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MCPS Eliminates Middle School Final Exams

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Board to consider elimination of high school final exams

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) will make changes to its assessment program beginning this school year in order to increase instructional time and relieve the testing burden on the district's students. The Montgomery County Board of Education Tuesday (July 14) endorsed a district plan to eliminate all MCPS-developed final exams in middle school courses this coming school year.

The Board also will consider policy changes that would allow for the phasing out of high school final exams, beginning as soon as the spring semester of the 2015-2016 school year.

On Tuesday, [Interim Superintendent Larry A. Bowers presented the district's plan](#) to the Montgomery County Board of Education. The Board endorsed Mr. Bowers plan for middle schools and unanimously directed its Policy Management Committee to review Board Policy IKA, *Grading and Reporting*, and bring back a recommendation regarding high school exams to the Board in October.

"We have heard from many parents who are deeply concerned about the amount of instructional time that is lost to testing," said Patricia B. O'Neill, president of the Board. "This plan will increase instructional time while ensuring we continue to have the data and information we need to provide supports and services to our students and to monitor how our district is performing."

Currently, end-of-semester exams are required at the end of most high school courses and are given in some middle school courses. These two-hour exams are given at the end of each semester, in January and June, and generally count for 25 percent of a student's grade.

"Assessments are an important part of teaching and learning if the data is used to inform instruction and provide timely supports to students," Mr. Bowers said. "Our overall assessment strategy must reflect the fact that testing is not an event, but rather an ongoing part of our work to provide students with an education that prepares them for success in the future."

Under the plan presented Tuesday, centrally developed end-of-semester exams in middle school courses would be eliminated in the coming school year (2015-2016). Further discussion will be held on Mr. Bowers' plan for high school exams, which would eliminate end-of-semester exams in the second semester of next school year in subjects for which there are already Maryland state end-of-course tests—Algebra 1, English 10, Biology, and Government. Mr.

Bowers' plan would eliminate all end-of-semester exams in high schools the following year (2016-2017) and would instead use in-class assessments that are given throughout the school year, including unit tests, essays, projects, document-based questions, and more.

In the coming weeks, the Board's Policy Management Committee will begin reviewing the impact that eliminating exams in high school would have on Board policies and district regulations. Public feedback will be gathered on any substantial changes to these policies.

In March, Mrs. O'Neill and Board Member Phil Kauffman, chair of the Policy Management Committee, sent a letter to Mr. Bowers asking that the district consider changes to its testing program. The Board's Strategic Planning Committee held a series of meetings to review and provide input on the MCPS assessment plan. Maryland State Superintendent Lillian Lowery also has asked all districts in the state to review their testing programs, and the General Assembly has created a task force to research the testing load on public school students across the state.

MCPS developed four options that would restore instructional time during the school year and reduce the amount of testing while maintaining accountability measures for student performance. The district's Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs gathered feedback from a broad array of stakeholders, including staff, parents, and students. The feedback was gathered through questionnaires given to teachers and administrators, focus groups, and an online form posted on the MCPS website.

[View the District's Assessment Plan](#)

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