



Compulsory School Age Law: FAQs

What is the Compulsory School Age (CSA) law?

In the 2012 Legislative Session, the General Assembly increased the compulsory school age attendance requirement from 16 to 18 years old, effectively mandating that all school-age children complete up to a secondary level of education. In addition, the law provides for real consequences for students who drop out such as involvement in the juvenile justice system. Parents of children who drop out are also subject to fines.

The legislation's goal is to stop 16 and 17 year olds from dropping out of school and to signify that no student is dispensable. However, there will always be children—especially students in challenging circumstances—that will opt out of school and will need a viable option to complete their secondary education.

Dropout prevention and enrichment programs at the pre-k, elementary, and middle school levels are critical in preparing youth for the responsibilities of adulthood.

When does the increase in age go into effect?

The CSA increases to **17 years old** beginning the 2015-16 school year. Any child who turns 16 **on or after July 1, 2015** will be required to be in school.

The CSA increases to **18 years old** beginning the 2017-18 school year. Any child who turns 17 **on or after July 1, 2017** will be required to be in school.

How can a student be exempt from the CSA law?

Those exempt from the CSA law include students who:

1. Have obtained a Maryland high school diploma, an equivalent out-of-state high school diploma, or a GED;
2. Have a disability **and** have met the requirements for a Maryland high school certificate of completion;
3. Have received regular, thorough instruction during the school year in the studies usually taught in the public schools, or have completed such a program;
4. Have a severe illness and requires home or hospital instruction;
5. Are married;
6. Are in military service;
7. Are committed by a court order to an institution without an educational program;
8. Provide financial support to his or her family;
9. Have been expelled from school;

10. Are pregnant or a parent and is enrolled in an alternative educational program;
11. Attend an alternative educational program;
12. Attend a public school on a part-time basis while attending a private career school.

**There is also another section of the law [§7-301(G)] that could allow students in GED prep programs to be exempt from the CSA law, but that is unclear.*

Why implement early interventions? What are some examples of early interventions?

Early interventions is the term used to describe a broad category of programs and systems used to aid students struggling academically and behaviorally **before** they enter high school. Some examples include:

- High-quality early childhood programs including pre-k and evidence-based home visiting
- Parental engagement beginning in early childhood and continuing through high school
- Supportive school climate with high expectations of students
- Early warning systems (see below)
- Strong reading programs, especially those lagging behind by the third grade
- Middle school programs designed to help at-risk students academically and behaviorally

What is an Early Warning System?

Dropping out is a process, not an event. The process of using data to identify students at highest risk of dropping out and targeting resources to keep them in school is called an early warning system.

According to the National High School Center, an early warning system (EWS) that uses indicators based on readily accessible data can predict whether a student is on the right path toward eventual graduation. The three most reliable indicators are:

- Attendance
- Behavior
- Credit accrual/course performance

Creating a team is the first step to developing an EWS. The team can create a tool of indicators which would guide the application of appropriate interventions and referrals. It is crucial that these methods have buy-in from the staff.

If these interventions and systems are put in place, will this eliminate the need for interventions in high school?

Even with the best prevention systems, there will always be a certain number of students that get to high school unable to excel in the traditional school environment either because of academic issues or problems at home. High school interventions will continue to be an important tool in increasing graduation rates.

What is an alternative school? What is an alternative program? What do alternative programs currently look like in Maryland?

Currently, Maryland does not have an official statutorily-defined definition for alternative education, operating standards platform or regulations to govern this approach to learning. According to the Maryland State Board of Education, a workgroup is developing the alternative educational services framework. The framework will include a definition and the types of programs and/or supports that will be considered as alternative method of learning.

The general characteristics of an alternate program are ones that target specific populations and allow students to continue education outside or within the traditional school setting under the control of the public school system. The program would also give a secondary school student the opportunity to earn credits and/or progress toward graduation.

As an example, Baltimore City has some alternative schools that provide a distinct educational setting similar to traditional schools, but independent of other schools.

What are some examples of alternative schools and programs?

There are schools and programs both in Maryland and around the country that are classified as alternate. The two links below are examples of varying evidence and success. ACY will be releasing a review of alternative programs around the country later in 2013.

Maryland State Department of Education – Dropout Prevention/School Completion Intervention Resource Guide:
http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/4B4DE1F8-A445-4161-A043-78A4936CA5C8/31079/DRSCG_01_2012_.pdf.

National Dropout Prevention Center – Model Programs Database:
http://www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms/get_programs.php.

What is a General Education Development prep program? How is it funded?

A General Education Development or GED preparation program is defined by the state, the state's Department of Education, or other assigned entities whose office of Vocational and Adult Education determine the standards for adult education. Programs are funded by student contributions and a combination of state and federal funds.

How is the current GED test administered? What is the cost for the state and student?

The GED Testing Service makes the test available to states. Currently, there are paper-based testing sites around the state that are credentialed by the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (DLLR). Beginning in 2014, there will be a new computer-based GED test (*see next bullet for more information on the new test*).

Credentialing of sites will be handled by both Pearson—the parent company to the GED Testing Service—as well as DLLR. Registration will be handled by DLLR.

Currently, the cost to take the GED test in Maryland is \$45 for an individual student. Fees across country range from free to \$380. The individual student fee does not cover the complete cost of the current test as DLLR subsidizes the cost. The new computer test will have a new fee structure and Pearson will charge \$120 to sit and take the test. There will be additional costs for DLLR and testing sites associated with the operation of the program.

DLLR is undergoing an analysis to determine what the overall cost will be, the fee for individual test takers and the subsidy that DLLR can possibly provide to make the test affordable for students.

What changes are coming to GED test?

In 2014, GED Testing Service will unveil a new assessment that will continue to provide adults the opportunity to earn high school credentials. However, this revision will include a measurement for career-and college-readiness skills and will be somewhat aligned with the Common Core Standards. The four content areas—literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies—will measure a foundational core of knowledge and skills that are essential for career and college readiness.

Will more kids take the GED because of the new CSA law?

The extent that additional 16-18 year olds will take the GED given the new CSA law is unknown, but providers and advocates are expecting an increase. Currently, this age group only makes up a small percentage of GED test takers each year.

What are examples of student support services?

Student Support Services are those non-academic supports that students need to thrive in school. It can include guidance counseling, mental health supports, drug/alcohol abuse counseling, and/or employment assistance. In many schools, these services are coordinated through a guidance counselor, a school psychologist, social worker, or an assigned vice principal.

How are these support services currently funded?

In some school districts and counties, schools can choose the extent to which they will fund support services. Some schools have been able to receive grants or local government funding to support certain efforts such as school-based health centers.

What does a good student referral system look like?

It is important to acknowledge that schools do not usually have the resources to implement a full suite of supports. Given this, it is important to build on-going communications with non-school based providers in the community and keep a current list of resources. An effective referral system will include a point of entry at the school such as a guidance counselor, and an assigned teacher or a vice principal to work with students and identify issues. The assigned staff should have strong working relationships and/or a list of community providers that can receive referrals and help the students.

How would a good referral system benefit the school? The student?

Having an effective referral system helps resolve student issues before they become bigger problems for the student or the school. For instance, a child may be skipping school or misbehaving due to a mental or physical health issue that they or a family member is experiencing. The student may also be missing school due to financial reasons. The goal is to give students the support that they need in a timely fashion that will help them get on the right academic track.