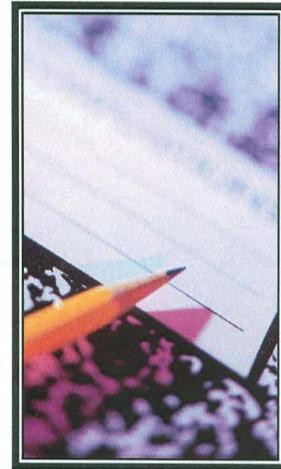
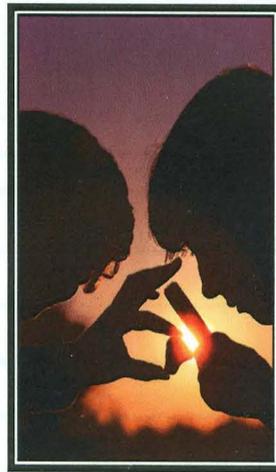
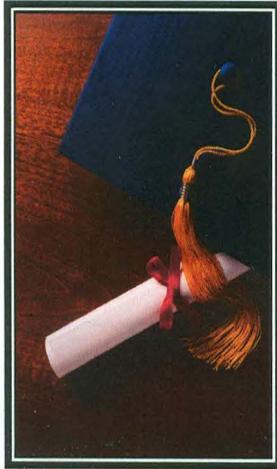


**Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act
Report on Best Practices**



**Prepared for
The Maryland General Assembly
October 2006**

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Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor

Scope of the Report

Education Article §5-401 requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to review academic intervention and behavior modification programs in local master plans under the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act (BTE) to identify best practices. The Department must periodically report on the best practices to the Maryland State Board of Education, local boards of education, the Governor, and, subject to § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the Maryland General Assembly.

In preparing this report, MSDE staff analyzed self-reported *Summaries of School System Success* contained in each local school system's 2005 Annual Update to the Bridge to Excellence Master Plan. These self-reported summaries describe the successes that school systems attained in the five No Child Left Behind (NCLB) goal areas since 2003. Organized into five sections, this report discusses the origins and purpose of BTE, describes the review process for the 2005 Annual Updates, provides a synopsis of the overall findings as a result of the review of the 2005 Annual Update, and provides a summary of what programs, strategies, and practices – including academic interventions and behavior modification programs – school systems attribute to their success. This report is not a scientific study but rather, a qualitative report based on information reported by local school systems.

Acknowledgements

The Maryland State Department of Education is pleased to share this report on local school system best practices related to the Bridge to Excellence Master Plan. The fundamental purpose of Bridge to Excellence is to accelerate academic achievement for all students and eliminate achievement gaps among student groups. MSDE would like to acknowledge the Bridge to Excellence Workgroup for its leadership in the development of guidance for completing the original master plan and annual updates. The Workgroup has been instrumental in shaping the vision for master plans and subsequent Updates. MSDE also extends thanks to local superintendents, Bridge to Excellence points of contact, and local planning teams. We at MSDE recognize and appreciate the hard work of these individuals to achieve the overall purpose of BTE. Additionally, MSDE extends thanks to those dedicated individuals who have volunteered their time to review master plans and annual updates. This is an enormous commitment requiring many hours of hard work. Despite this, our reviewers have ensured a fair and equitable review of each local master plan and subsequent updates. Finally, MSDE would like to extend a special thanks to members of the Maryland General Assembly for their continued vision and support for the Bridge to Excellence program and their commitment to academic excellence for the students of Maryland.

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Executive Summary

Three years ago, the State of Maryland made a commitment to reform the state of education and ensure adequacy and equity in its public schools. That commitment, enacted into legislation as the Bridge to Excellence Act, resulted in an enormous increase in State funding and also gave school systems flexibility to determine the best allocation of their resources. In exchange, school systems must demonstrate that they are meeting high expectations for increased student, school, and system performance. School systems were required to develop, adopt, and implement a five-year comprehensive Master Plan linking funding from federal, State, and local sources to strategies designed to improve student and school performance. Each year, local school systems submit an Annual Update to the Master Plan describing progress toward goals and targets and adjustments to strategies where progress is not sufficient.

This report is the first of three to the Maryland General Assembly and builds upon two other reports, one of which was presented to the Maryland State Board of Education; the other disseminated to the general public.¹ This report is based on self-reported information gleaned from the *Summaries of School System Success* contained in each local school system's 2005 Annual Update to the Bridge to Excellence Master Plan. In these summaries, local school systems developed a short narrative highlighting the successes attained since 2003, programs, strategies, and practices (including academic interventions and behavior modification programs) related to these successes, and how the distribution of resources to these programs, strategies, and practices has affected student achievement. This report will: 1) Summarize the origins and purpose of Bridge to Excellence; 2) Provide a synopsis of the overall findings as a result of the review of the 2005 Bridge to Excellence Annual Update; and 3) Provide a summary of what programs, strategies, and practices – including academic interventions and behavior modification programs – school systems attribute to their success.

Education Article §5-402 requires an external evaluation of the implementation of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act and requires that a preliminary and final report be developed. MGT of America, Inc. has been awarded the contract to complete this study, which will provide a detailed description of how school systems are using state education aid, a comparison of school systems that show significant improvements in student and school performance to school systems that do not, an assessment of the extent to which local boards are successful in implementing the comprehensive Master Plans, an analysis of funding that local governments provide for education each year, and a list of programs or factors that consistently produce positive results for students, schools, and school systems. An initial report on the results of the evaluation will be presented to the General Assembly on or before December 31, 2006. A final report will be presented to the General Assembly on or before December 31, 2008.

¹ *2005 Master Plan Update: Three years into implementation, are five-year Master Plans being successful in accelerating achievement for all students and closing achievement gaps?* was presented to the Maryland State Board of Education in December 2005. *The 2005 Master Plan Annual Update: Driving Reform, Focusing Resources, Achieving Results* was released to the general public in February 2006.

1.0 History/Background

1.1 Introduction

In 1999, the General Assembly established the Commission on Education Finance, Equity, and Excellence (the Thornton Commission). The Thornton Commission was charged with conducting a comprehensive review of the State's current finance system and making recommendations to ensure statewide adequacy and equity in education finance, as well as excellence in school system and student performance. The 27-member Commission was appointed and began its deliberations in 1999. During the 2000 legislative interim, the Commission undertook a comprehensive analysis of the existing funding formulae, trends in education spending, local tax effort and tax limitations, and existing accountability measures. In addition, the Commission contracted with a private consultant, Augenblick & Myers, Inc., to conduct an equity analysis and two adequacy studies.

1.2 Previous Finance Structure

Maryland has 24 public school systems, one system for each of the State's 23 counties and one for the City of Baltimore. The school systems do not have taxing authority and are dependent on the State and local governments for their annual appropriations. Statewide, local school systems received about 54 percent of their fiscal 2002 revenues from local governments, 41 percent from the State of Maryland, and 5 percent from the federal government.

Prior to the implementation of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, State aid was distributed to the local school systems through more than 50 different programs. Many of these State programs were categorical programs targeted to restricted initiatives. Some of the programs were formula driven with adjustments for inflation and student enrollment while others were not. Several existing programs had been level funded for a decade, including State aid for special education. From fiscal year 1996 to fiscal year 2002, State aid to the local school systems increased by 38.6 percent, an average annual increase of 5.6 percent.

About 65 percent of State aid was distributed to local schools systems inverse to county wealth. A few of the newest initiatives, Class-Size Reduction and the Governor's Teacher Salary Challenge Program, were distributed in a manner that correlated positively with wealth. This raised equity concerns because there was a vast disparity in wealth among Maryland's local jurisdictions. For example, in fiscal year 2003, the wealth per pupil in Talbot County was over \$535,000 while the wealth per pupil in Baltimore City was less than \$155,000. The tax effort made by local jurisdictions to fund public education and overall public services also varied substantially. The State's poorest jurisdiction, Baltimore City, had the highest overall tax effort and the highest at-risk student population. The demographic composition of the student body also was significantly different from one system to the next. In fiscal year 2003, 73 percent of the student body in Baltimore City was eligible for free or reduced priced meals (FRPM), while less than 10 percent of the student body in Howard County was eligible for FRPM. Two-thirds of the State's limited English proficient population attended school in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. After reviewing the State's existing finance structure and the needs of the

school systems, the Commission determined that the existing structure was unnecessarily complex, administratively burdensome, and not appropriately related to the needs of students or the ability of local jurisdictions to meet those needs.

1.3 Adequacy Studies

The Thornton Commission hired Augenblick & Myers, Inc. to conduct two adequacy studies using different approaches – the successful schools approach and the professional judgment approach. The professional judgment approach typically uses multiple panels of educators to determine the kinds of resources needed to achieve a particular set of objectives in prototypical elementary, middle, and high schools. The resources identified by these panels are then “priced out” based on salary levels and other factors to determine the per pupil base costs. The successful schools approach examines the “basic” spending of schools that meet performance objectives established by the State, where basic spending excludes transportation, special education, compensatory education, or other spending associated with adjustments that will be made to the base cost figure.

Simultaneously, the New Maryland Education Coalition hired a different consultant firm, Management Analysis & Planning, Inc., to conduct an independent adequacy analysis using the professional judgment approach. The Management Analysis & Planning report produced three different levels of adequacy based on three different professional judgment panels.

The adequacy studies were completed in May 2001 and presented to the Commission at its June 2001 meeting. All of the studies identified a gap in funding between existing resources and “adequate” resources. The gaps ranged from a low of \$380 million to a high of \$2.7 billion. However, the \$380 million figure was an isolated number, with all other analyses identifying a gap of well over a billion dollars. The median result was about \$2 billion, 30 percent more than currently available to the local school systems. The school systems identified with the greatest needs were located in counties with the lowest wealth per pupil and the highest percentage of students at-risk (limited English proficiency, economic disadvantages, or disabilities).

1.4 Thornton Commission Activities

The Commission met every other week during the 2001 legislative interim. It heard from experts on legal issues, fiscal matters, tax policy, and education philosophy. Twelve public hearings were held in all geographic regions of the State to get input from a wide range of interested parties.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Department of Legislative Services staffed the Commission. This staff met regularly to evaluate data and develop alternative proposals to restructure Maryland’s school finance system using the information gleaned from the adequacy studies and the hearings. A simulation model was developed by MSDE and refined by the Department of Legislative Services. This interactive model allowed staff to adjust foundation levels, utilize different pupil weights for at-risk students, change wealth

equalization factors, apply different State and local cost sharing formulae, and phase out existing programs as new programs were phased in. Through the use of this model, staff were able to identify a new funding structure for public education that was consistent with the Commission's philosophies, while ensuring that every school system received annual increases in State aid during the phase in period.

In January 2002, the Thornton Commission published and distributed its final report to the Governor and the General Assembly. At the same time, the legislative members of the Commission introduced legislation to codify the Commission's recommendations.

1.5 Overview of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002

Senate Bill 856, the *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act*, was enacted in April 2002. This Act restructured Maryland's public school finance system and increased State aid by \$1.3 billion over the previous formula through 2008. The funding formula adopted by the Act is based on the principal of equity and adequacy, by linking resources to the needs of students and distributing 74 percent of State aid inverse to local wealth. The new finance structure was based on the recommendations of the Thornton Commission. As a result of the Bridge to Excellence Act, Maryland embraced a standards-based approach to public school financing under which the State set academic performance standards, ensured that schools and students had sufficient resources to meet those standards, and held schools and school systems accountable for student performance.

A foundation program was established to provide State and local aid to school systems based on general enrollment and a "base cost" per student. This base cost reflects the "cost of adequacy" as determined through the analyses conducted by the Thornton Commission. Overall, the State and counties each provide about 50 percent of the program costs. However, the program is wealth equalized. Less wealthy counties, as measured by assessable tax base and taxable income, receive relatively more State aid per student than wealthier counties. State aid provided through the program is adjusted to reflect regional differences in the cost of providing education services.

Three categorical programs are established for: 1) students with special education needs; 2) students with limited English proficiency; and 3) students from circumstances of economic disadvantage. School systems receive additional per pupil State aid for these "at-risk" students based on formulae linked to the foundation program and adjusted for local wealth. Each at-risk student is weighted in accordance with the "cost of adequacy" determined through the analyses conducted by the Thornton Commission. This weight is applied to the base cost per pupil used for the foundation program.

Local school systems are provided maximum flexibility in spending State education aid; however, each local school system must develop a five-year comprehensive master plan providing for improvements in student achievement for every segment of the student population. Accountability is provided through the master plan process and assessments of student performance. If any segment of the student population fails to demonstrate progress toward

meeting performance standards, the State Superintendent of Schools must review the master plan and may require the school system to make changes to its plan. Under Bridge to Excellence, the State Board of Education has the authority to review and approve the allocation of resources in school systems that fail to improve student performance and fail to develop a satisfactory master plan.

At the recommendation of the Commission, the new law requires every local school system to provide full-day kindergarten services for all students and pre-kindergarten services to economically disadvantaged four-year-old students by the 2007-2008 school year.

The legislation continues the existing local maintenance of effort requirements. However, the law requires the Maryland State Department of Education to evaluate the effect of increased State aid for education on student and school performance in each local school system. This study must include an analysis of the impact of increased State aid on local appropriations for education. In addition, the study must provide a detailed description of how local school systems are using State aid, provide comparisons of school systems that show significant improvements and those that fail to achieve improvements, and identify best practices. The Maryland State Department of Education is also required to contract with a private entity to develop a geographic cost of education index for the State of Maryland. This index must be applied to the State's education finance formula by fiscal 2005.

1.6 Senate Bill 894 and Fiscal Accountability

During the 2004 legislative session, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 894, the *Education Fiscal Accountability and Oversight Act*. This Act prohibits local school systems from carrying budget deficits, requires more reporting on local school system finances, requires each system to undergo a legislative audit, and authorizes legislative auditors to conduct a centralized audit at MSDE of all master plans to determine overall compliance with the Bridge to Excellence Act.

To meet the new fiscal accountability requirements under Senate Bill 894, local school systems are required to review their initial five-year comprehensive master plans to determine how the board of education budget aligns with goals, objectives, and strategies for improving student achievement. Additionally, schools systems must establish processes and procedures to collect budget information that is aligned with the master plan and verify that funds are being used to meet the goals, objectives, and strategies in the original master plan and subsequent updates.

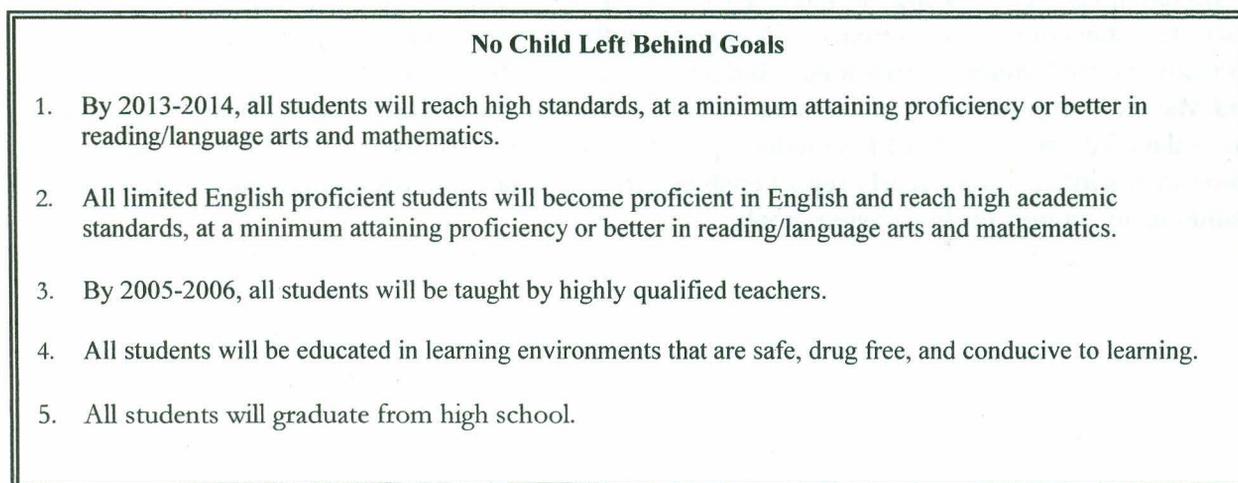
1.7 Contents of Master Plans

The Bridge to Excellence Master Plan serves as the organizing framework for school improvement and reform. Under Bridge to Excellence, local school systems are provided flexibility in spending State education aid. However, with increased funding and flexibility comes increased accountability. To ensure the acceleration of student achievement and elimination of achievement gaps, each school system was required to develop a five-year comprehensive Master Plan to be updated annually containing goals, objectives, and strategies

related to student performance. Accountability for student performance is provided through a comprehensive annual review of school system goals, objectives, and strategies by MSDE relative to school system data; particularly student performance on the MSA.

In the Master Plan, school systems were required to address the five No Child Left Behind (NCLB) goals and indicators that address student performance, teacher quality, safe learning environments, and high school graduation (see Figure 1.1). Also, school systems must evaluate programs such as Career and Technology Education, Early Learning, Gifted and Talented, and Special Education that address specific student groups and cross-cutting themes such as Education Technology, Education that is Multicultural, and Fine Arts. Additionally, school systems address the requirements of federal programs such as Title I in the Master Plan.

Figure 1.1: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Goals



1.8 Master Plan Updates

The Bridge to Excellence Act requires local school systems to submit annual updates of their five-year comprehensive master plans to MSDE. The annual update has been designed to gather information about how school systems are implementing their master plans.

In the 2005 Annual Update, school systems were required to analyze data related to ESEA goals, additional State goals, and other local goals. Where the data showed that progress toward a goal is not being made, school systems were directed to evaluate their Master Plan programs and strategies in order to determine why progress is not being made and to provide the rationale for future planning. School systems responded to the following questions:

1. Which parts of the Master Plan addressing these areas of concern were fully implemented by 2004-2005, and why did these strategies not result in the intended effect? Does the school system intend to continue with their implementation despite the lack of success? Why?

2. Which parts of the Master Plan addressing these areas of concern were *not* fully implemented by 2004-2005? Why not? What changes regarding these strategies is the district planning to make in the 2005 Update? Why?
3. What new strategies, if any, is the school system implementing to address these areas of concern? Why?

The Master Plan Update process requires planning, reflection, problem-solving, and coordination among multiple stakeholders. While interests and investments among stakeholders may vary, their purpose is shared: improving and enriching the education and the lives of every student. This shared purpose is used to drive the difficult decisions, shift priorities appropriately, and, ultimately, improve student achievement.

Completed, each 2005 Bridge to Excellence Master Plan Annual Update is a stand-alone document that conveys a summary of successes with a focused discussion around areas of concern and mid-course corrections. Budget components that demonstrate how budget priorities and Master Plan priorities align are also included. Finally, the Updates include Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) federal program grant applications. Consolidating these components into a single yearly report enables school systems to align programs, practices, and resources to support unified system goals.

2.0 Review of 2005 Master Plan Updates

2.1 Overview

The 2005 Annual Update was designed to serve as a catalyst for change to Master Plan strategies where performance data indicated that progress was not sufficient. At this point school systems were entering the third year of implementation of their five-year Master Plan. As such, the process for completing and reviewing the 2005 Master Plan Update began with an analysis of performance data. Part of this analysis involved identifying whether Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for school systems, schools, and subgroups was met. The results from this analysis were used to identify potential areas of concern and inform school systems as they engaged in making mid-course corrections to their five-year master plan in order to ensure the elimination of achievement gaps and acceleration of student performance.

The review of the 2005 Master Plan Updates by MSDE, which took place during October and November 2005, consisted of two separate reviews and fulfilled two separate purposes.

2.2 Technical Review

The *Technical Review* of the 2005 Annual Update was conducted by MSDE program managers responsible for administering federal and State programs that are part of the Master Plan including federal ESEA programs, Fine Arts, Gifted and Talented, Special Education, Career and Technology Education, Early Learning, Educational Technology and Education that is Multicultural. The purpose of the technical review was to ensure that local school systems are complying with federal and State programmatic, fiduciary, and legal requirements while implementing these programs.

2.3 Content Review

The Content Review was conducted to determine the sufficiency of the school systems' responses to the three questions in section 1.8 of this report, to check the alignment of the local budget with Master Plan priorities, and to ensure that legislative audit findings were addressed.

For the 2005 review, there were four review panels, each comprised of approximately 13 members internal and external to MSDE, engaged in a thorough and comprehensive review of six Master Plan Updates. Review panelists were tasked with determining whether Master Plans were supporting federal, State, and local goals and if not, whether systems are making appropriate mid-course corrections to address areas of concern. Reviewers grounded themselves in what the data revealed in order to determine the extent to which school systems had been successful in identifying and responding to deficiencies.

3.0 Overall Findings

3.1 Findings of the 2005 Review of Annual Updates

School systems across Maryland are focusing on student achievement. Although school systems are at various stages of implementation of initiatives and strategies, they all recognize the central importance of teaching each individual student, from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, in a way that will most benefit him or her.

While progress has occurred over the past three years in each of the 24 school systems, tremendous growth is still required over the next two years and beyond in order to meet the targets, particularly for African American students, Hispanic students, students receiving special education, limited English proficient students, and students receiving free and reduced meals.

Figure 3.1 below provides a summary of the overall findings of the review of the 2005 Updates from Maryland's 24 local school systems.

Figure 3.1: Overall Findings

Source: *The 2005 Master Plan Annual Update: Driving Reform, Focusing Resources, Achieving Results (2005).*

Summary of Overall Findings in the 2005 Annual Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ School systems are using data to improve student achievement.➤ School systems must continue intensive support for the following student subgroups:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ African American and Hispanic students○ Students receiving special education services○ Students receiving limited English proficient services○ Students receiving free and reduced price meals (criteria used to identify economically disadvantaged students)➤ Eight of the 24 school systems in Maryland are systems in improvement. Two of these systems have no schools in improvement – their system improvement status results from the performance of subgroups in the aggregate only.➤ One school system, Baltimore City is in Corrective Action.➤ Ten of the 24 school systems in Maryland have no schools in improvement status.➤ Two-hundred and thirty six schools out of 1,419 (17%) are in some form of school improvement status; the majority of those schools are in Baltimore City and Prince George's County.➤ Compared to elementary grades, middle school achievement (grades 6, 7, and 8) is not as high, nor are gains as widespread or as large.➤ Seven of the 24 school systems are likely to achieve the requirement that all teachers in core academic subjects are highly qualified by 2005-2006.➤ School systems are making good progress toward implementing full-day kindergarten and required pre-kindergarten programs.

For a more detailed analysis of the findings of the 2005 review of master plan Updates, including a Goal-by-Goal analysis of the 2005 Update and a detailed budget analysis, the following reports are available on MSDE's website at www.marylandpublicschools.org:

- *2005 Master Plan Update: Three years into implementation, are five-year Master Plans being successful in accelerating achievement for all students and closing achievement gaps?*
- *The 2005 Master Plan Annual Update: Driving Reform, Focusing Resources, Achieving Results.*

4.0 Best Practices

4.1 Introduction

As part of the Guidance for the 2005 Annual Update, each local school system was required to develop a *Summary of Success* – a cohesive narrative highlighting school system successes attained since 2003. In this narrative, school systems were to link programs, outcomes, and funding resources in order to show the effectiveness and appropriateness of strategies being implemented. In their responses, school systems addressed the following:

- What successes has the school system attained in each goal area since 2003?;
- To what programs, strategies, and practices (including academic interventions as well as social-emotional learning programs) does the school system attribute these successes?; and
- Describe how the distribution of resources to these programs, strategies, and practices has affected student achievement.

In their 2005 Annual Update, school systems provided a two to five page response to the prompts above.

4.2 Methodology

It is important to point out that the *Summaries of Success* consist of self-reported information provided by local school systems. That is, each school system took an in-depth look at their performance data, reported where they thought success was evident, and then drew conclusions about what programs, strategies, and practices were attributable to their success. Staff at MSDE analyzed the summaries of success provided by school systems by developing a matrix that captures, statewide, what programs school systems attribute to their success in reading and mathematics². The matrix also captures what social-emotional learning programs school systems across the State are using.

Once this information was collected and recorded, staff conducted a frequency analysis to determine what programs, strategies, and practices were being used by multiple school systems in the areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and behavior modification. From this analysis, MSDE was able to determine what reading/language arts, mathematics and behavior modification programs, strategies, and practices are being used statewide and contributing to the success reported by local school systems. This analysis also brings to light some strategies that school systems felt were attributable to their overall success.

² Note: MSDE staff analyzed the *Summaries of Success* only. Schools systems may have identified additional programs, practices, or strategies elsewhere in the 2005 Annual Update that may not be reflected in this report.

4.3 Overall Findings

Reading: 2005 Data Summary

Statewide, Maryland School Assessment (MSA) data generally show a steady, upward trend in reading since 2003. Third graders overall improved by 17.7 percentage points in reading (from 58.1% to 75.8% proficient). Lower performing subgroups have made substantial gains on the third grade MSA in reading, closing the achievement gaps somewhat. While Limited English Proficient students continue to be the lowest-performing subgroup, they made the largest gains, improving 29.4 percentage points (from 17.8% to 47.2% proficient). Third grade students in other underperforming subgroups also made substantial gains in reading: students receiving special education (an increase of 26.4 percentage points), Hispanic students (24.2 points), students receiving free or reduced meals (24.2 points), African American students (23.0 points), and American Indian students (20.8 points).

Fifth graders overall improved by 8.6 percentage points in reading (from 65.7% to 74.3% proficient). Lower performing subgroups have made substantial gains on the fifth grade MSA in reading, closing the achievement gaps somewhat. As with third grade students in reading, while Limited English Proficient students continue to be the lowest-performing subgroup on the fifth grade reading MSA, they made the largest gains, improving 14.9 percentage points (from 23.8% to 38.7% proficient). Fifth grade students in other underperforming subgroups also made substantial gains in reading, in greater amounts than students overall: students receiving free or reduced meals (an increase of 12.9 percentage points), African American students (12.6 points), Hispanic students (12.0 points), and students receiving special education (9.2 points).

Eighth graders overall improved by 6.5 percentage points in reading (from 59.9% to 66.4% proficient). Some lower performing subgroups have made substantial gains on the eighth grade MSA in reading, closing the achievement gaps somewhat. Students receiving free or reduced meals made the largest gains, improving 9.7 percentage points (from 35.6% to 45.3% proficient). While Limited English Proficient students continue to be the lowest-performing subgroup on the eighth grade reading MSA (as with third and fifth grade students in reading), they improved 8.0 percentage points (from 12.4% to 20.4% proficient). Eighth grade American Indian and African American students also made substantial gains in reading, in greater amounts than students overall (improving 8.8 percentage points and 8.3 percentage points, respectively). The performance of Hispanic students dropped in 2004 and rose back to the same level in 2005, resulting in no net gain. Students receiving special education experienced a drop of 9.4 percentage points in 2004 (from 30.1% to 20.7% proficient) and an increase of only 6.8 percentage points in 2005, resulting in a net loss of 2.6 percentage points in 2005.

Reading: Summary of Programs, Practices, and Strategies

Reading Intervention Programs

Many school systems in the State attribute their individual success to reading intervention programs or strategies. Reading intervention programs in general are implemented by school systems to meet the needs of struggling students. School systems using early intervention programs or strategies have processes in place for identifying students for whom such programs or strategies would be most beneficial. For example, Allegany County offers reading intervention and continues to use scaffolding to provide assistance to “at-risk” readers. Both primary and intermediate programs are being offered in schools throughout the county and parents are encouraged to be part of the process for identifying children for these programs. In Wicomico County, reading intervention strategies such as *Wilson Reading* are being used to increase the performance of students with disabilities.

Howard County uses three levels of interventions designed to address individual student needs: minimal, moderate, and intensive. A minimal intervention is one that is designed to help those students who range from slightly below grade level to attaining grade level. These interventions are usually part of regular classroom instruction, but may also include additional time on task in a supplemental fashion. Moderate interventions are designed for those students who are below grade level, and who benefit from additional intervention services beyond those typically provided as part of regular instruction. These may include extended day/year programs. Intensive interventions in Howard County are designed for those students who are performing significantly below grade level and who need more intensive additional services, often in small groups or one-on-one. This level of intervention may occur during the school day, before or after school, or in an extended year setting.

Alignment of Curricula to the Voluntary State Curriculum

Overwhelmingly, school systems are attributing their success in reading to the alignment of their curriculum to the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). In fact, 13 of the 24 school systems attribute their success, at least in part, to the alignment of their curriculum and activities to the VSC.

In their *Summary of Success*, Worcester County reports that they align curriculum, instruction and assessment with current Maryland Content Standards, Core Learning Goals, and the VSC. Teachers in Worcester County are using the VSC as a guide to plan instruction and objectives are given to students based on the VSC. Baltimore County has placed increasing emphasis on providing and evaluating high quality professional development to ensure the consistency and fidelity of the delivery of the VSC, the Core Learning Goals and the Baltimore County Public Schools Essential Curriculum. Additionally, Baltimore County is implementing the *Scott Foresman Reading* program in

grade six, ensuring alignment with the VSC, and providing sufficient ongoing technical assistance to help teachers deliver the program consistently.

High-Quality Professional Development

In addition to aligning curriculum and activities to the VSC, local school systems are focusing on quality professional development to support this alignment and enhance instruction. Caroline and Dorchester Counties have dedicated a significant portion of professional development to support VSC alignment. In Caroline County professional development activities have focused on the alignment of instructional practices and assessments with the VSC. Dorchester County is implementing reading programs such as Houghton Mifflin's *A Nation's Choice* (elementary reading program), *Success for All*, and the Glencoe *Reader's Choice* program. To ensure alignment with the VSC, Dorchester County focused professional development on these programs with specific emphasis on their alignment.

Other counties have provided professional development specific to the core reading programs or targeted interventions that they are implementing. For example, Carroll County has trained a total of 35 teachers as *Wilson Reading Tutors*. Allegany County provides high quality professional development to support the implementation of its core reading program, emphasizing the five areas of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).

Reading First

Several school systems are implementing *Reading First* models to improve reading performance including Baltimore, Calvert, Dorchester, and Somerset Counties (other school systems are implementing Reading First however; this was not indicated in the *Summary of Success*). Baltimore County is implementing Reading First in five elementary schools and simultaneously implementing the research-based *Assessment Intervention Model* to expand the positive impact of *Reading First* strategies by promoting ongoing assessment, early identification, and support for students who are at risk of reading failure. Calvert County is using the *Three Tier Intervention Program* (a *Reading First* model) in each elementary school. Dorchester and Somerset Counties have adopted core reading programs and are implementing them through the *Reading First* format.

Reading Specialists

In their summaries, a few counties have indicated that they have hired reading specialists to help improve student achievement. Allegany County has hired reading (and math) specialists to work in the middle schools. These individuals provide data analysis, job-embedded professional development, and coaching/mentoring. In Caroline County,

specialists provide assistance to schools and staff with program implementation, intervention strategies, and data analysis of formative assessments to support achievement for all students and subgroups. Queen Anne's County employs reading specialists in each school.

Expansion of Reading Block

Some school systems reported expanding the time allotment for reading instruction as a strategy to increase reading performance. St. Mary's County, for example, has implemented a new elementary schedule which assures 135 minutes of reading for every student from kindergarten through fifth grade. At the middle school level, St. Mary's County has adjusted its schedule so that each student in grade 6 receives a double period of language arts (approximately 90 minutes total).

Mathematics: 2005 Data Summary

Third graders also improved in mathematics, although the increase in proficiency was not as great as in reading. Overall, third graders improved by 11.7 percentage points in mathematics (from 65.1% to 76.8% proficient). Lower performing subgroups have made substantial gains on the third grade MSA in mathematics, closing the achievement gaps somewhat. As in reading, Limited English Proficient students in third grade made the largest gains in mathematics, improving 17.5 percentage points (from 38.2% to 55.7% proficient). While students receiving special education continue to be the lowest-performing subgroup on the third grade mathematics MSA, they did experience an improvement of 12.4 percentage points (from 37.1% to 49.5% proficient), slightly greater improvement than that of third grade students overall. Third grade students in other underperforming subgroups also made substantial gains in mathematics that were larger than in the aggregate: students receiving free or reduced meals (an increase of 17.0 percentage points), Hispanic students (16.5 points), African American students (16.4 points), and American Indian students (16.1 points).

Overall, fifth graders improved by 14.2 percentage points in mathematics (from 55.0% to 69.2% proficient). Lower performing subgroups have made substantial gains on the fifth grade MSA in mathematics, closing the achievement gaps somewhat. As with third graders, while fifth-grade students receiving special education continue to be the lowest-performing subgroup on the mathematics MSA, they did experience an improvement (12.7 percentage points, from 23.3% to 36.0% proficient). However, unlike third graders, fifth graders receiving special education did not improve by a greater margin than students overall, and thus the achievement gap did not close for these students. Likewise, Limited English Proficient students, while improving (by 9.5 percentage points, from 29.2% to 38.7% proficient), did not improve more than all students overall, and thus the achievement gap did not close for these students. Fifth grade students in other underperforming subgroups did make substantial improvement in mathematics, in greater

amounts than students overall: African American students made the largest gains (17.8 percentage points, from 35.0% to 52.8% proficient). Fifth grade students receiving free or reduced meals, Hispanic students, and American Indian students, whose performance increased by 17.6, 15.1, and 14.3 percentage points, respectively, also closed the achievement gap in mathematics.

While their performance on the mathematics MSA was again lower than on the reading test, eighth graders in general experienced greater gains in mathematics, improving by 12.0 percentage points (from 39.7% to 51.7% proficient). As was not true in the case of reading, all subgroups experienced gains in 8th grade mathematics. Students receiving special education continue to be the lowest performing subgroup in 8th grade mathematics. While they did improve 8.7 percentage points (from 8.3% to 17.0% proficient), their increase was not as great as that of students overall, and thus the achievement gap did not close for these students. Other lower performing subgroups have made substantial gains on the eighth grade MSA in mathematics, closing the achievement gaps somewhat. American Indian students made the largest gains, improving 16.6 percentage points (from 30.3% to 46.9% proficient). Hispanic students, students receiving free or reduced meals, African American students, and students with limited English proficiency all made gains greater than did students overall (with improvements of 13.6 points, 12.9 points, 12.7 points, and 12.3 points, respectively).

Mathematics: Summary of Programs, Practices, and Strategies

Alignment of Curricula to the Voluntary State Curriculum

In mathematics, as is the case in reading, many school systems attribute their success to the alignment of curricula to the VSC. Anne Arundel County has revised and implemented pacing and alignment guides while St. Mary's County has engaged in activities to align their core mathematics program with the VSC and use pre and post assessments at all grade levels, one through five, with unit assessments at grades three through five.

Quality Professional Development related to Mathematics

The analysis of the *Summaries of Success* shows that school systems are using a variety of core mathematics programs at the elementary and middle school levels. School systems have developed professional development geared toward the implementation of the core mathematics program and have targeted professional development to ensure that implementation of the core program is consistent with the VSC. Several systems have included teachers in the process of aligning mathematics programs with the VSC.

Mathematics Specialists

Several school systems have hired mathematics specialists to help improve mathematics performance. In Garrett County, mathematics specialists deliver daily mathematics instruction to elementary students and help to ensure that an inclusive education for special education students is provided.

Behavior Modification and Intervention

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) is a process for creating safer and more effective schools. It is a systems approach to enhancing the capacity of schools to educate all children by developing research-based, school wide, and classroom discipline systems. The process focuses on improving a school's ability to teach and support positive behavior for all students. Rather than a prescribed program, PBIS provides systems for schools to design, implement, and evaluate effective school-wide, classroom, non-classroom, and student specific discipline plans. PBIS includes school-wide procedures and processes intended for: all students, all staff, and in all settings; non-classroom settings within the school environment; individual classrooms and teachers; and individual student supports for the estimated 3-7% of students who present the most challenging behaviors.

In the *Summaries of Success*, 10 of the 24 local school systems cite PBIS as one of the key strategies in maintaining school climate. Anne Arundel County expanded PBIS to 49 schools. Baltimore County reported that 32 schools at all levels were involved in PBIS and projected that 52 schools will participate in the 2005-2006 school year. PBIS is being implemented in 5 schools in Carroll County and 5 additional schools have completed professional development related to PBIS. Allegany, Calvert, Garrett, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties also report implementing PBIS.

Character Education

Character Education is an intentional process of fostering character development by integrating the teaching of cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral skills into all aspects of school life. It assists students to develop qualities that enable them to treat themselves and others with respect and compassion, to act with integrity in their ethical lives, and to strive for excellence in all their pursuits.

The review of the local *Summaries of Success* shows that six school systems report using character education as a behavior modification strategy to improve school climate. Programs such as Character Counts are being implemented in Caroline and Queen Anne's Counties while Carroll County has formed a Character Education/Discipline Committee. Calvert, Prince George's, Somerset, and Worcester Counties also report

implementing character education programs. All of these school systems report that character education has contributed to the overall improvement of school climate.

Alternative Programs

In addition to the implementation of PBIS and character education, several school systems have reported that they are providing alternative education programs as well as alternatives to suspension to meet the needs of students exhibiting behavior challenges. Calvert, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, and Worcester Counties report the use of alternative schools or centers as a strategy to manage behavior.

School systems such as Harford, Queen Anne's, and Talbot, are implementing alternative-to-suspension programs (in-school suspension). Talbot County has a highly structured in-school suspension program that provides services to students who are in need this type of intervention off the school campus and provides bus transportation. Carroll County is implementing an in-school suspension program called Community Learning and Suspension Service program (CLASS).

Carroll County has developed a unique relationship with the Department of Juvenile Justice, the court system, and the Youth Services Bureau to provide assessment and family counseling for youth. The Transition Project between the Department of Juvenile Justice and the school system provides for the needs of students who return to the school system from various juvenile detention facilities and results in more appropriate behavior by students upon their return to school. Caroline County conducts monthly meetings with a core team representing law enforcement, the Health Department, and Emergency Management Services to ensure that everyone responds effectively to a crisis situation.

Overall Strategies for Success

Extended Day/Year Programs

In the *Summaries of Success*, school systems identified strategies that they attributed to their overall success. Among those most frequently identified were extended day/year programs and efforts to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. Overall, providing extended day/year programs transcended academic and behavior modification classification. School systems such as Charles (reading, mathematics, and technology), used this strategy to increase reading and/or mathematics performance. Worcester County is implementing several extended day/year programs including after school academies with an academic focus in grades 1-8, after school intervention programs in three high-poverty elementary schools, and extended day intervention programs in two high schools. Worcester County also offers summer programs in K-12 to both enrich the academic program for all students as well as remediate those who need more time and provide on-going assistance for those who have special needs.



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