades
 - (a) Credit/no credit may only be used in courses not specifically required for graduation by MSDE or MCPS. Credit/no credit cannot be applied to a Certificate of Merit course (Refer to Diploma Endorsements in Section III.C.).
 - (b) Replacement grades will be included in grade point averages as described in MCPS Regulation IKC-RA,

Grade Point Averages (GPA) and Weighted Grade Point Averages (WGPA).

b) Student Service Learning (SSL)

Students must complete 75 SSL hours. SSL is distinguished from volunteering or community service by the opportunity it provides for students to improve their academic skills by applying what they learn in school to the real world. They then reflect on their experience to reinforce the link between their service and their learning. SSL requirements, acceptable service activities, and record keeping procedures are described on the MCPS SSL website.

c) Maryland High School Assessments (MHSA)

Students must meet requirements for assessments established by MSDE. MHSA requirements may vary by the year a student enrolls in a course or the year a student enrolls in ninth grade for the first time. These assessments can be found in the *MCPS High School Course Bulletin* and associated addenda, which contain all state and local requirements for graduation

2. Transferring Credits to Meet Graduation Requirements

a) Transfer from Outside MCPS

- (1) In order for a student to be awarded a Maryland High School Diploma, the student must be in attendance in a Maryland public high school one full semester immediately preceding graduation in addition to meeting the other diploma requirements.
- (2) Credits earned in accredited nonpublic or out-of-county schools should be accepted by the principal and converted into appropriate MCPS credits for comparable MCPS coursework.
- (3) Transfer of credits earned for coursework outside the U.S. are determined by the principal in consultation with the MCPS International Admissions and Enrollment unit in the Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement.

- (4) The SSL requirement is prorated for students enrolling in MCPS for the first time after Grade 6.
- (5) Students who transfer from a nonpublic school or a school out-of-state may be exempt from one or more of the MHSAs under conditions specified in COMAR.
 - (a) Students who transfer from a nonpublic school or from a school out-of-state into MCPS after the first semester of their senior year are exempt from the MHSA requirements.
 - (b) However, if such students also attended a Maryland public high school during their high school career, they may be subject to MHSA requirements for the time they attended a Maryland public high school.
 - (c) Upon request from the receiving principal, the Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) reviews transfer credit(s) approved by the principal to determine if the student may be exempted from one or more MHSAs based on criteria established in COMAR.
- (6) Students who enter MCPS in their senior year are exempt from those graduation requirements beyond minimum state requirements, established in Board Policy IED, *Framework and Structure of High School Education*. Such students are exempt from the MCPS requirement for an additional credit in mathematics and an additional half credit in physical education beyond graduation requirements established by MSDE.
- (7) If students transfer during the last semester of their senior year from one Maryland public high school to another Maryland public high school, and all graduation requirements have been met, they have the option of graduating from either high school upon agreement of the principals, or the respective local superintendents of schools when more than one local school system is involved.

3. High School Courses Taught in Middle School

- a) The associate superintendent for the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP) and the chief academic officer will identify the high school courses that may be offered in middle school for high school credit, taking into consideration the impact of the proposed course on existing programs and resources, as well as the availability of highly qualified teachers. The OCIP may conduct a pilot study, offering a course at a small number of schools before implementing it systemwide.
- b) Credit toward high school graduation may be earned by middle school students if all the following criteria are met:
 - (1) The student has taken a high school course meeting the local school system curricular objectives.
 - (2) The teacher meets certification requirements specific to the course and subject code taught.
 - (3) The high school curriculum is taught.
 - (4) Middle school students must meet the same requirements as high school students and earn a final grade of A, B, C, or D.
 - (5) When a high school course specifically required for graduation is offered for credit in middle school, students must follow established course sequences.

C. Alternative Provisions for Earning Credit

1. MCPS Courses Beyond the School Day

- a) Students may earn high school credit through learning opportunities offered by MCPS beyond the regular school day or the regular school year.
- b) The MCPS administrator responsible for the course notifies the registrar of the student's home school of all grades and credits earned. Grades earned in MCPS courses beyond the regular school day will be included in computing weighted and unweighted grade point averages.

- c) Students who are expecting to complete requirements for graduation by earning needed credits at a MCPS high school during the summer session are subject to the requirements set forth in MCPS Regulation CGA-RA, *Summer School Program*.

2. Credit for Courses Offered by Institutions Other than MCPS

- a) In order to apply credits for coursework earned at institutions other than MCPS to high school graduation requirements, students must obtain principal approval prior to registering for the course, as follows:
 - (1) High school students obtain approval from their high school principal.
 - (2) Students younger than high school age obtain approval of the high school principal of their attendance area.
- b) A principal's approval for coursework, other than dual enrollment set forth in section III.C.3 below, is dependent on the following:
 - (1) The course is not available to the student because it is not part of the MCPS curriculum, it is not offered at the student's school, or it does not fit into the student's schedule.
 - (2) In order to receive high school credit for a comparable MCPS course, the student must demonstrate that the course—
 - (a) provides the student with an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of all content standards for the high school course(s),
 - (b) is equivalent to or exceeds the rigor of a comparable course offered by MCPS in terms of the syllabus studied, and
 - (c) meets any other requirements established by MSDE.
 - (3) The course provider must be accredited by a recognized accrediting agency or approved by MSDE and MCPS, and the course must be approved by MCPS.

- (4) MCPS will not cover or contribute to tuition costs for coursework taken outside the regular school day or regular school year, except as provided for students dually enrolled at Maryland institutions of higher education, as set forth in section III.C.3 below and in accordance with established procedures.

3. Dual Enrollment

- a) Students may dually enroll at institutions of higher education for high school and/or college credit while they are MCPS students, subject to certain requirements. There is, however, a distinction made between college-level courses for which students simultaneously receive both high school and college credit, and courses for which students receive *only* college credit, as follows:
 - (1) Dual enrollment means students receive both high school and college credit.
 - (2) Concurrent enrollment means students receive only college credit on the college transcript.
- b) Students are advised to consult with their academic advisors or counselors and with the dual enrollment program assistants at each high school for applications and further information about dual enrollment or concurrent enrollment.
- c) For the purposes of *dual enrollment*, the following apply:
 - (1) With prior approval, a student will earn 1.0 high school credit toward fulfilling the 22-credit requirement for graduation for each 3- or 4-credit college-level course successfully completed. (Principals should consult with the associate superintendent of OCIP/designee regarding appropriate high school credit for college courses valued higher than four credits).
 - (2) Dually enrolled students may not retake college courses for high school credit, and if they fail the first college course, or drop the course without approval, they cannot take other college courses for high school credit.

- (3) Under terms set forth in Maryland law and in partnership agreements with MCPS, students dually enrolled in a public secondary school in the State of Maryland *and* a public institution of higher education in the State, which includes Maryland community colleges and Maryland four-year universities, may qualify for opportunities for reduced tuition.
 - d) Students taking college courses without prior approval, or students transferring into MCPS with prior college credits that were not already credited on the transcript by the transferring school may only receive dual enrollment credit on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the principal and the associate superintendent of OCIP/designee.
- 4. Course credit value, weight, and diploma procedures
 - a) Grades earned in courses at institutions other than MCPS, as described in sections III.C.2 and 3 above, will be included in the student's weighted and unweighted grade point averages unless the student elects the credit/no credit option in advance of enrolling in the course.
 - b) If the course is recognized by the principal as an honors or advanced level course and the course code does not already include a quality point, the weighted grade point average will be computed by adding one quality point to the grade of A, B, C, or D.
 - c) The course grade shall enter into the computation of weighted and unweighted grade point averages as described in MCPS Regulation IKC-RA, *Grade Point Averages (GPA) and Weighted Grade Point Averages (WGPA)*.
 - d) Students who are expecting to complete requirements for graduation by earning needed credits at institutions other than MCPS and receive a Maryland High School Diploma when finished must meet the following conditions:
 - (1) The plan to complete courses outside MCPS that meet graduation requirements must be preapproved in writing by the student's home school principal.

- (2) The institution offering the course must report the student's grade in the course before credit and/or a diploma will be granted.
- (3) Diplomas are issued in the name of the home school and must bear the signature of the principal of that school.

D. Career-related Experiences Outside of School

1. In order to earn credit for a paid or unpaid career-related experience outside of school, a student must be enrolled in advance in the appropriate MCPS course (e.g., Internship or Site-based Work Experience courses listed in the MCPS *High School Course Bulletin*), which will involve supervision and related instruction.
2. For such work or experience outside the school which is approved and supervised by MCPS, not more than nine elective credits toward graduation may be granted to a student.

E. Independent Study

1. Independent study is an opportunity to provide educational experiences that offer students involvement in learning to achieve or move beyond the course objectives, goals, or standards. Opportunities for independent study and eligibility requirements are established by the professional staff of the school, with appropriate involvement of students and parents/guardians.
 - a) These experiences may make available content and/or materials and personnel resources of the local school not available or practical in regular classroom study.
 - b) Independent study may vary in length of time from several weeks within a given course to a semester or longer.
 - c) No more than four credits of independent study may be granted to a student toward meeting graduation requirements.
2. In cooperation with professional staff, the principal is responsible for developing procedures for achieving the following:
 - a) Informing all students, parents/guardians, and staff of the possibility of an independent study program as a part of students' school experiences

- b) Approving/disapproving applications from students interested in participating in an independent study program using criteria that take into consideration the order in which student requests were received and the availability of staffing and funding
 - c) Reviewing, approving, and evaluating individual projects
 - d) Approving/disapproving a request to do all or part of a study project outside the school building (Approval requires the completion of MCPS Form 560-31, *Parent/Guardian Approval for Trips MCPS Transportation is Not Provided.*)
 - e) Securing written authorization from the parent/guardian or eligible student, for the student to participate in independent study activities away from the school
- 3. When developing an independent study program, the school should make use of community resources when appropriate.
 - 4. Students are responsible for initiating and planning their independent study program, in cooperation with an appropriately certified teacher and parents/guardians, and producing evidence of learning under the supervision of an appropriately certified teacher.
 - 5. The teacher is responsible for evaluating the student's mastery of course objectives, goals, or standards and recommends to the principal an appropriate grade and credit award.
 - 6. Procedures for recording student attendance must be developed to ensure that students are marked "present" for the period of time they are participating in an independent study program.

F. Alternatives to Four-Year Enrollment

Students shall satisfactorily complete four years of study beyond Grade 8 unless an alternative enrollment plan is developed and a waiver is approved as outlined below.

- 1. Waivers may be approved for any of the following reasons:
 - a) The student is accepted to an accredited college before high school graduation.

- b) The student is accepted to an approved vocational, technical, or other postsecondary school program before high school graduation.
- c) The student enters high school at a chronological age greater than that of their grade level peers, or
- d) The student has completed all graduation requirements.

2. Credit by Examination

MSDE allows students who have met all graduation requirements except for earning a credit in either Algebra 2 or English 12 (but not both) to earn the credit for the course by taking a state-approved examination and achieving a passing score, as defined by MSDE.

3. Procedures for developing an alternative enrollment plan and approving a waiver are as follows:

- a) The eligible student or parent/guardian obtains and completes MCPS Form 280-97, *Request for Waiver of the Fourth Year Enrollment Requirement* and submits the form to the school counselor with an updated MCPS Form 560-45, *Student Educational and Planning Worksheet* with enough lead time to allow a decision to be made at least one full semester prior to anticipated enrollment in a specific course or program.
- b) The school counselor schedules a meeting with the student and parent/guardian to discuss the proposed program. The school counselor forwards their recommendation to the principal. Recommendation for approval may be made contingent upon acceptance to an approved college, vocational, technical, or other postsecondary school program.
- c) As the superintendent of schools' designee, the principal approves or disapproves the request and sends a copy of MCPS Form 280-97, *Request for Waiver of the Fourth Year Enrollment Requirement* indicating the final decision to the student and the parent/guardian.

G. Diploma Endorsements

1. Certificate of Meritorious Service

The *Certificate of Meritorious Service* is a MCPS certificate awarded with the Maryland High School Diploma to recognize graduating seniors who have completed 260 or more SSL hours. Special recognition will identify meritorious service graduates at the time of graduation.

2. Montgomery County Public Schools Certificate of Merit

The *MCPS Certificate of Merit* is a local diploma endorsement awarded along with the Maryland High School Diploma upon successful completion of the following additional provisions:

- a) Obtain an unweighted 3.0 cumulative grade point average, or higher
- b) Receive credit for an MCPS Algebra 2 course
- c) Earn at least 12 credits in advanced courses identified in the *MCPS High School Course Bulletin*

3. Maryland Seal of Biliteracy

The Maryland Seal of Biliteracy is an award authorized by Maryland law that recognizes a student's high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages other than English.

- a) The Maryland Seal of Biliteracy is established to recognize and reward excellence in language learning as measured by rigorous proficiency assessments.
- b) MSDE establishes eligibility criteria, as well as the proficiency assessments which satisfy those criteria.
- c) The diploma endorsement may be awarded to MCPS students graduating from MCPS in 2017 and thereafter.

H. Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion

The *Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion* is awarded to students with disabilities who cannot meet the requirements for a diploma, but who meet the following state standards set forth in Maryland law:

- 1. All students will be considered diploma bound and will be assessed and graded accordingly unless and until an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines that a student will be instructed, assessed, and graded

on Alternative Learning Outcomes that are aligned with MCPS Curriculum 2.0, leading to a Certificate of Completion. Such a determination requires written consent from the parent/guardian except as otherwise provided in Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article, § 8-405(f).

2. The student has been enrolled in an educational 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 student's parents/guardians, to have developed appropriate skills for the individual to enter the world of work, act responsibly as a citizen, and enjoy a fulfilling life, including but not limited to—
 - a) gainful employment,
 - b) post-secondary education and training,
 - c) supported employment, and
 - d) other services that are integrated in the community.
3. The student has been enrolled in an educational program for four years beyond Grade 8 or its age equivalent and will have reached age 21 by the end of the student's current school year.
4. An Exit Document that describes the student's skills shall accompany the Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion.
5. 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.
6. A student with significant cognitive disability may not meet high school graduation requirements for a Maryland High School Diploma, if a student—
 - a) participates in an Alternative Assessment based on Alternative Academic Achievement Standards, and
 - b) continues to receive instruction based on Alternative Academic Achievement Standards through high school.

Related Sources:

Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article §7-103, §7-205, §8-405(f). §18-14A-01, §18-14A-04; *Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR)* §13A.03.02 et seq., §13A.07.03.01-.05, and §13B.07.02.01C; *Montgomery County Public Schools High School Course Bulletin* and associated addenda

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