Academic Validation Project
Package Approval Process

Review Process

Local Review Panel overview. The local school system will establish Local Review Panels. The Local Review Panel will be assigned the role of assessing an Academic Validation Project Package(s) at the end of the assigned work period. The Local Review Panel will make recommendations to the local superintendent who must give the final approval of an Academic Validation Project Package (see Local Superintendent’s Decision).

Panel composition. Members of the Local Review Panel will include education professionals appropriate to the HSA content area of the Academic Validation Project Package the student has submitted as well as any student-specific needs identified. For example, a panel assigned a Project Package from a special needs student must include a member currently certified in special education. A second language acquisition professional must be included on a panel reviewing a Project Package submitted by an English Language Learner student.

It would be appropriate for the makeup of any particular panel to include members who would permit a fair and accurate review of the student’s work, but any ad hoc additions to the panel must include only members who are properly trained under MSDE guidelines.

Independent. A Local Review Panel must be as independent as possible. To ensure equity and consistency, scoring will be done at the local school system level, not the school level. Panels can include faculty from a school but must include central office staff and/or faculty from other schools, as determined by the local superintendent. A Local Review Panel cannot include a teacher or educator directly associated with a student whose Academic Validation Project Package is being reviewed.

Regional Review Panels. Local school systems with a small number of high schools could cooperatively agree to convene Regional Review Panels to provide assurances that student Academic Validation Project Package reviews are unbiased and consistent scoring standards are maintained.

Consistency. Local school systems may have different Local Review Panels assigned to different Academic Validation Project Packages based on the content and nature of the packages. However, measures must be taken to ensure that the panels’ recommendations are consistent and without bias.

Convening a panel. The local school system will convene Local Review Panels in a timely manner to assure a prompt review of Academic Validation Project Packages. Adequate time should be allocated so that Academic Validation Project Packages can be evaluated prior to commencement exercises.

The local school system will decide how a Local Review Panel will be conducted. Local school systems may determine that all panel members should meet in person for the panel review. However, given technological advances, panels may also be conducted remotely via conference call; electronically via email or the web; or by other methods of communication. Regardless of the method by which a Local Review Panel is conducted, local school systems must take appropriate measures to assure security.

State staff on Local Review Panels. MSDE staff will serve on Local Review Panels during initial reviews until there is a level of assurance that the local panel members understand the scoring criteria and can apply them consistently.
**Validation.** The Local Review Panel must have confidence that the submitted Academic Validation Project Package is the student’s work and is representative of the student’s knowledge and skills. By signing an Academic Validation Project Package Submission Form, the student, parent/guardian, Project Monitor, and designated school staff member provide assurance that the work is indeed the individual work of the student.

Though not mandated, where deemed appropriate, a Local Review Panel may request an interview with a student. Such interviews may require the student to make a presentation and respond to questions from Local Review Panel members.

**State review and standardization.** Local Review Panels will include trained MSDE staff in the initial reviews until the local panel members have a thorough understanding of the level of rigor and expectations required by the State. MSDE involvement will ensure standardization among recommendations statewide and across school system review panels. Subsequently, MSDE will participate on Local Review Panels upon request so the State can continue to assist in the implementation of standards.

**State reliability audits.** The primary purpose of MSDE presence on the Local Review Panels and subsequent random State audits of the panels’ work is to assure consistency in standards across and within school systems. Findings from State audits will be used to adjust procedures and training for future use of the Bridge Plan, but they will not reverse original decisions of panels.

**Annual Evaluation.** Each year, the State will review Local Review Panel results for process effectiveness and student use of the Bridge Plan. MSDE will provide procedures to local school systems so they may perform their own evaluations.

**Local Superintendent’s Decision**

The local superintendent will review the recommendations and findings of the Local Review Panels and determine if the student has demonstrated mastery of all the identified content from the Academic Validation Project Package. The local superintendent can accept the panel’s recommendations, return recommendations to the panel for further study and resubmission, or reject the panel’s recommendations.

If the local superintendent returns or rejects the Local Review Panel’s recommendations for an Academic Validation Project Package, an explanation and further directions must be provided. The panel will resume the review and provide new or additional recommendations to the local superintendent.

If the local superintendent rejects a student’s Academic Validation Project Package, written feedback will be provided to the student. The student will have at least ten (10) days from the date of receipt of the local superintendent’s rejection notice to complete any additional work on the Project Package and resubmit the project for review or submit a written appeal to the State Superintendent.

**Appeals Process**

A student who wishes to appeal a local superintendent’s decision must petition the State Superintendent in writing within at least ten (10) days from the date of receipt of the local superintendent’s rejection notice. The appeal can only be based on the local superintendent’s decision not to accept the Academic Validation Project Package; no other circumstances will be considered in the appeal. The State Review Panel will review the student’s materials and make a recommendation to the State Superintendent.
The decision of the State Superintendent shall be final. Upon approval from the State Superintendent, the student will have fulfilled the requirement for the specific HSA content area(s). If the State Superintendent does not approve the student’s materials, the local superintendent’s decision stands. The student must either retest in the specific HSA content area(s) or rework his/her Project Package in response to the local superintendent’s written feedback.