



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential

15 West Gude Drive ♦ Suite 100 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850

BILL: SB 451

TITLE: Adult Education – High School Diploma by Examination – Requirements and Study

DATE: February 12, 2025

POSITION: Support

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT: Patricia Ursprung, Coordinator, Legislative Affairs

The Montgomery County Board of Education supports Senate Bill 451.

Currently, the Maryland Department of Labor requires an individual to take the Reasoning Through Language Arts portion of the General Educational Development (GED) exam in English if that person takes any other portion of the exam in Spanish. Maryland is the only state with this requirement. This bill would obligate the Department of Labor to rescind that requirement, meaning test-takers would be permitted to take each portion of the exam in their chosen language, thereby eliminating a substantial barrier to passing the exam.

Montgomery County Public Schools sees the impact of this barrier every year in its Career Readiness Education Academy (CREA). The CREA program is for Emergent Multilingual Learners who are at least 18 years old, and are unlikely to meet all graduation requirements prior to turning 21 years old. The CREA program provides a pathway to earning a high school diploma via GED exam along with developing important work skills and gaining industry certifications.

During the 2023-2024 school year, MCPS's CREA program had a total of 200 students enrolled at some point that year. This number fluctuates as students enter and exit the program. By the end of the school year, only three individuals had passed all sections of the GED exam, with the Reasoning Through Language Arts section having by far the lowest attempt and pass rate. Specifically, for the social studies and science portions of the exam, the pass rate was about 40% (social studies – 77 students made 131 attempts and 52 passed; science – 79 students made 114 attempts and 45 passed). Passage was a little lower for math, at about 33% (58 students made 96 attempts and 32 passed). The pass rate for Reasoning Through Language Arts was just 10% (33 students made 66 attempts and 7 passed). While test takers need to pass all four sections of the GED exam, the Reasoning Through Language Arts section, taken in English, is the single



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biggest obstacle to earning the GED credential for many. Without this added language requirement, it is likely that the pass rate for CREA students would increase.

The stated reason for the language restriction is so the test taker can demonstrate English proficiency; however, English proficiency is not an explicit requirement of the GED exam. The Montgomery County Board of Education understands the importance of English proficiency - it is an important skill for native speakers of languages other than English to succeed in this country. However, Maryland is the only state that imposes the added requirement that the language arts section of the GED exam be taken in English. This creates an artificial and substantial barrier for an individual who is otherwise able to pass the GED exam, especially when language development can and will continue to occur once the individual is able to enter the workforce. This restriction is unwarranted and prohibits otherwise qualified individuals from gaining employment because they lack a high school diploma. In order to eliminate this hurdle, **the Montgomery County Board of Education supports SB 451, which removes the requirement that a portion of the GED exam be taken in English.**