MARYLAND SCHOOL ASSESSMENT RESULTS POST NEW GAINS

SCORES RISE AT BOTH ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL; 19 SCHOOLS LEAVE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

BALTIMORE (July 21, 2009) – Continued improvement in reading and mathematics scores was recorded on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) for 2009, building on the steady progress made over the past six years, according to data released today.

The rise in test scores contributed to 19 schools leaving the federally mandated school improvement process. Seven of those schools are located in Baltimore City, four in Montgomery County, three in Prince George’s County, two in Baltimore County, and one each in Allegany, Howard, and Kent Counties.

The 2009 assessment score data in Maryland also show a continued closing of the achievement gaps that have plagued schools nationwide. Scores are being expressed as the percentage of students in each system who scored at or above the proficiency levels set when the exams launched in 2003.

Composite MSA reading proficiency at the elementary grades has risen more than 25 percentage points since 2003, and composite elementary mathematics proficiency has increased by 25 points as well. Composite middle school reading proficiency has increased 22 percentage points since 2003, while composite middle school math proficiency has risen 32 points.

“I am so proud of our students, and want to extend a special thanks to families in every corner of our State who continue to play such an important role in student achievement,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “Maryland is home to the best public schools in America, not just because Education Week said so, but because over the last five years, we’ve seen strong improvement throughout schools across the state and across demographic lines. Working together, we’ve made tremendous progress for our top-ranked public school system, even during historically difficult economic times.”

State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick said the steady progress made is the result of continuous effort put forth by educators throughout the State. “The rising
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targets set forth in federal law make it more difficult each year for our schools to meet the goals, and many of our schools are reaching the 90 percent proficiency levels that make it difficult for rapid gains,” she noted. “But hard work in the classroom continues to prevail and our students are the beneficiaries of improved instruction.”

Not only have 19 schools exited the rigorous school improvement process, but that hard work has resulted in fewer Maryland schools being cited as “in improvement” overall, the federal designation for having missed Adequate Yearly Progress targets for two years running. The number of Maryland schools in improvement fell from 170 in 2008 to 158 this year.

The percentage of students statewide scoring at the proficient or advanced levels for reading in Grade 3, for example, rose from 58.1 percent in 2003 to 84.9 percent this year. The percentage of students scoring in the proficient range for Grade 5 mathematics rose from 55 percent five years ago in 2003 to 81.2 percent this year.

Maryland’s consistent improvement in achievement has its roots in a variety of programs that have been successfully implemented over the past several years. For example:

• Maryland was the first state in the nation to assess the knowledge and abilities of children as they enter kindergarten. Through the Maryland Model for School Readiness, the State has been tracking student readiness since 2001-02, and those efforts have helped strengthen early childhood education.

• Maryland’s state curriculum, launched in 2002, has been successfully implemented in schools throughout the State, helping to strengthen instruction.

• Maryland has greatly increased the number of Highly Qualified Teachers in its classroom. The percentage of classes taught by Highly Qualified Teachers increased from 66.9 percent in 2004 to 85.5 percent in 2008.

• Maryland’s groundbreaking Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act has helped bring more than $1.3 billion to school systems, with the vast majority of the funding targeting the classroom. In turn, school systems have worked with (more)
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MSDE in an extensive Master Plan process, targeting both overall student achievement and a reduction in achievement gaps among student subgroups.

The MSA exams are given to third- through eighth-grade students in reading and mathematics. Nearly 365,000 students took the exams this year. The data are used to meet federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. The law has as its goal that all students will score at proficient levels by 2014. To reach that goal, the targets rise every year, for every school and every school system.

NCLB charts the progress of the overall student population in the grades tested, as well as that of students receiving any of three categories of special services: Free and/or Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs), Special Education, and Limited English Proficient (LEP). It also follows the success of students in five racial subgroups: American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, White, and Hispanic.

“It gets more difficult for our schools and systems to reach the steadily rising targets, but aiming higher is what our educators have been committed to do,” Dr. Grasmick said. “Only with unwavering focus on improving instruction can we prepare students for the world that awaits them.”

There are a variety of gratifying results included in today’s MSA score release. For example:

• Achievement gaps are continuing to close, as all subgroups made progress in 2009. Gaps are closing quickest at the elementary grades, particularly among LEP and FARMS students.
  
  o For example, the gap in elementary reading achievement between English language learners and those with language proficiency has been reduced by 27.5 percentage points since 2003. More than 70 percent (72.1 percent) of LEP students scored at the proficient or advanced range in 2009.
  
  o Gaps also are closing among racial subgroups. The gap in achievement in middle school reading between African American and White students fell
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16.5 percentage points between 2003 and 2009, with 72.1 percent of African American students now scoring either proficient or advanced. The gap between Hispanic and White students dropped 13.8 percentage points, with 73.8 percent of Hispanic middle school students now scoring in the proficient range.

- Mathematics scores also are rising across-the-board as well, and gaps have closed significantly over time.
  - For example, 74 percent of White elementary school students were scoring at the proficient levels in 2003, compared to 40.9 percent of African American students—a gap of 33.1 points. By 2009, the elementary school gap has been cut by more than half, to 15.9 percentage points. Nearly 92 percent (91.9 percent) of White students scored proficient or advanced, while 76 percent of African American students were scoring in that range.

Schools that left the school improvement process this year are: Braddock Middle in Allegany County, Arbutus Middle in Baltimore County, Woodlawn Middle in Baltimore County, Murray Hill Middle in Howard County, Chestertown Middle in Kent County, Briggs Chaney Middle in Montgomery County, Lakelands Park Middle in Montgomery County, Newport Mill Middle in Montgomery County, Silver Spring International Middle in Montgomery County, Columbia Park Elementary in Prince George’s County, Walker Mill Middle in Prince George’s County, William W. Hall Elementary in Prince George’s County, Alexander Hamilton Elementary in Baltimore City, Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary in Baltimore City, Fort Worthington Elementary in Baltimore City, Guilford Elementary/Middle in Baltimore City, Johnston Square Elementary in Baltimore City, Morrell Park Elementary/Middle in Baltimore City, and Sinclair Lane Elementary in Baltimore City.

Scheduled for release later this year are the 2009 MSA science scores at the elementary and middle school level, High School Assessment scores, graduation rates, and attendance figures. High school and system-wide AYP information will be available at that time as well.
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Statewide, system, and local school MSA data will be available soon on the Maryland State Department of Education’s updated report card Web site, www.mdreportcard.org.

Maryland schools in improvement will be listed here:
http://www.mdreportcard.org/SchoolsForImprovement.aspx?AypPV=1410991AAA1110000001A

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