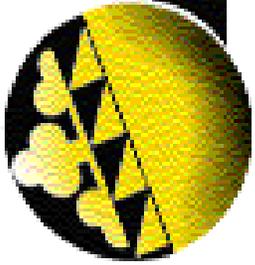


Visionary Panel

For Better Schools

Maryland State Department of Education



Achievement Matters Most

**The Final Report
of the Visionary Panel
for Better Schools**

January 2002

Report

Letter from the Visionary Panel Co-Chairs

January 14, 2002

Dear Dr. Grasmick:

On behalf of the Visionary Panel, we are pleased to submit to you the final report of our panel. Last year, you charged us with reviewing the record of Maryland's public schools over the last decade and with fashioning a vision to make them better over the next decade. We believe our report does just that.

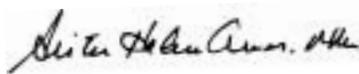
Our vision and the eight major implementing recommendations contained in this report reflect the contributions of more than 300 Marylanders. Our panel did not start with a view of the past or a plan for the future. Those came from the work of the citizens who gave freely of their time to study the past decade, to weigh the evidence on how school reform has progressed around the country, and then to form their own ideas for improvement. In other words, our vision evolved.

As co-chairs, we helped to guide the conversation, but this report was written by our seven task groups and their leaders. The ideas came from what they learned and what they thought. We are deeply in their debt for the hundreds of hours they spent on this effort, and we urge everyone to read the full reports of the task groups which form the main part of this report — each is a thoughtful summary of what needs to be done to make the state's public schools better.

The other point we must make is that our report is driven by the imperative that all of Maryland's students must learn more, and especially that the achievement gap must be closed between students of different races and economic circumstances. All students need to know more to survive in today's world. But, Maryland especially needs to educate better its poorly performing students, many of whom are African American, Hispanic, and immigrant. The numbers of students from these diverse racial and ethnic groups are growing fast, and they will soon comprise the majority of students in Maryland. Many minority students are doing well in school, but a disproportionate number are not. Maryland's economic and social future is at risk if we do not urgently improve their academic achievement.

It has been a pleasure for us to serve as co-chairs of this outstanding group of people, and we thank you for that honor. We also would like to thank George Funaro for his knowledge and steady direction of the work of the task groups and panel. We could not have succeeded without him. And to our co-editors, Teresa Knott and Nan Mulqueen, who made our deliberations come alive in words, thank you. We are also deeply indebted to the department staff who contributed so much to this effort.

Sincerely,



Sister Helen Amos



John "Jack" Jennings

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Editorial Note

Parts I & II — Our Vision & Summary Recommendations

Our Vision and eight recommendations presented therein thematically reflect the beliefs of the Visionary Panel's task groups. The Vision, in general, and the Summary Recommendations, in particular, use wording taken directly from various task group reports. The bracketed references at the end indicate the task group from which the statement was derived. Some editing and paraphrasing was necessary for better coherence and transition.

Part III — The Reports of the Task Groups

The main body of the Final Report is the presentation of all seven task group reports in their entirety. The Panel believes that each report is capable of standing alone in its import and meaning. Therefore, the reader is urged to examine carefully each report and its specific recommendations and strategies. It should also be noted that several studies are referenced in Parts I and II and throughout the individual task group reports, each of which proved invaluable in task group deliberations and decision making. The reports include:

The Redesign of Teacher Education, MHEC/MSDE, 1995

Minority Achievement in Maryland, MSDE, 1998

Every Child Achieving, MSDE, 1999

Part I: Our Vision

Where We Are & Where We Need to Be

It is a pivotal time for education in Maryland. Just this month, *Education Week* named the state #1 in the nation in standards and accountability. It is Maryland's second consecutive title-holding year.

The recognition is well deserved. Maryland has spent the last 10 years establishing and refining rigorous academic standards, aligned assessments, and accountability for results. These three interlocking pieces — school reform's tripod — lay the critical foundation for student achievement.

But issuing standards alone will not yield students who can meet them, just as administering tests alone will not produce students who can pass them. Accountability clarifies where we need to be, not how we're supposed to get there.

And even a cursory look at student performance data across the state reveals that Maryland is not "there" yet — not even close. On the whole, student achievement has reached a plateau. And in every school system, significant performance gaps persist based on students' race and ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic circumstances, disability, and native language and culture. We can't possibly contend that we've delivered on the premise and promise of accountability — a high-quality education for every student — until *every* student meets our standards.

The Breakthrough

And so the state is poised for another leap forward. But *this* leap — this breakthrough — must occur not with laws and regulations, but with instruction — not in the statehouse, but in the classroom. Maryland's system of standards and accountability may have effectively raised expectations for all students, but good instruction is the only way to help all students meet them.

The tasks ahead are imperative. We must dramatically accelerate student achievement. And we must understand that doing so ultimately means enabling high-quality instruction — and supporting the teachers who deliver it.

The eight recommendations that follow in Part II of this report, then, can essentially be boiled down to one: *The state and local school systems must align every aspect of education — educators' preparation and professional development, policymaking, testing, curriculum, leadership, and funding — to support the classroom teacher and students.*

Transformation vs. Reformation

The Visionary Panel knows what every parent knows, what every student knows: there is no substitute for a good teacher. Teacher quality matters — *it matters more than anything else*.

So achieving the learning transformation we're talking about requires that teachers assume greater responsibility for student achievement. But it also requires that the state and local school systems assume greater responsibility for teacher preparation, development, and career-long support.

Specifically, the state and districts must commit to:

- hiring only qualified teachers and professionals and placing the most qualified staff in the poorest performing schools;
- ensuring that all teachers have access to a precise and challenging curriculum, one that is uniform in content and expectations and fully aligned with state standards;
- making sure all teachers have the technical assistance and support they need to translate curriculum into effective, individualized instruction;
- ensuring that the professional development provided to teachers is targeted to their needs and to the needs of their students;
- providing each teacher with a qualified principal whose primary responsibility is improving teaching and learning in his or her school;
- improving teacher recruitment, retention, and advancement by providing compelling incentives to prospective and current teachers;
- ensuring that state and district testing programs provide timely and relevant data that are useful for improving the classroom teaching and learning processes; and
- ensuring that instructional materials and technology resources are available to teachers to focus and improve their instruction, accelerate student learning, and facilitate data analysis.

While the responsibilities above fall primarily to the Maryland State Department of Education and each of the 24 local school systems, they must be shared by more people and in a more direct fashion than in the past. Maryland's political leadership, its business community, colleges and universities, and taxpaying citizens must commit to providing whatever it takes to educate every child to the exacting standards we've established. Without that practical commitment — entailing everything from money to organizational restructuring — reforms will most likely fail.

Of course, securing this commitment will depend, in large part, on the public's acceptance of this report's tenets. Therefore, we urge the Department to increase its outreach to all stakeholders (focusing especially on poor, minority, and culturally diverse communities), and clarify for them not only what the plan will guarantee for students but what it will demand of adults.

What must be communicated, as well, is the fact that the plan's recommendations are interdependent; that is, the effect of any one will be profoundly influenced, if not determined, by progress made in the other seven. Therefore, isolated or piecemeal implementation is no better than failing to implement the plan at all.

At the Threshold

We cannot afford to waste a single moment more in assuming the responsibilities outlined here. Each year that we *talk* about what we believe without actually *doing* it means one more year that we fail to deliver on a promise made to Maryland's students more than a decade ago. The state is poised to write another chapter in school-reform history. It's time to take up the pen.

Part II: Summary Recommendations

If the eight recommendations that follow are implemented fully, they will forever change the face of public education in Maryland, ultimately laying the groundwork for:

- establishing a statewide curriculum for every grade, in every subject;
- restructuring the certification and re-certification of teachers;
- redefining the role of the principal;
- establishing a shared system of accountability calibrated to the nature and level of the problem;
- creating an aligned testing system backmapped from the High School Assessments;
- eliminating the achievement gap; and
- focusing state policy on the most important beneficiaries of education reform—students and teachers.

1. Develop a statewide K-12 curriculum.

The state must develop a K-12 curriculum that specifies what students need to know and be able to do *in each subject, at every grade level* [Learning]. The state can provide an extremely useful tool to school districts — and classroom teachers — by providing a curriculum that is fully aligned with state standards and assessments. Such a tool does not presently exist, and many districts, particularly small ones, do not have the capacity to develop it on their own. A state-endorsed curriculum made available to local districts but not mandated for adoption will likely gain widespread use. The state should work with local districts to determine the most effective and efficient way to develop and disseminate this curriculum [Accountability].

Through a process developed by the state, local school systems must align the curriculum they provide to teachers with the state curriculum. While state and local curricula alignment is essential, the state should not mandate nor review those aspects of the curricula that fall under local discretion, namely textbooks, instructional resource materials, and lesson plans.

However, the state must build local school systems' capacity to translate curriculum into instruction by providing:

- documents that link standards and curriculum;
- examples of grade-level activities that may be used to teach the curriculum;
- model lessons and best practices; and
- professional development in proven instructional techniques [Learning].

2. Align K-12 curriculum and testing.

The curricular, instructional, and assessment programs of Maryland's state and local school systems must be closely coordinated, supportive of each other, and aligned with the Maryland Content Standards. To ensure the continuity of elementary, middle, and high school expectations, and to ensure that each, feeding seamlessly into the next, ultimately prepares students for the high-stakes High School Assessments, Maryland will need to re-examine instruction and testing at all school levels.

The complexity of coordinating all elements of an aligned system of curriculum, instruction, and testing requires a clear statement of the state's responsibility in this effort. The *state's primary role* is the development and administration of high-quality summative (school and system level) assessments that are used for making decisions about accountability. The *state's secondary role* is to provide assistance to local systems in the use of formative assessments that are fully aligned with the Maryland Content Standards and that yield ongoing diagnostic information about individual student performance. Formative assessments are intended to help teachers select the most appropriate instructional strategies for meeting each student's needs [Assessment].

The focus of a good assessment system must be improved student learning, and standards and measurements should be a natural part of the infrastructure supporting teacher decision making at all levels. The system should include a variety of testing and response models and provide information on the development of basic skills as well as information about the application of those basic skills in solving problems. Professional development must be provided for *all* staff to ensure that assessments are understood by all and placed in their proper perspective [Assessment].

Assessments are valuable tools to aid in instructional improvement, but they constitute only one element of the entire system. The state should strive for balance, encouraging the use of multiple sources of information for making instructional decisions about individual children. Ultimately, the state must make certain that its assessment system is comprehensive, aligned, and useful as a support tool for instruction [Assessment, Achievement Gap].

3. Widen the focus of accountability from low-performing schools to all schools.

Maryland's education system must meet a number of related challenges over the next 10 years. In particular, our schools must significantly increase achievement for all students; speed up the pace of academic improvement statewide; and close achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, family income, and other demographic characteristics. To help accomplish this, the state's approach to accountability must change [Accountability].

For example, while the current system is effective in focusing resources and attention on the lowest performing schools, it now must also provide more systematic and consistent recognition, encouragement, and guidance to *all* schools in Maryland,

including those that are neither especially low-performing nor making especially rapid progress. While the current approach holds each *school* accountable for results, it now must also more effectively engage local school districts and their leaders, as well as individual principals, teachers, and parents, in a system of *shared accountability* for results. While the current approach provides for interventions in low-performing schools, it now must also equip every school with the tools and capacity to be data-driven — to use the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) and other relevant data to guide a continuous improvement process. While the current approach considers the progress schools make with their students overall, it now must also consider the performance and progress of important subgroups of students, to ensure that none is left behind [Accountability].

Finally, a graduated series of rewards and interventions is an essential component of our strategy to help all schools make progress. Under this proposed policy, there will be many more schools than at present identified as making satisfactory progress *and* many more identified as needing improvement, including some that are relatively high performing but not improving each year. Consequently, there must be a more highly differentiated set of interventions and rewards, matched closely to the performance of each school/district and its respective capacity [Accountability].

4. Make every school accountable for the performance of every child.

Perhaps the most important variable in improving student learning is a qualified and effective teacher. Teacher preparation and certification must ensure that teachers are able to demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to promote student achievement [Teacher Quality]. Arguably then, the first level of school accountability resides with the teacher, together with an effective and capable principal who provides the leadership necessary to achieve instructional excellence across the curriculum [Leadership].

The accountability for individual teachers and principals must be based on an assessment system that yields timely, accurate, and relevant data on the progress made by individual students and groups of students from one assessment interval to the next. Gains in student achievement must be one component of an individual accountability system, not the sole component. Teachers must also be accountable for meeting standards for rigorous instruction, principals for demonstrating effective leadership, and both for effective outreach to parents [Accountability].

An effective accountability system must also be guided by a comprehensive school plan designed to eliminate achievement gaps and aggressively monitored by the school district. The plan must include a description of the measures that will be used and the process by which data will be collected and evaluated to measure change in student learning [Achievement Gap].

The comprehensive school plan requires, therefore, an assessment system at both the local and state levels that provides valid and reliable information that can be used to support high-stakes decisions. Data produced from the system should be:

- relevant and timely so that appropriate instructional decisions can be made;
- disaggregated to ensure information on the progress of every child;
- supportive of the establishment of different performance levels so that students can demonstrate high performance as well as acceptable performance;
- communicated to all stakeholders — including parents, principals, teachers, and students — in a user-friendly and easy-to-understand manner; and
- informative and supportive of the continuous improvement of school and student performance [Assessment, Accountability].

5. Certify only those teachers who can demonstrate high-level knowledge and teaching skills.

The state must create a comprehensive performance-based teacher preparation and certification system that is aligned with Pre-K–12 student achievement [Teacher Quality]. To be truly effective, the certification process must be flexible, developmental, grounded in content knowledge, and standards/performance-based. While allowing for multiple paths to certification, the process must ensure rigor through adherence to a common set of standards, as well as to the major tenets of the *Redesign of Teacher Education*, including the need for extensive preparation in academic content coupled with an intensive internship in a school classroom setting [Teacher Quality, Accountability].

To determine the effectiveness of universities' teacher preparation programs and give them a critical basis for ongoing program improvement, on-the-job performance of first- and second-year teachers should be assessed, summarized, and reported back to the institutions from which the teachers were graduated. An important indicator of program quality would be local school system satisfaction with evidence that preparation and certification needs are being met [Teacher Quality].

Support for teachers early in their careers is especially important. Local school systems should advocate modified teaching schedules and focused mentoring during the first three to four years of teachers' experience and should build the resources to facilitate such an advocacy [Teacher Quality].

Of course, in emphasizing the importance of *early* support, we do not absolve the state and local school systems from providing teachers *ongoing* support as well. Teachers must be assured professional development that is focused, continual, job-embedded, and career-long. On-site facilitation and individual guidance are needed as teachers plan and carry out professional development plans and certificate renewal requirements [Teacher Quality, Assessment]. Indeed, fulfilling the vision of *Every Child Achieving* — so vitally important to this state's well-being — is predicated on the strongest possible commitment to a vital professional development program for every teacher statewide. To provide time

for and access to this professional development, and to enhance the status of the teaching profession, state and local funding should ensure that teachers be offered 12-month positions [Teacher Quality].

6. Place more highly qualified teachers and principals in our lowest performing schools.

The state must address the quality and distribution of principals, teachers, and student services staff in low-performing schools and in schools with high concentrations of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Research has shown that the difference in teachers' effectiveness is the single most important factor accounting for differences in students' academic growth from year to year. *Minority Achievement in Maryland* (1998) recommended that schools carefully assign teachers because "teacher effectiveness is a dominant causative factor affecting student growth. Further, teacher effects are so cumulative that if a student receives two rather ineffective teachers in succession, the loss in growth is usually not recoverable" [Achievement Gap].

Therefore, intensive district-level training and ongoing support must be provided to teachers who staff these schools and to those who move from schools with low-minority enrollments to schools with high concentrations of minority students. To function effectively as a teacher or principal in Maryland today, job-embedded professional development must also prepare new and seasoned educators for working in schools that are more diverse [Achievement Gap].

Most importantly, local districts and employee unions should work closely together to ensure that local district policies and provisions of the collective bargaining agreement permit and support assignment policies needed to staff low-performing schools with the most qualified teachers and principals [Accountability]. Specific recruitment strategies and incentive programs must follow these agreements. Opportunities to work in such schools must be made more attractive and satisfying to excellent teachers [Teacher Quality]. And because research repeatedly shows that dynamic and competent leadership is particularly critical to reshaping low-performing schools, school districts should institute means for providing job security for principals undertaking high-risk, difficult school leadership challenges [Leadership].

7. Shift the focus of the principal from administration to instruction.

For all schools and students to reach their potential, first-rate teachers must be supported by administrators who are focused on instruction [Assessment]. Moreover, the strong instructional leadership of school principals is an essential component of teacher retention. Every school must have a principal who establishes and maintains a school environment that is committed to effective teaching and high student achievement. This key factor is critical to recruiting and retaining excellent teachers [Teacher Quality].

For these reasons and more, *the principal's primary role must be that of instructional leader and that role must take priority over all other roles and responsibilities.* What is needed is a

fundamental redesign of the principalship from a position that has traditionally focused on school management to one that concentrates on improving all aspects of teaching and learning [Leadership].

To accomplish this, every school should have a new position, that of Building Manager. This role must be separate from the assistant principal, who clearly must be part of the instructional leadership team within the school. The Manager would be responsible for such functions as transportation, school facility use, maintenance, business matters, and cafeteria supervision — all support functions that now fall to the principal [Leadership].

8. Demand full funding of existing reform plans designed to solve our worst educational problems.

It is a poignant observation that “There are no throw-away kids.” Indeed, it would be unconscionable for state leaders to create high standards to improve student achievement, then turn their backs on providing students the resources necessary to meet those standards.

In 1999, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted a comprehensive plan developed by a statewide task force of educators, business leaders, and community members to ensure that no child, regardless of his or her circumstances, would be left behind in our movement toward higher standards. This plan, *Every Child Achieving*, lays out a detailed and comprehensive process that, when properly implemented, will minimize the possibility of any child being denied the high-quality education envisioned in the Maryland School Performance Program. In a recent report, Achieve, Inc., a national organization consisting of governors and top corporate executives, called *Every Child Achieving* “the most thoughtful intervention plan in the country.”

Ironically, however, the resources to implement the recommendations of *Every Child Achieving* have not been forthcoming at a level that even approaches the amount recommended. Such a failure cannot be allowed to continue, particularly as Maryland’s students move inexorably toward the high-stakes High School Assessments, which, in 2007, will determine whether or not students graduate.

The State of Maryland has a constitutional responsibility to provide adequate resources for public education, and this obligation clearly extends as well to the 23 counties and Baltimore City. We face months of debate on the issue of adequacy, but we must push for the full funding of *Every Child Achieving*.

The citizens of the state must speak unequivocally on this issue and demand the political courage of state and local leaders to provide the needed resources to ensure that the goal of educational reform in Maryland is realized: high-quality education for every student in every school and school system in the state [Leadership, Teacher Quality, Assessment, Accountability, Achievement Gap, Learning, Public Support].

Funding Matters

Of course, implementing the recommendations in this report will require a considerable amount of money. The Visionary Panel did not directly address securing this money, as we did not want to duplicate the work of the Commission on Education Finance, Equity, and Excellence (Thornton Commission). The Thornton Commission, established by the General Assembly in 1999, has conducted a comprehensive review of the state's finance system and made recommendations to ensure statewide adequacy and equity in education financing.

The recommendations outlined in this report, coupled with the Thornton Commission's funding initiatives, will give us the direction and resources we need to transform education and accelerate achievement in the decade ahead.

A Final Word

All key points made in this summary will be found in the seven Panel task group reports that follow. The reports' inclusion in this document is testament to their thoughtfulness, substance, and significance. We urge the reader to consider each report carefully and weigh all of its recommendations.

Part III: Task Group Reports

- **Accountability**
- **Achievement Gap**
- **Assessment**
- **Leadership**
- **Learning**
- **Public Support**
- **Teacher Quality**

Accountability Task Group

**Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools
December 3, 2001
Presented by Michael Cohen, Chairman**

Introduction

Retrospective on the 1990s

Maryland has been among the first states in the nation to implement a standards-based system of accountability statewide. Based on the recommendations of the Governor's Commission on School Performance, its accountability system is highly focused, relying on a limited set of performance indicators, and focusing the attention and resources of state education leaders on the schools with the greatest needs – those with the lowest performance levels that are not able to make any improvements in student achievement. It also provides rewards to those schools making the greatest improvements in student achievement.

This approach has served Maryland well. It has helped to raise expectations for all students and stimulated educators in schools throughout the state to focus on helping students reach the very challenging standards set by MSPAP. It has demonstrated convincingly that a system of challenging standards, aligned assessments and accountability for results can and must be a key component of any comprehensive strategy for improving achievement for all students in the state. Most significantly, it has helped bring about steady gains in student achievement over the past decade.

However, the challenges of the coming decade are significantly greater than the progress of the past. The knowledge and skills provided by a world-class education will be even more important in tomorrow's knowledge economy and diverse society than yesterday's. And, Maryland's schools are rapidly becoming more diverse, with a growing proportion of racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities – groups of students whose academic performance has typically lagged behind students from majority backgrounds due to a complex combination of community, family and school factors.

Consequently, Maryland's education system must meet a number of related challenges over the next ten years. In particular, our schools must significantly increase achievement for all students, speed up the pace of academic improvement statewide and close achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, family income and other demographic characteristics. To help accomplish this, the state's approach to accountability must change.

For example, while the current system is effective in focusing resources and attention on the lowest performing schools, it now must also provide more systematic and consistent

recognition, encouragement and guidance to all schools in Maryland, including those that are neither especially low performing nor making especially rapid progress. While the current approach holds each *school* accountable for results, it now must also more effectively engage local school districts and their leaders, as well as individual principals, teachers and parents, in a system of *shared accountability* for results. While the current approach provides for interventions in low-performing schools, it now must also equip every school with the tools and capacity to be data-driven – to use MSPAP and other relevant data to guide a continuous improvement process. While the current approach considers the progress schools make with their students overall, it now must also consider the performance and progress of important subgroups of students, to ensure that none is left behind.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

The Accountability Task Group combined its consideration of these two issues into a statement of core beliefs to guide its work.

- **Accountability in education is important.** A sound accountability system is essential to an effective system of public education. It provides the information necessary for educators, parents, state and local policymakers and the public to understand how well the public school system is preparing students. It focuses attention on areas that need improvement, and fosters the actions necessary for improvement to occur.
- **Maryland must provide for shared accountability.** While the school must continue to be the primary unit for accountability, there must also be mechanisms to hold individual students, teachers, parents and principals accountable, as well as school districts and the state.
- **The accountability system must help schools improve more rapidly and close achievement gaps.** The goal of Maryland’s accountability system should be to help all schools make continuous progress for all students. Along with other state education initiatives, it must help increase the pace at which Maryland schools increase achievement and close achievement gaps.
- **The accountability system must provide schools and communities with information about results and help to improve.** Maryland’s accountability system must focus on essential learner outcomes, provide schools and communities with timely and accurate information about performance, and provide consequences that stimulate improvement, principally in the form of the help and support necessary to improve.
- **The accountability system must include indicators of academic and other important outcomes of schooling.** While the primary purpose of a school accountability system is to help schools improve academic achievement, it must also incorporate indicators of other important short- and long-term outcomes of schooling, such as regular attendance, high school graduation, enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education, and gainful employment.

- **Achievement data and other indicators must be disaggregated to show the performance of various subgroups.** Public reporting of results and determinations of adequate progress must reflect the performance of all students, and therefore must be disaggregated by subgroup.
- **Schools will need different types of help.** Interventions and support for schools not making progress must be calibrated to the nature and level of the problem; more forceful and direct interventions are required for schools with the lowest performance and most severe problems.
- **The state and local school districts must help every school develop the capacity to improve.** In order for the accountability system to work as intended, every school must have the capacity to analyze and interpret performance data, develop and implement comprehensive data-based school improvement plans, and align curriculum and instruction to the state's learning outcomes. School staff must be given the support and training necessary to accomplish these tasks effectively.

Recommendations

To make a system of accountability a more effective tool for improving achievement statewide, the Accountability Task Group proposes that the state require continuous improvement in every school and district, equip every school with the tools it needs to undertake effective school improvement, and intervene more powerfully in schools not making adequate progress. Our recommendations are described in detail below. We see them as three equal parts of a coherent and inseparable package and urge the Visionary Panel, the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education to treat them as such. For *any* of the three recommendations to be effective and worth undertaking, *all three* must be implemented.

Recommendation #1

Institute accountability for continuous improvement and gap closing for every school district, school and classroom.

Rationale

At present, the state's accountability program focuses almost exclusively on the lowest performing schools in Baltimore City and Prince George's County. While this focus is necessary, to make more rapid progress statewide in boosting achievement and closing achievement gaps, we believe the accountability system must broaden its focus to effectively engage every district, school and educator in the state.

This is particularly important since the state will soon place new accountability burdens on individual students, through the requirement that they pass the new High School Assessments in order to graduate from high school.

Every school and district should be required to make continuous improvement in student achievement overall and in closing achievement gaps. Every educator should be held accountable for measurable increases in the achievement of his or her students.

The current system does not appropriately mesh school and district accountability. The twenty-four local school districts in Maryland operate the schools, hire and fire teachers and principals, organize instruction, and provide more than half of the financing for public schools. While the individual school must continue to be the primary unit for improvement, the local school district must be the primary agent of accountability.

The state can effectively accomplish this, without reducing its proper concern with the most severely troubled schools, by building on the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP) through the following action steps:

- **Classify each school and district on the basis of both performance and progress, and report such designations publicly.** School improvement teams, administrators, parents and the public will benefit from knowing clearly how well each school performs relative to state standards, and whether it is improving over time. This approach will provide a better balance between *performance* and *progress* in the state accountability system, recognizing high levels of achievement while more strongly encouraging improvement. We also believe the proposed rankings will help improve public understanding of the overall performance and ranking of each school and district, providing informal but very important incentives for improvement to the entire school community.
- **Set performance progress targets for each school and each school district.** The state should set reasonable and attainable short-term (one- to three-year time spans) progress targets for increases in the percentage of students reaching state standards, for each school and for each district. These targets must be achievable, but must also require greater annual gains than have been achieved over the past decade. Targets would be calculated individually for each school, factoring in the gap between the current performance levels and minimal state standards, while recognizing that all schools, even those above state standards, should be expected to make progress with all students and subgroups. With the statewide application of a uniform system of targets, schools would more clearly understand both their challenges and their accomplishments and could plan accordingly.

The state must pay particular attention to high schools as it develops a new performance index and performance targets. In addition to incorporating new high school assessments in the School Performance Index, the state should use additional measures – at least for public reporting and diagnostic purposes – such as high school graduation rates; indicators of postsecondary enrollment, persistence and success; and surveys of recent graduates to determine how they view the adequacy of their high school preparation.

- **Set performance achievement designations for each school and district.** School improvement teams and administrators would find the assignment of multiple performance achievement designations for schools throughout the performance spectrum helpful in providing more information for planning. This information will aid in identifying performance achievement targets and will

facilitate an understanding of the work accomplished and the work ahead for each school.

States such as North Carolina and Texas, which have produced significant achievement gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress, formally recognize varying levels of achievement among schools and districts by combining school performance information on a number of indicators (e.g., for reading and math achievement in a number of different grades) into an overall, easily understood assessment of school performance. Schools or districts are placed into categories such as Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable or Academically Unacceptable. For Maryland, we recommend establishing additional performance categories, reflecting performance between Reconstitution-Eligible and Satisfactory, and Above Satisfactory.

- **Set district and school progress targets for population subgroups as well as for the school and district as a whole.** In order to ensure that achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, poverty, language and disability are addressed, progress targets for each school and district should include targets for improving the performance of subgroups of students, as well as for the school or district as a whole. The state should require progress for each distinct subgroup (by race, ethnicity, poverty, language and disability), and no school should be considered to be making satisfactory progress if particular subgroups of its students are not. Similarly, no school or district should receive a high-level achievement designation if there are significant achievement gaps, even if its overall achievement is high. In addition, disaggregated student achievement data for each school and district, reflecting the performance and progress of students in each group, should be reported publicly and disseminated widely to parents and the public.
- **Develop the tools necessary to hold local school districts accountable for the progress and performance of LEP students and students with disabilities.** It is essential that *all* students be included in the state assessment and accountability system. However, there are special issues that must be addressed in order to include fully LEP students and students with disabilities. For example, there are frequently too few students of either category in a school to disaggregate and analyze achievement data meaningfully for these groups. Therefore, while continuing to hold each school accountable (when statistically appropriate), the state should also hold school districts ultimately accountable for the achievement of LEP students and students with disabilities.

In addition, certain special education students receive accommodations which enable them to participate in state assessments, but which also invalidate the assessments in whole or in part, particularly in reading and math. Therefore, the Maryland State Department of Education should work over the coming years to develop additional indicators of student achievement, appropriate for students whose MSPAP scores are invalid or who participate in alternative assessments, to be included in the SPI for schools and districts.

- **Require local school districts to hold individual educators, including teachers and principals, accountable for measurable increases in student achievement.** The accountability for individual teachers and principals must be based on “value added” measures; i.e., on progress students make over time. This approach requires an assessment system that yields timely, accurate and relevant data on the progress made by individual students and groups of students from one assessment interval to the next. Pretests, which are necessary for value-added approaches, must be aligned with the curriculum, standards and subsequent assessments, and must yield valid diagnostic information that can be used for instructional purposes.

Gains in student achievement must be one component of an individual accountability system, not the sole component. Teachers must also be accountable for meeting standards for rigorous instruction, principals for demonstrating effective leadership, and both for effective outreach to parents.

Local school districts have the primary responsibility for developing and implementing accountability measures for individual teachers, principals and other district employees. The state must be responsible for providing the overall framework for individual accountability systems, identifying models and tools for local consideration and use. The state must also be responsible for helping ensure that beginning teachers come to the classroom well prepared, by working with institutions of higher education, and through its licensure system. Poorly prepared and unqualified teachers cannot effectively be held accountable for high-quality performance.

- **Clarify the expectations of local school districts, and be a partner in helping local school boards, superintendents and their staffs meet them.** Ultimately, each local district must be held accountable for the performance of all of its students and schools. Specifically, the local school board and superintendent are responsible for (1) aligning curriculum, instructional practices and staff development to state standards; (2) taking the necessary corrective actions and interventions, including redirecting resources into more effective uses, where performance is low or progress inadequate; and, (3) determining the areas in which it most needs assistance from the state in order to fulfill these responsibilities.

In turn, the state should serve as a resource and support to meet the identified needs of individual school districts, and provide them with the financial resources and technical support they need. School districts must also be given adequate flexibility in the use of funds and freedom from unneeded regulations, paperwork and control, so that obstacles to increased achievement and accountability for schools and employees are eliminated.

Recommendation #2

Give every school the support to develop and implement sound improvement plans that are put into action.

Rationale

We know that our recommendations to strengthen the accountability system will provide educators and parents with better information with which to improve schools, and may well lead to increased pressure on many schools and educators. We believe that some level of pressure is an important component of the improvement process, but we also know that an accountability system that relies heavily on pressure without providing at least as much help and support to educators cannot work.

Yet in Maryland as in virtually every other state, many schools and educators don't receive sufficient and effective support. It is essential that the state, in partnership with local districts and other institutions, fill this void if the stronger accountability measures proposed here are to be translated into gains in student achievement. The state's job is to create a high-quality pool of research-based, proven tools, models, providers and other resources that districts and schools can use, largely on their own. These must incorporate current and new research findings and models, and the experience of local school districts and schools.

While this is a big job, it does not call for a bigger state bureaucracy or greater state control. Rather the state must assemble these resources by working through partnerships with local districts, institutions of higher education, foundations and private nonprofit organizations. It may also be necessary to reallocate existing and invest additional state financial resources in order to provide all schools with the level of high-quality support they need.

To help all schools, including those not making adequate progress, more effectively increase student achievement, the state should:

- **Provide a state-approved curriculum, fully aligned with state standards and assessments.** The state can provide an extremely useful tool to local school districts – and classroom teachers – by providing a curriculum that is fully aligned with state standards and assessments. Such a tool does not presently exist, and many districts, particularly small ones, do not have the capacity to develop it on their own. A state-endorsed curriculum, made available to local districts but not mandated for their use, will likely gain widespread use. The state should work with local districts to determine the most effective and efficient way to develop and disseminate an aligned curriculum.
- **Work in partnership with local school districts to provide schools with high-quality, ongoing professional development in the content areas, aligned to state standards.** These should include research-based professional development and leadership development programs and models.
- **Work in partnership with local school districts to provide schools with access to the data, training and tools necessary for continuous school**

improvement. We know that continuous improvement is dependent upon a data-based, coherent school improvement plan. Every school should be required to have one and review and update it regularly. School district staff should review every plan and provide timely and meaningful feedback to the school. However, we also know that, in a compliance-oriented culture, a mandated school improvement plan can quickly become little more than additional paperwork – hurriedly developed, filed with the appropriate authorities, and quickly forgotten by the handful of people who knew of its existence in the first place. If any accountability system is to lead to continuous, statewide improvement in student achievement, we must find ways to provide school improvement teams with the support they need to make school improvement planning the basis for thoughtful action. To accomplish this, the state must work in partnership with local school districts to:

- **Provide schools with timely data on school performance, an easily accessible database and the tools to analyze the data in ways that can appropriately inform instructional improvement.** These include needs assessment instruments, as well as data analysis and school improvement planning tools.
- **Provide school improvement teams with high-quality training in analyzing and using data for instructional improvement, and in developing comprehensive and meaningful school improvement plans.** To ensure that school improvement plans serve their intended purpose, school staff and school improvement teams need access to high-quality training and ongoing support from external assistance organizations with proven track records and to comprehensive, research-based models of school-wide improvement and the assistance to select and implement them.
- **Create a statewide dissemination and technical assistance capability to help all schools and districts, and particularly those in need of improvement, access tools for school improvement.** Local districts must develop the capacity to help their schools identify and effectively use research-based practices for school improvement, yet many districts themselves have only limited capacity to identify, locate and support these tools. The state should work with local districts, institutions of higher education, foundations, public education funds and other entities to identify or develop, disseminate, and, where necessary, provide on-site implementation support for research-based tools for school improvement. In many cases, these practices and tools are already in use by some districts, and could easily be made available to others. At other times, it may be necessary to identify tools or programs elsewhere, and help develop local capacity for their use.

As part of this effort, the state should provide each local district with a state contact team that works directly with the district to broker technical and financial resources and to provide other support as needed. It should also help local districts establish Field Implementation Teams responsible for assisting schools in need of improvement to identify, access and use research-based tools.

- **Work in partnership with local school districts to ensure that schools have the instructional resources and other tools necessary to help limited-English proficient students reach challenging state standards.** In particular, there must be a concerted effort to ensure an adequate supply and distribution of well-prepared, highly qualified teachers for LEP students. Extra steps must also be taken to ensure that communication between the schools and parents of LEP students is effective. This means that important materials must be translated into a language understood by parents, and that the school has ready access to qualified and certified translators in order to facilitate effective communication.

Recommendation #3

Implement a graduated system of interventions and rewards for all schools and districts — including a strengthened process for school and school district reconstitution — based on their classification according to both progress and performance.

Rationale

A graduated series of rewards and interventions is an essential component of our strategy of helping all schools make progress, not just the lowest performing schools. Under this proposed policy, there will be many more schools than at present identified as making satisfactory progress and many more identified as needing improvement, including some that are relatively high performing but not improving each year. Consequently, there must be a more highly differentiated set of interventions, including rewards and recognition of progress, matched to the severity of each school/district situation and its respective capacity. Each district bears primary responsibility for implementing the necessary interventions in its schools. The state will be responsible for helping to build an infrastructure (e.g., research-based tools, new capacity) to support local intervention and, as at present, for reconstituting the lowest performing schools and districts.

However, the reconstitution process as currently operated is not as predictable, transparent and effective as needed. The schools that are identified as reconstitution-eligible are not necessarily those with the lowest achievement in the district, and the achievement levels necessary to be removed from the reconstitution-eligible list change annually because they are tied to student achievement levels statewide. Further, schools identified as reconstitution-eligible are given too long to develop and implement new improvement plans, and too little help in light of their typically limited capacity. Consequently, the schools identified as reconstitution-eligible face an uncertain future with little clear prospect of getting off the reconstitution-eligible list, and little prospect of making substantial improvements. The students in those schools face the prospect of continued low achievement throughout their schooling career.

In addition, the State Board of Education lacks the legal authority necessary to address the problems of persistently low-performing districts, and, where necessary, to remove or otherwise intervene in local school boards that have failed to fulfill their responsibilities for improving student achievement.

- **Provide financial rewards and recognition to schools that make the most substantial gains in student achievement.** Schools that meet or exceed their targets for improving student achievement, including by closing achievement gaps, should receive financial rewards, comparable in size to rewards currently provided by the state. Because the proposed new accountability system would set targets for all schools in the state, the funding for this program may need to grow to accommodate the number of schools that earn rewards. The intent here is to create modest financial rewards to improving schools, which can be used to support further improvements and which recognize the schools' achievement.
- **Provide recognition to consistently high-performing, and consistently progressing, schools.** For schools that are consistently high performing, or that show significant improvement over a period of years by consistently meeting or exceeding performance targets regardless of initial performance, the state should create a prestigious award, akin to the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools Program.
- **Work with local school districts to match interventions in schools and districts that need improvement to the severity and capacity of each circumstance, with the objective of bringing about needed and sustained changes and improvements as rapidly as possible.** The first step in any intervention is a careful assessment to determine if the school/district has the necessary leadership, culture and staff capacity to work as a team to analyze and interpret data and formulate and implement a research-based improvement plan. Where the school or district is relatively high performing or failing to make progress for a few but not all subgroups, simply directing the school to high-quality, research-based tools and resources, identifying proven gap-closing strategies for groups with which the school is not yet succeeding, and providing minimal support from the local district may be sufficient. In other cases, where performance is persistently low and capacity more limited, more intensive and directed assistance will be necessary. In all cases, the interventions should proceed with a sense of urgency; if any school fails to make progress over a three-year period, progressively more intensive interventions should be provided.

We believe that the school improvement plan can be an effective tool for improvement, but are deeply concerned that in many circumstances it is not.

In the case of the very lowest performing and stagnating schools, the interventions may involve immediate changes in leadership and teaching staff. Current policy allows such schools (identified for "local reconstitution") several years to develop and implement improvement plans before they move from reconstitution-eligible to reconstitution. Our proposal would shorten that time frame considerably for schools that are found to have extremely limited staff capacity based on the initial needs assessment. And in no case should a local reconstitution school remain in that status, without making significant progress, for more than three years.

- **Provide districts with a pool of resources dedicated to helping turn around low-performing schools and close achievement gaps.** While the state should continue to bear responsibility for the resources necessary for school reconstitution, local districts must have access to additional resources to support the graduated series of interventions for other schools needing improvement, without removing resources from successful schools. The additional resources recommended by the Thornton Commission will assist significantly in this regard. In light of still-limited state resources, the state and districts together should look to federal funds as a key source of additional funding, through programs such as Title I, 21st Century Learning Centers (for after-school and summer school programs), Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program, and new programs to improve teacher quality through professional development.
- **Strengthen the reconstitution process for the persistently lowest performing and non-improving schools.** The state must retain the responsibility for determining when a school must be reconstituted and for providing the resources necessary to reconstitute schools. Where, based on a careful external assessment, school staffs lack the capacity to work together to develop and implement data-based improvement plans, necessary changes in school leadership and staffing should be made without delay. The state and district should work together to provide needed, externally facilitated and directed technical assistance, professional development and support, including the use of a state-approved curriculum, school improvement program (e.g., research-based comprehensive school reform model), leadership development, etc.

If a reconstitution-eligible school fails to improve after three years, the state should reconstitute it, using a range of appropriate strategies including contracting with outside companies or organizations to operate schools designated for reconstitution.

The state should work with each affected local district to provide sufficient financial and other incentives to attract and retain teams of the best qualified, most experienced teachers and principals in order to help turn around reconstitution-eligible schools. Local districts and employee unions should work closely together to ensure that local district policies and provisions of the collective bargaining agreement permit and support the incentives and assignment policies needed to staff low-performing schools with the most qualified teachers.

- **Enact legislation authorizing the reconstitution of persistently low-performing local school districts, including significant changes to governance and leadership structures that lead to the replacement of school board members and/or superintendents.** The State Board of Education lacks the authority to make necessary governance changes in local school districts with persistently poor performance. Such authority is necessary in order to turn around local districts where the school board is unable or unwilling to provide the leadership necessary for improvement. The state-city partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools is an example of how such governance changes can stabilize a system, attract and retain qualified leadership, and bring about significant gains in student achievement.

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Achievement Gap Task Group

**Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools
December 3, 2001
Presented by Dane Coleman and Min Leong, Co-Chairs**

Introduction

Retrospective on the 1990s

Since the issuance of the Report of the Governor's Commission on School Performance in 1989, Maryland has initiated a number of major policy initiatives intended to address its education reform agenda. In its report, the Commission created a blueprint for Maryland's education reform that has provided significant value in improving education for all students in our state. Among its recommendations, the Commission suggested that school performance and student achievement information be reported to the public so as to identify achievement inequities concerning subgroups of students within the public school system.

Maryland's accountability system has followed the advice of the Commission and, in each of Maryland's School Performance Reports since 1991, has identified and reported significant school performance inequities manifested in student achievement gaps among groups of students statewide. Twelve years after the Commission's report, the most important challenge is eliminating the still large educational achievement gaps for minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Maryland's minority school-aged population is growing. For example, African American and Hispanic students alone represent almost 40% of the student population in the public school system. In addition, the number of immigrant students and students who are limited English proficient is growing. It is anticipated that by 2015 no single group will represent a majority in our schools.

The issues concerning achievement gaps for minority and economically disadvantaged students represent a critical challenge to Maryland's future economic and social well being. The gaps are significant and exist in all school systems and in virtually every area of school performance and student achievement measures: scores on standardized tests, grade point averages, course selections, and high school completion rates. We also see differences in attendance and discipline figures, with minority students more likely to be habitually truant, suspended, or expelled.

Adding to our growing understanding about achievement gaps is recently published information clearly showing that many of Maryland's minority children entering kindergarten are disproportionately found to have significant gaps in key readiness areas. Further analysis of school performance measures shows little evidence that these readiness areas are

effectively addressed for many students as they move through their school years.

Eliminating the achievement gap is a shared responsibility among public agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Educators, parents, students, policymakers, business leaders, and community leaders all have a vital role to play. The kind of change we want to accomplish is not easy. Eliminating the achievement gap will require the utmost skill and effort from all of us for it to happen. It will require leadership and political will at all levels of government and commitment from all levels of education, with increased accountability. It will require a more expanded and direct role for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) through resource alignment and technical assistance to help school systems eliminate the achievement gaps as soon as possible.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

- **Definitions:** The Achievement Gap Task Group defines *achievement gaps* as the distance minority students are from reaching state standards in a range of academic and such related areas as attendance and school completion. The task group defines *minority students* to include race/ethnicity, gender, students in poverty, students with disabilities, limited English proficient students, and students in geographic areas where access to specific programs is severely limited.
- **Why achievement gaps occur:** Achievement gaps occur for numerous and complex reasons. Clearly, factors outside school control, such as parents' level of income and education, are strongly connected with academic success of students. Although poverty is a factor, it can't explain the entire achievement gap. Grade and test-score disparities are present in middle-class and wealthy families and communities, as well. Inadequate housing, high mobility, higher health risks, and unsafe communities are all factors in the achievement gap. But many factors well within school control also affect student achievement. In fact, research findings indicate that all too often, schools may be contributing to the low performance of many students. School factors that lead to disparities in achievement for minority and low-income students include: lower expectations, watered-down curriculum and low-level instruction, inadequate or poor quality resources, language barriers, low numbers of experienced teachers, and cultural and social learning differences.
- **Actions to eliminate achievement gaps:** All of Maryland's public school children deserve to receive a high-quality education. The work and deliberations of the task group focused on actions that state and local policymakers must take to improve the academic achievement of *all* students in *all* schools across Maryland. All students, including minority and economically disadvantaged students, must have access to challenging curricula and instruction provided by high-quality teachers throughout their education careers. Schools must eliminate tracking and give all children a real opportunity to learn equally rigorous curriculum and content. Students needing additional help in making the transition to more challenging curricula must be aided through intensive before- and after-school programs, Saturday classes, summer school programs, support classes, mentoring, and other similar strategies. High standards and accountability for minority

student performance must be expanded and maintained by MSDE. Access to high-quality preschool programs must be assured for all minority and poor children throughout the state. And finally, adequate and equitable human and financial resources are immediate requirements to eliminate school performance inequities and student achievement gaps that have been allowed to persist much too long.

- **Recommendations for policymakers:** Examining research and state and national studies, the task group focused its attention on issues of *equality, access, and quality*. During our deliberations, we synthesized our findings into five strategic recommendations and key implementation strategies. Central to our approach is a *rethinking of some of the basic premises about educating and improving the quality of instruction for all students*. The task group suggests that the five recommendations be a starting point for discussion and reflection about actions that are needed by Maryland’s policymakers and educators to eliminate achievement gaps.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

We recommend that legislation be enacted that requires the Maryland State Department of Education and each local school system, as part of the funding and accountability system, to develop comprehensive plans that contain rigorous annual achievement and resource goals to eliminate gaps in achievement and access to key educational resources in five years.

Rationale

The Maryland State Board of Education has called on MSDE and each local school system to eliminate the achievement gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students and their peers over a five-year period. This call to action will require local boards of education and their superintendents to establish formally the elimination of achievement gaps as the top priority within their strategic plans and operations, and incorporate related performance measures as part of their accountability system.

To guide this effort, a legislative proposal should be introduced that would require local school systems to develop comprehensive plans that direct the use of current and new state and federal funds available to school systems to eliminating the achievement gap and challenging *all students* to higher academic levels. Each school system’s comprehensive plan would organize and align research-based practices, instructional services, professional development, and resource distribution. The legislative proposal would include the following required components:

- As part of a *comprehensive needs assessment*, each local school system must take a long and hard look at why certain groups of students in their schools, especially minority and economically disadvantaged students, have a significant gap between their performance and the state standards.

- As part of a *review of program and instructional delivery*, each local school system must examine existing programs and activities funded under state and federal resources to determine their effect on raising minority student achievement and whether these funding sources are supporting programs that are aligned with state and local academic standards. Additionally, each local school system must review how *all* state, federal, and local funding sources are being used to provide minority and economically disadvantaged students with effective assistance to meet Maryland's high expectations and standards expected for all students, and if these programs are reaping the expected results.
- As part of the *comprehensive planning process*, each local school system must examine ways to eliminate any gaps in educational resources for minority and economically disadvantaged students, including gaps in access to qualified teachers and professionals, modern facilities, and instructional programs and supports, as well as the funding necessary to secure those resources.
- As part of a *resource distribution process*, each local school system must develop and deliver *equitable* and *inclusive services*, including highly qualified staff, instructional resources and materials, early childhood services, extracurricular activities, counseling and other student services, technology, and flexible and extended learning opportunities. Local school systems must devote resources and high-level administrative support to an aggressive initiative to eliminate achievement gaps.
- As part of *family and community outreach*, local school systems and schools must develop and implement a comprehensive preK-12 parent/family involvement program and annually evaluate the program's performance relative to its effect on eliminating achievement gaps.
- As part of an *accountability system*, each comprehensive plan must include a description of the measures that will be used and the process by which data will be collected and evaluated to measure change in student learning and other educational performance attributable to eliminating achievement gaps. Schools must develop annual improvement plans that focus on eliminating achievement gaps. Local school systems must aggressively monitor the plans.
- As part of the *local governance process*, each local school system will establish an advisory board that will follow the progress of the system's comprehensive plan and annually report and advise the local board of education on efforts to eliminate achievement gaps within five years.
- As part of the *state governance process*, the State Board of Education will establish an independent adjunct oversight body that annually reports and advises the State Board on the progress of schools, school systems, and the state in their efforts to eliminate gaps in achievement and gaps in resources within five years, and the extent to which they have met their annual achievement and resource goals.

- As part of a *research and development framework*, Maryland's PreK-16 Partnership will take the lead in identifying and developing research and case studies to learn more about possible causes of and effective strategies and practices for closing the gap. The research findings and case studies will be incorporated into higher education teacher preparation programs and used by MSDE and local school systems through ongoing professional development programs.

The blueprint for the local comprehensive plans should build upon two planning processes MSDE already has in place: The School Accountability Funding for Excellence (SAFE) legislation passed by the General Assembly in April 1998 and the Education That Is Multicultural (ETM) requirements under COMAR 13A.04.05. Specifically, under SAFE each local school system submits to MSDE a *comprehensive plan* on ways to increase at-risk students' success in school and to integrate state, federal, and local funding sources. Under ETM, local school systems submit plans that include strategies related to student achievement within each of the following required components: curriculum, instruction, instructional materials, staff development, and climate. Rather than having local school systems submit several plans that address the needs of diverse school populations, including minority students and economically disadvantaged students, the components required in the SAFE and the ETM plans should be incorporated as part of a broader comprehensive planning document.

Although local SAFE and ETM plans must address the needs of at-risk students and culturally and language-diverse populations, and present strategies for meeting those needs, *closing the achievement gap is not specifically required in either plan*. The state, therefore, should require comprehensive plans that address the elimination of the achievement gap.

The Maryland State Department of Education, in collaboration with local school systems, should take the lead in developing clear and rigorous measures of key educational resources tied to eliminating the achievement gap over a five-year period. The Maryland State Department of Education should convene a work group to identify the elements to be included in the comprehensive plan and an accompanying reporting system. In addition to MSDE staff, the workgroup would include representatives of local school systems, principals, teachers, parents, local boards of education, and educational organizations.

Recommendation #2

We recommend that legislation be enacted to fund fully and monitor the implementation of academic intervention, teacher capacity, and student readiness as set forth in *Every Child Achieving*.

Rationale

*Every Child Achieving*¹ must serve as the framework for local comprehensive plans noted in Recommendation 1. In developing comprehensive plans that focus on increasing the achievement levels of minority and low-income students, local school systems must focus on high standards, a challenging curriculum, and competent teachers. An effective local comprehensive plan must identify strategies for any group of students that is not succeeding in school or is not meeting grade-level proficiency, whether it is by race/ethnicity, English language proficiency, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, or some other common factor.

The Achievement Gap Task Group believes that *Every Child Achieving* addresses important elements in looking at educational issues affecting minority students and economically disadvantaged students. *Every Child Achieving* prescribes strategies to prevent student failure through academic interventions; to strengthen teachers' skills and administrators' leadership by improving educator capacity; and to enhance learning experiences for very young children to ensure student readiness.

The Maryland State Department of Education's 2001 budget contained a portion of funds for *Every Child Achieving*. However, the all-embracing components of a preK-12 intervention system detailed in *Every Child Achieving* have not been fully funded. Without the necessary funding, *Every Child Achieving* has not been fully implemented. Furthermore, the task group agrees with the State Board of Education that it is unreasonable to expect and demand success without providing schools and at-risk students with effective assistance to meet the expectations and standards. The task group strongly supports the reintroduction and passage of *Every Child Achieving* in the next legislative session.

To build upon the recommendations and strategies noted in *Every Child Achieving*, MSDE, through partnerships with families and community organizations, should seek ways to (1) expand pre-school/early childhood program access to all children residing in geographic areas demonstrating the greatest need and (2) provide access to full-day kindergarten to all children attending low-performing schools and schools serving large populations of minority and low-income students. Additionally, working in cooperation with local school systems, Maryland's institutions of higher education, national research groups, and agencies providing services to young children, MSDE should identify and develop research that can be used to improve the quality of programs supporting the readiness of young children.

The task group supports a strong focus on early grades. We also believe, however, that we cannot ignore students in grades 9 to 12 who need help. In a recent interview about declining math scores for 12th graders, Jack Jennings, the director of the Center on Education Policy, noted, "We're on our way to improving elementary schools. Middle schools have some way to go, but we have a long way to go to get high schools doing better" (Schemo, August 2001). According to the National Committee on the High School Senior Year, "the senior year is often a lost opportunity, during which many students let one-quarter of their high school learning time slip through their fingers" (U.S. Department of Education, January 2001). Working in cooperation with local school systems, Maryland's institutions of higher education, and national research groups, MSDE should identify and develop research that can be used to improve the quality of programs supporting high school students, especially ones geared to improving school success for minority and low-income students. These research findings should be incorporated into a final section of *Every Child Achieving* to address intervention and prevention practices and programs for raising minority high school academic achievement.

Promising models and practices for raising minority achievement do exist and should be consulted by MSDE and local school system staffs. In October 2001, the American Youth Policy Forum issued a report entitled "Raising Minority Academic Achievement" that studied 38 education initiatives that show promise in improving school success for minority students.

The programs and practices described in the report range from preschool through high school. But it is hard to see how these and other promising ideas can take hold without an increased effort by MSDE and local school systems to collect, synthesize, and promote successful practices. Therefore, the task group recommends that MSDE provide leadership in assembling information about promising practices for raising minority student achievement, and disseminating this information through the MSDE Website, workshops and conferences, and face-to-face visits with central office and school staffs.

Finally, the task group firmly believes that we cannot address ways to eliminate the achievement gap without also addressing the amount of time available for learning and how time is used. This includes extended-day and year-round schooling, as well as the central issue of time usage within the school day. As noted in the *Maryland's Response to Prisoners of Time* (MSDE 1995), schools “often apply time in the same way for all students, rather than recognizing that teaching and learning take place in different ways, in different times, and in different styles for individual learners.” Students who demonstrate appropriate mastery should also be able to move on to other educational challenges. For example, some students may leave high school sooner than the traditional four years. Others may continue only as part-time students. Students experiencing difficulty, on the other hand, should be allowed to have more time where necessary and to concentrate that time in a manner appropriate to their needs rather than follow a checklist of requirements driven solely by time or credit. Students who need additional assistance should receive it during the school day, before school, after school, on Saturday, or during the summer.

Recommendation #3

We recommend that the state accountability system be designed to include performance standards for schools that measure the increased access and genuine involvement of historically underrepresented students in high-end learning programs (e.g., Advanced Placement, Gifted and Talented, Honors, and International Baccalaureate).

Rationale

A fundamental premise of Maryland's school reform is “all children can learn.” This oft-repeated phrase is a worthy ideal, but it has become more a slogan than a belief. Rather than repeat it endlessly, all teachers need to develop an attitude that *all students* have talents and strengths upon which to build their learning and *all students* can be taught a high-level curriculum.

The enrollment of minority and limited English proficient students in academically rigorous programs is unequally distributed. They are underrepresented in college preparatory and in gifted and talented programs. A *de facto* pattern of tracking routinely used to organize students for instruction differentiates access to knowledge, content and quality of instruction, expectations of teachers, and classroom climates for learning between upper and lower tracks.

According to Kati Haycock, executive director of the Education Trust, schools create a self-fulfilling prophecy for marginalized students – they aren't expected to learn as much, so they don't (1998). At the elementary level, minority students and economically disadvantaged

students tend to be concentrated in low-performing schools where they are given less rigorous curricula. Claderon (1999) noted that this weak start is compounded at the secondary level where schools often relegate minority students to non-college bound tracks, leaving them with diminished opportunities for life success.

In too many schools, some students are taught a high-level curriculum, while other students continue to be taught a low-level curriculum. Students simply cannot learn what they are never exposed to, no matter how hard they work or what prior knowledge and skill they bring to the tasks. As noted by Sorenson and Hallinan (1977), students' opportunities to learn place a ceiling on what they can learn. Because students in top tracks get exposed to "high-end" learning materials and opportunities not available to students in lower tracks, they gain important learning advantages over students in lower tracks.

A special report of *Issues on Higher Education* (Burdman, 2000) examined data from 21 colleges and reported that students who had taken an Advanced Placement (AP) course in high school significantly outperformed students who had not taken the AP course but had the college-level prerequisite course. Minority and limited English proficient students are underrepresented in higher-level learning opportunities. For example, African Americans represent about 37% of Maryland's student population. Of the total number of all students who took at least one AP examination in 2000, 8% were African American.

To increase the representation of minority and low-income students in high-end learning programs, school personnel must focus on factors that contribute to effective recruitment, placement, and retention. Proactive measures must be guided by the development of appropriate interventions. As Haycock (2001) noted, "ample evidence shows that almost all students can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. But equally clear is that some students require more time and more instruction. It won't do, in other words, just to throw students into a high-level course if they can't even read the textbook."

The Achievement Gap Task Group suggests the following measures to ensure that *all* students are taught a high-level curriculum and have access to high-end learning opportunities:

- MSDE, in partnership with local school systems, must set performance standards and implement support systems that ensure equitable and successful inclusion of historically under-represented students in AP and other higher-level courses.
- MSDE, as part of its leadership and monitoring role, must work with each local school system to ensure that all students have access to and participate fully in a rigorous curriculum designed to eliminate the achievement gaps among students. Gifted, AP, international baccalaureate, and honors programs must be more representative of the diverse student populations. Consistent with this strategy, working with local school systems, MSDE must expand the data collection and analysis capabilities to identify access and performance patterns of all student populations in high-end learning programs.

- Local school systems must expand training for teachers and counselors to increase the number and percentage of minority and low-income students who achieve the state excellent standards and who successfully participate in high-end academic programs.
- MSDE and local school systems must increase minority teacher representation in AP and other higher-level courses.
- Local school systems must develop systemwide and school-specific activities that actively educate and involve minority and economically disadvantaged parents in the placement and retention of their children in a broad range of high-end learning programs.

Recommendation #4

We recommend the state adopt a strict policy establishing staffing requirements relative to full certification, experience, and competence in accelerating minority achievement toward rigorous academic standards for principals, teachers, and student services staff.

Rationale

To address the delivery of *equitable resources and inclusive services* across all schools noted in Recommendation 1, MSDE and local school systems must also pay particular attention to the quality and distribution of principals, teachers, and student services staff in low-performing schools, in schools with concentrations of minority and economically disadvantaged students, and in schools located in geographic areas where access to specific programs is severely limited. Research has shown differences in the effectiveness of teachers to be the single most important factor accounting for differences in students' academic growth from year to year. The 1998 report, *Minority Achievement in Maryland: The State of the State*, recommended that schools carefully assign teachers because "teacher effectiveness is a dominant causative factor affecting student growth. Further, teacher effects are so cumulative that if a student receives two rather ineffective teachers in succession, the loss in growth is usually not recoverable" (MSDE, 1998).

Research has shown that schools with high-poverty and high-minority enrollments have teachers with fewer years of experience, on average, than other schools, and have higher rates of turnover (Kober, 2001). These schools also have teachers who do not have strong backgrounds in the subject matters they teach (Kober, 2001; Haycock, 2001; Gay, 2000; Sanders and Rivers, 1996; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). In *Minority Achievement in Maryland at the Millennium*, a special report issued by MSDE and the Achievement Initiative for Maryland's Minority Students Steering Committee (MSDE, 2001), Dr. John Lee discussed the nature of teacher quality and student achievement in Maryland's five largest school systems (Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County). Dr. Lee concluded that "...schools are divided not only along lines of students' special and economic backgrounds, but also along lines of teacher experience *both between and within school systems*. These findings are disturbing, given that even after controlling for teacher salary by examining teacher staffing patterns within school districts, schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students are staffed by the highest concentrations of non-tenured teachers."

The Achievement Gap Task Group supports the adoption by MSDE of a strict policy of hiring and placing fully certified, experienced, and competent principals, teachers, and student services staff in all schools. We also acknowledge that any discussion of how teachers are hired and placed in schools must include teacher unions and other educational affiliations. More equitable teacher assignments are one measure that could sharply reduce the achievement gap. The task group also encourages MSDE and local school systems to adopt the following measures related to assigning teachers to schools, especially schools with high-poverty and high-minority enrollments:

- Teachers must be assigned to teach only in the fields and grade levels for which they are prepared. A teacher who is intellectually able, well prepared, and experienced in teaching a particular subject or at a particular grade level is not necessarily effective in teaching other subjects or other grade levels.
- When deploying effective, seasoned teachers from schools with low-minority or low-poverty enrollments to schools with high-poverty and high-minority enrollments, these seasoned teachers need to be aware that the techniques that work well with non-minority students may not work as well with minority students (Nelson-Barber, 1999). Therefore, district-level training and ongoing support must be provided to teachers who move from schools with low-minority enrollments to schools with high concentrations of minority students.
- Minority principals, teachers, and student services staff are underrepresented in many schools across Maryland (MSDE, 2001). The task group is not suggesting that matching the race of the student to that of the teacher will increase achievement. All students require the most proficient teachers, regardless of race or ethnicity. However, the retention and recruitment of minority educators represent a promising way to address school failure and alienation among minority students.
- Teachers must be provided more incentives to work in low-performing schools and in schools with high-minority and high-poverty enrollments. Local school systems should explore options to initiate and link principal and teacher monetary incentives to improved student achievement as assessed by standards and nonstandard measures.

State and local professional development must also address the achievement gap. Statewide, regional, and local staff development can become catalysts for changing school policies, programs, and practices so they reflect expanded awareness, understanding, and value of minority and economically disadvantaged children.

The task group offers the following suggestions regarding the training of educators:

- All local school systems must engage in an ongoing and sustained dialogue with their schools and communities on the achievement gap.

- When considering new professional development practices or programs, state and local staff must look for evidence of success with minority and economically disadvantaged students.
- Professional development must prepare new and seasoned educators for working in schools that are more diverse. Important topics in pre-service education and ongoing professional development programs must focus on cultural diversity relative to values, norms, and traditions, as well as differences in how minority students learn and make sense of what is taught.
- The Maryland State Department of Education and local school systems must evaluate the performance of professional development programs to determine their effectiveness in eliminating the achievement gap for minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Recommendation #5

We recommend that the state include as a core component of a comprehensive assessment system the use of multiple examples of student work that are aligned with the core learning goals and content standards as a means of determining student achievement and proficiency with the state-tested content areas.

Rationale

There is a growing body of evidence that student work must be at the center of discussions about standards, instruction, and assessment. Samples of student work must be used to provide examples and exemplars of quality work for classrooms, state assessments, and standards documents.

Student work, along with other student and school performance data, can provide essential qualitative data to inform practice and policy. For example, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University has established a *Student Work and Accountability Website* that explores how the examination of student work can be a core strategy in a system of accountability. The Website documents models of how the examination of student work can be used to inform instruction and improve teaching. Research conducted by the Institute has found that the examination of student work contributes to a common understanding of what good student work and good teaching look like and helps in developing more authentic forms of assessment that are more closely embedded in practice (Glass, 2000).

“Authentic,” “alternative,” and “performance” assessment techniques call on students to apply their thinking and reasoning skills to generate responses to the problems put before them. In many of these testing situations, there are multiple “correct” answers; in almost none of them is the student forced to select from a list of pre-specified multiple choice alternatives. Extended writing assignments, hands-on science assessments, student portfolios, and group projects must be further developed as alternatives to the traditional testing practices. The Achievement Gap Task Group believes that these assessment strategies, along with the examination of student work, can develop much richer insight into the skills and competencies of minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Incorporating the use of student work as part of the accountability system will provide expanded opportunities for minority and economically disadvantaged students to demonstrate mastery of skills and knowledge beyond paper-and-pencil tests. The use of student work provides other opportunities for teachers to monitor student progress in mastering specific fundamental skills and core subject area learning outcomes throughout the learning process. Additionally, the task group encourages MSDE and local school systems to adopt the following measures related to assessment and accountability:

- Local school systems should work with schools to establish protocols and standards for examining student work. Because of the versatility and value in using authentic student work, methods to examine it are being developed by many school reform organizations as professional development tools.
- No major educational decision related to students should ever be based on test scores alone. Testing experts caution that tests are useful measures of reform only if they are closely matched to state standards and curriculum. They also advise that in all educational decisions, test scores provide just one type of information and should always be supplemented by past records of achievement and other types of assessment data (Kober, 2001).
- In looking at evidence of success, local school systems and schools must review a variety of disaggregated data (achievement and assessment results, perception data, program effectiveness data, etc.) to ensure that all students are consistently meeting with genuine success. The use of multiple, informed data sources have the potential to provide a rich database and also to improve the credibility of the various sources.
- Norm-referenced standardized tests for evaluating student achievement should be used cautiously and in conjunction with other performance measures. As Geneva Gay (2001) points out, “more emphasis should be placed on evaluating students against their own records, with a range of improvement between different points of reference being the focus of attention, as opposed to performance at isolated points in time. This requires that schools and classrooms use multiple techniques and procedures, including academic, social, psychological and emotional measures, as well as verbal, visual observational, participatory, and kinetic means, to assess students’ knowledge and skills.” Gay notes that this variety is necessary to prevent any one technique that is highly advantageous to one cultural group from being used to the exclusion of others.

¹To ensure that students receive the help necessary to pass the high school assessments, in January 1998, the State Board adopted a resolution calling for MSDE to develop and put in place a comprehensive K-12 program of intervention assistance for students not succeeding in reading or mathematics or in one or more of the tested content areas. The resolution also called for increased professional development activities, as necessary, to ensure quality teaching. As a result of the resolution, MSDE developed, in consultation with a variety of stakeholders, *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner*.

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Assessment Task Group

**Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools
December 3, 2001
Presented by Cynthia Kuncl and Dr. Jerry Weast, Co-Chairs**

Introduction

Retrospective on the 1990s

The Governor's Commission on School Performance, appointed by Governor William Donald Schaefer in 1987, examined ways to measure and improve the performance of Maryland public schools and set in motion a series of actions that resulted in a comprehensive assessment system. Calling the need to improve schools urgent, the Commission, in its 1989 report, said far too many schools were not educating all of their children to live rewarding and productive lives and to contribute to the nation's well being. The Commission called for a vigorous educational system that would ensure that Maryland schools provide students with the opportunity to learn rigorous content and that the school environment is one in which students can progress and learn.

For testing, the Commission's report meant Maryland had to develop a state assessment system that had clear standards aligned with what is taught. The state subsequently had to develop a way to assess those standards across the grades through a variety of measures and include an array of accountability features, including a report card on schools, recognition for schools that demonstrate success, and intervention for schools that perform poorly.

Responding to the Commission's recommendation for an assessment system targeted to schools, Maryland developed the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) expressly to measure school performance. The test consists of approximately nine hours of written and constructed-response testing in grades three, five, and eight and produces valid and reliable school results, answering the charge to test the established standards as completely as possible at the school level. The assessment program has been in place for the past decade, providing trend-line data and information for schools and school systems to use in making sound instructional decisions. The program has undergone numerous reviews, many of which resulted in modifications and improvements in the assessment.

While MSPAP has provided school and school system results that are used for making decisions, it does not produce individual test results at the same level of confidence. Individual student test results are available for use by both parents and teachers through the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills/5 (CTBS/5) in grades two, four, and six.

The state's current assessment program at the high school level is the Maryland Functional Testing program, a program that was in place when the Governor's Commission issued its

report. Students are currently required to pass competency tests in reading, mathematics, and writing to graduate; however, these tests are slated to be phased out as new high school assessments are being phased in.

The High School Assessments are end-of-course examinations consisting of both multiple choice and extended responses. These assessments, under development since the mid 90s, are intended to raise standards at the high school level statewide. The tests are ultimately to become tied to high school graduation as early as the 2003-04 school year. Implementation has been slow and deliberate, ensuring that the state and local school systems look closely at the instruction students receive before they take the assessments. This will ensure that all supporting elements are in place and that students will have every opportunity to be successful when they take the tests.

The Assessment Task Group sees the High School Assessments as the focal point for the entire pre-k through graduation assessment system. All state and local assessments experienced prior to the High School Assessments should ensure that schools are able to prepare students to progress to the next level in schooling.

Implementation of *Every Child Achieving*, Maryland's plan for ensuring that every child has the resources necessary to meet the standards, is crucial to ensuring the success of all students on these rigorous assessments.

The High School Assessments alone were never designed to define the high school experience. Local school systems should go well beyond the Core Learning Goals and the High School Assessment courses to make certain every child is fully prepared for post-high school experiences.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

The following core beliefs evolved from discussions by the Assessment Task Group of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools:

- The curricular, instructional, and assessment programs of Maryland's state and local school systems should be closely coordinated and supportive of each other. The assessment program should be aligned with the instructional program. Emphasis should be on instruction, and assessments should not become major events in the school year.
- The assessment system should be designed to measure the Content Standards that guide instruction. Content standards should be rigorous and measurable at both formative and summative levels. Standards and measurements should be a natural part of the infrastructure supporting teacher decision-making.
- The assessment system should include a variety of testing and response models and provide information on the development of basic skills as well as information about the application of those basic skills in solving problems.

- Assessments should inform and support the continuous improvement of school and student performance. Professional development should be provided for all staff, including principals and teachers, to ensure that assessments are understood by all and placed in their proper perspective.
- Assessments should be viewed as only part of the total picture of school improvement and student performance. For all schools and students to reach their potential, first-rate teachers must be supported by first-rate administrators who are focused on instruction. Teachers must be equipped with a curriculum that is aligned, must have relevant instructional materials, and must receive continuous, job-embedded professional development.
- The Assessment Task Group defined its role as setting the parameters for a comprehensive assessment system. The Task Group envisions the convening of a subsequent group of experts in both assessment and policy to advise Maryland on the implementation of the Visionary Panel's assessment recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

All elements of the state assessment program, including Content Standards, should be aligned with the High School Assessment Program.

Rationale

Performance at the elementary and middle school levels should prepare students for the high-stakes, end-of-course High School Assessment program. All state assessments should be aligned with the Maryland Content Standards. Multiple performance levels should be established so that students can demonstrate high performance as well as acceptable performance.

To ensure this alignment, Maryland will need to re-examine existing instruction and tests and make certain the state continues to build toward high school assessments for all students. Modifications and adjustments will need to be made where necessary to bring about this alignment.

The assessment system should assess a broad range of learning, including content in the core academic areas as specified in the Maryland Content Standards. These standards need to be clear and specific so that students, parents, teachers, and the public understand what is expected. The assessment system should include a variety of testing and response models and provide information regarding basic skills as well as information on the application of those basic skills in problem solving. While reading and mathematics should be priorities in both instruction and assessment, these subject areas should not eclipse the importance of a broad instructional experience for all children. The state should continue to explore current cooperative efforts with other states and regions in the development of joint efforts related to assessment, curriculum, and professional development activities.

The curricular, instructional, and assessment programs of Maryland's state and local school systems should be closely coordinated and supportive of each other. The focus should be on improved learning. Standards and measurements should be a natural part of the infrastructure supporting teacher decision-making. All student performance measures and instructional program measures should inform and support the continuous improvement of school and student performance.

Recommendation #2

Both summative and formative assessments are needed to measure performance.

Rationale

Maryland's assessment system at both the local and state levels must provide valid and reliable information that can be used to support high-stakes decisions. Data produced from the system should be:

- Relevant and timely so that appropriate instructional decisions can be made
- Disaggregated to ensure information on the progress of every child
- Supportive of the establishment of different performance levels so that students can demonstrate high performance as well as acceptable performance
- Communicated to all stakeholders, including parents, principals, teachers, and students, in a user-friendly and easy-to-understand manner
- Informative and must support the continuous improvement of school and student performance.

2a. State-level summative assessment instruments used for measuring student or school performance and for accountability purposes must be of the highest quality.

Rationale

The state's primary role in assessment is in the development and administration of high-quality summative assessments that are used for making decisions about accountability.

Data used for making decisions on accountability must be accurate and must be available for student, school system, and state performance and must be provided in clear and useful formats to all stakeholders. Summative assessments do not produce diagnostic information and should not be confused with formative assessments.

As with any assessment program, an ongoing research program should support the continued improvement of the assessments to ensure that tests meet prevailing industry standards.

2b. The state should collaborate with local school systems as they implement their own formative assessment programs.

Rationale

The state's secondary role in the assessment arena is to provide assistance to local school systems in the use of formative assessments that yield ongoing results and are useful in identifying learning and teaching priorities for teachers and schools. Formative assessments produce diagnostic results related to individual student performance — results that can be used to assess children's progress so that teachers, parents, and others can make timely decisions about student interventions. Formative assessments at the local level should be aligned closely with state summative assessments to provide a clear, overall representation of student and school progress that will help focus instruction. The state's role should include providing assessment tools (e.g., item bank), technical resources, and technical assistance to local school systems in order to ensure a seamless, high-quality assessment system.

Recommendation #3

Maryland should pursue emerging assessment technologies that hold promise for improving, at both state and local levels, data collection and the scoring, analysis, and reporting of student and school performance.

Rationale

It is impossible to anticipate the availability and capability of future technologies; however, the state should move forward aggressively to access and utilize available and emerging technologies that will provide for the most efficient and most expeditious data collection, scoring, analysis, and reporting of student and school performance.

- While computer technology has been of growing value in the analysis and reporting of assessment data, Maryland has been among the nation's leaders in developing user-friendly, on-line tools for reporting information to parents and school personnel. Maryland should continue its groundbreaking work in this area. Both data websites (mdk12.org and msp.msde.state.md.us) provide useful and easily accessed information for both educators and the public.
- Computer technologies are increasingly useful in the scoring of written responses, opening up the possibility of computer-scored performance assessments. The development of computer-based scoring technologies can provide for more timely return of results for both formative and summative assessment measures. Maryland should aggressively explore the application of these technologies. Clearly, more rapid feedback to both teachers and students would better facilitate learning and teaching and help preserve the instructional value of performance-based assessments.
- The reporting of individual performance information in both print format and on-line has been explored by groups as diverse as the College Board and enterprises such as GrowNetwork. The result has frequently been diagnostic feedback to both teachers and parents that can be incorporated into instructional plans for both classrooms and individuals. Maryland should explore ways to build upon some of the available technology systems for use with the formative assessments in local school systems.

While summative assessments do not produce diagnostic data on individual students, summative assessments, in many instances, do produce individual scores. Maryland should explore the use of technology as a tool for producing more meaningful data for parents and teachers.

The evolution of assessments in Maryland's accountability system should continue into the next decade as the state attends increasingly to the task of building instructional capacity. While the state has been known widely for its assessment work in the past decade, the challenge in the decade ahead will be to build on that foundation. Assessments are valuable tools to aid in instructional improvement, but they constitute only one element of the entire system. The state should strive for balance, encouraging the use of multiple sources of information for making instructional decisions about individual children. Ultimately, the state should make certain that our assessment system is comprehensive, aligned, and useful as a support tool for instruction.

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Leadership Task Group

Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools

December 3, 2001

Presented by Dr. Michael Hickey, Chairman

Introduction

Retrospective on the 1990s

The Maryland School Performance Program has led the state's school systems into a place of prominence in the era of standards-based reform. In fact, the results of the Sondheim Commission's pioneering efforts, coupled with courageous and singularly focused leadership by the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education, have placed Maryland at the forefront of educational accountability nationally. These efforts have guided us through the first half of our journey and, while that has indeed been difficult, in some respects at least it may turn out to have been the easiest part.

Maryland now has in place a rigorous structure of *school* and *school system* accountability. The challenge that looms large before us in this decade is to take the critical next steps — student accountability and its obvious corollary: accountability on the part of both teachers and school leaders for the achievement of their students. With high-stakes accountability now a reality for all students, it is unconscionable not to apply similar high-stakes consequences to the adults in the system for persistently poor student performance. While schools and school systems are the primary settings for teaching and learning, teachers and school and system leaders are the *individuals* who must be accountable for the value they add to the educational process.

It must be noted, however, that accountability for student achievement must also be shared by a larger constituency and in a much more direct fashion than has been true in the past. Parents must become close partners with educators in the mutual pursuit of higher student achievement. Moreover, if education is the primary duty of the state, then government and political leaders, business leaders and their organizations, unions both within and outside education, and leaders in local communities must step forward and accept their responsibility to support fully the development and renewal of our state's most fundamental resource: its children.

The Governor's Commission on School Performance (Sondheim Commission) set forth three fundamental premises for its work. These premises, which have become cardinal principles of educational reform in Maryland, are:

- All children can learn.

- All children have the right to attend schools in which they can progress and learn.
- All children shall have a real opportunity to learn equally rigorous content.

Yet in spite of the unassailable rectitude of these principles, the level of student achievement across the state has lagged well below where it should be for *all* students. Continuous quality improvement in education means raising the achievement level of every student. Additionally, significant performance gaps exist among and between groups based on race and ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic circumstances, disability, and native language and culture. Resolving these problems means translating these three principles into educational practice that impacts every student, in every classroom, in every school and in every school system of the state, something that — up to this point at least — simply has not happened.

Finally, one of the clearest lessons of the past decade is the importance of instructional leadership at the school and the school system level. Without a clear, singular focus on instructional improvement and student performance, the needed educational change will never happen. The research is very clear in this regard. Instructional leadership is widely acknowledged as the key to highly effective schools. But once again, the gap between this research-based and commonly held understanding and day-to-day educational practice is overwhelming (Elmore, 2000, p. 9). With few exceptions, instructional leadership has been more rhetoric than reality. This is the challenge our work in the Leadership Task Group is committed to address: providing a framework for action so that instruction and leadership are, in reality, as seamless as the term *instructional leader* suggests.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

The following core beliefs constitute the Leadership Task Group's collective reflection on the true meaning of educational leadership:

- We believe that every child is a part of our legacy as educators to our communities, our state, and our nation. Each must be fully developed to his or her highest level, and we cannot afford to waste a single one.
- We believe that the primary role of leaders in public education is to establish schools and school systems in which the three fundamental premises advanced by the Sondheim Commission are everyday reality, because they are essential to the aim of public education to create and sustain a democratic society.
- We believe that the key to enabling true instructional leadership is by developing leadership capacity at every level throughout every school and school system of this state. This entails developing in every employee a recognition of, and commitment to, the unique role he or she must play in adding value to the learning experience of every student every day.
- We believe that the state of Maryland, its political leadership, business community, and indeed, every citizen, must accept responsibility for providing the resources

necessary to educate every child to the high standards established by the state and demanded by its citizens. If these resources are not forthcoming, school reform in Maryland, despite its progress so far, will fail, and we all will pay a far greater cost—both human and economic—in more and more young lives hopelessly wasted.

- We believe that standards-based reform, uncomfortable though it may be at times, is an absolute necessity if excellence in education is going to become a reality for *every child* in the state of Maryland.
- We believe that each candidate for school leadership must demonstrate a solid grounding in teaching and learning, as well as a clear understanding of effective school improvement strategies.

Based on the foregoing beliefs, we assert the following seven principles, which underlie our recommendations:

1. Instructional leadership is the primary role of the school principal. All other roles and responsibilities of the position are secondary in nature and importance.
2. Leadership is not solely vested in a position or an individual. Leadership for student achievement is the responsibility of every employee in a school or school system. Each must add measurable value to the learning experiences of every student.
3. If instructional leadership is to be most effective, the school leadership team must have sufficient resources and the authority to utilize them in the most effective manner.
4. The primary measure of leadership effectiveness in public education is student performance across the curriculum as evaluated by multiple and varied assessments and continuous progress on different measurement standards over time.
5. The primary responsibility for student achievement is a reciprocal relationship between educators and parents, one that must be carefully nurtured and attended to by both parties.
6. Political leaders, business leaders, union leaders, and the community at large must share responsibility for the effectiveness of the educational enterprise in a much more visible way, even though the primary responsibility for student achievement resides with educators and parents.
7. In delivering instructional leadership, leaders create true learning communities in their schools and school systems. These learning communities are characterized by:
 - n *Strategic vision*: Building an organizational purpose or mission that leads to improved student achievement and increased community satisfaction

- n *Participative leadership*: Creating a climate of involvement and empowerment throughout the school or school system
- n *Collaborative culture*: Using formal and informal methods to develop collaboration within the school and school system and with their respective communities
- n *Change and transition*: Preparing the school and school system and parents and communities to understand and to thrive in an era of rapid change
- n *Continuous improvement*: Forging a commitment, embedded in the culture of the school and the school system, to seek quality improvement in both processes and outcomes on an ongoing basis
- n *Community engagement*: Establishing genuine and enduring processes that lead to full participation by parents and the broader community in the work of the school and of the school system
- n *Systems alignment*: Establishing integrity among all elements of the school and the school system by assuring that all components converge to support directly the school's mission

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

The principal's primary role must be that of instructional leader, and that role must take priority over all other roles and responsibilities.

Rationale

The Maryland Task Force on the Principalship (2000) created a vision statement that called for the principal's role as instructional leader to have priority over all other roles and responsibilities. The Task Force further recommended that extraneous responsibilities that impede the principal's ability to fulfill the instructional leader role be removed as part of the principal's direct duties. We agree strongly with the Task Force recommendations. We call for a fundamental redesign of the principalship from a position that has traditionally focused on school management to one that concentrates on improving all aspects of teaching and learning. This means developing instructional leadership *capacity* among all staff at the school, school system, and state levels.

In a recently published, ground-breaking report, the National Association of Elementary School Principals offers the following cogent summary of what is required:

Having a first-rate school without first-rate leadership is impossible. Leadership is a balance of management and vision. There is simply no way a principal alone can perform all the complex tasks of a school. Responsibility must be distributed, and people must understand the values behind various tasks. A full-time, qualified school leader places student and adult learning at the center of all decisions in a school. In addition, effective leadership requires that principals have the autonomy to make decisions based on the needs of individual schools.

Effective leadership also depends on having the authority to hold people accountable for results. (NAESP, 2001, p. 11)

The NAESP document goes on to list six standards that define the essence of instructional leadership, standards that are fully congruent with the directions recommended in this report. Because the members of the Leadership Task Group felt these standards are highly pertinent to our report, they are included in Appendix A.

According to Jonathan Kozol, “The principal represents the heart and soul of every public school in America.” Changing the role of principal to one of true instructional leadership means changing expectations for the role that are deeply embedded in the culture of public education. Concurrently, we must begin changing principals’ perceptions of what is expected of them, as well as the perceptions of those to whom the principals report. Close linkage between the superintendent and the principals is a key element in assuring both school and system effectiveness. Parents and other members of the school community likewise will need to understand that the principal’s role as instructional leader means that the majority of his or her time will be spent on issues related to improving what happens in the classroom.

To enable this new role to happen, every school requires a new position, that of Building Manager. This role must be separate from the assistant principal, who clearly must be part of the instructional leadership team within the school. The manager would be responsible for such functions as transportation, school facility use, maintenance, business matters, and cafeteria—all the support functions that now fall to the principal. While these are important functions that must be performed, they are only at best tangential to the teaching/learning process, while currently occupying the majority of the principal’s time every day. This manager position could be filled by qualified non-educational personnel.

This fundamental change in the role of the principal and the culture of the school community will require commitment on the part of all parties and an adjustment to the necessary changes in the traditional patterns and routines that have become commonplace in most schools. It will also entail the development of all school staff to share leadership of the instructional process. Building such leadership capacity throughout every school and school system will necessitate strong and effective leadership at the system level by superintendents and boards of education, and at the school level by the principal and members of the school leadership team, by classroom teachers, and by support personnel. The practices of leaders in schools around the country that are improving student learning suggest that four strategies are fundamental to capacity-building: 1) modeling learning; 2) providing compelling reasons for others to learn; 3) creating a coaching environment for continuous growth; and 4) establishing strong parent and community relationships. In other words, schools must truly become what Peter Senge has defined as a “*learning organization*” (Senge, 1990, p. 14).

Strategies

- Eliminate current responsibilities that are non-instructional in nature from the job requirements of principals.

- Revise state certification programs and requirements to reflect directly the responsibilities of the principal's role as instructional leader.
- Create a position of Building Manager, which reports directly to the principal.
- Assign the Building Manager those responsibilities that are non-instructional in nature as determined by the local school system, so that the principal can concentrate on improving the instructional program.
- Remove organizational and procedural barriers that impede regular and effective communication between the principals as building leaders and the superintendent, as the leader of the school system. Linkages between these two roles should reflect the interdependency of each for the other's success and for the achievement of the school system's mission.

Recommendation #2

State and local elected officials must demonstrate their leadership by providing the human and financial resources necessary to ensure that every student meets state standards.

Rationale

It is a poignant observation that "There are no throw-away kids." Indeed, it would be unconscionable for state leaders to create high standards to improve student achievement, then turn their back on the needs those students have for the resources necessary to meet those standards. In 1999 the Maryland State Board of Education adopted a comprehensive plan developed by a statewide task force of educators, business leaders, and community members to ensure that no child, regardless of his or her circumstances, would be left behind by the rigorous challenges of the movement toward greatly improved performance on the part of the state's students, their schools, and their school systems. This plan, *Every Child Achieving*, lays out a detailed and comprehensive process that, when properly implemented, will minimize the potential of any child being denied the opportunity for the quality of education envisioned in the three fundamental principles of the Maryland School Performance Program. In a recent report, Achieve, Inc., the national organization comprised of governors and top corporate executives, called *Every Child Achieving* "...the most thoughtful intervention plan in the country."

Ironically, however, the resources to implement the recommendations of *Every Child Achieving* have never been forthcoming at a level that even approaches the amount recommended. Such a failure cannot be allowed to continue, particularly as Maryland's students move inexorably toward the high-stakes High School Assessments, which, in 2007, will determine whether or not students graduate. It has been estimated that in some systems it is likely that as many as 40-50% of seniors will fail one or more of the tests and thus be denied graduation. Should this happen, it will precipitate a crisis of confidence in the state's educational system, but also in the state itself. Beyond the educational impact, there are also potentially negative effects socially, politically, and economically for all of Maryland.

In Maryland, unlike most states, school funding is the sole responsibility of the state and local governments, while school systems are precluded from raising funds through taxes. Such a relationship is described in the professional literature as “financial dependency” on the part of school systems—and indeed it is. The state of Maryland has a constitutional responsibility to provide adequate resources for public education, and this obligation clearly extends as well to the 23 counties and Baltimore City. While “adequacy” may forever be in the eye of the beholder, the failure of the state to provide funding for the recommendations of *Every Child Achieving*, while at the same time moving to high-stakes accountability for all students, is clearly a failure to meet the constitutional mandate.

The citizens of the state of Maryland must speak unequivocally on this issue and demand the political courage of state and local leaders to provide the needed resources to ensure that the goal of educational reform in Maryland is realized: high-quality education for every student in every school and school system of the state.

Strategies

- State and local governments must increase their level of funding to elementary and secondary education. The establishment of high standards and high-stakes accountability programs for all students cannot be achieved without adequate funding.
- The State must fully fund the recommendations of *Every Child Achieving*.
- Legislation and accompanying funding must be put in place to provide mentoring programs for beginning principals. These programs must be delivered by experienced, effective principals with no other assignments.
- The General Assembly must put into legislation the requirement and the funding for MSDE to conduct annual summer principal academies designed to reinforce skills needed for effective instructional leadership.

Recommendation #3

Boards of education, both state and local, must provide the school leadership team with resources, support, and decision-making authority to function as true instructional leaders and to maximize student achievement.

Rationale

According to The Report of the Governor’s Commission on School Performance, “The most powerful incentive for a school staff would be the recognition of the ability of competent teachers and principals to use their own judgment about how to do their work to get the best results for their students” (1989, p. 22). Over the course of the past decade, this has not happened. Now is the time to make it a reality. To accomplish this goal, school personnel must have the power, authority, and status to make instructional decisions that favorably impact learning for every child and promote the professional growth of every staff member.

Educational leadership has always been a challenge because it requires exceptionally high levels of energy, dedication, and skill. Leadership has become even more challenging in recent years, however, as a result of standards-based reform and its emphasis on accountability for student achievement (Elmore, 2000). If instructional improvement is to become the primary expectation for educational leaders, then current thinking about the skills and knowledge needed for such leadership to be successful must also shift. Elmore states that, under the pressures of standards-based reform, “If public schools survive, leaders will look very different from the way they presently look, both in who leads and in what these leaders do” (2000, p. 3). School leaders need sufficient knowledge about research-based school and classroom strategies to develop or adapt a set of guiding principles and goals to keep the work of the school and every person in it focused on student learning (Hoachlander, Alt, Beltranena, March, 2001, p. 1).

Standards-based reform is currently driving instructional improvement, and in Maryland the results are encouraging. At the same time there are costs involved with such reform initiatives. These costs include, but are not limited to, personnel, materials of instruction, and professional development. There are also costs associated with providing school leaders, staff, and communities timely access to disaggregated student achievement data in a format that is readily understandable and applicable to school improvement issues.

Direct involvement in instruction is infrequent among school administrators at any level (Elmore, 2000, pp. 14-15), suggesting that ongoing, job-embedded professional development will be needed for current leaders if they are expected to transition effectively into the responsibilities of instructional leadership. After all, they were trained primarily as school administrators, not instructional leaders. Traditional preparation programs are often disconnected from the daily reality of life in schools, particularly the mission-critical work that occurs in the classroom. The challenge of preparing a new generation of school leaders will require that university-based preparation programs change dramatically *what* is taught and *how* it is taught (Bottoms and O’Neill, April, 2001, pp. 24-28).

Research is unequivocal in recommending that professional development should be viewed as an enterprise that spans educational leaders’ careers and is built upon close collaboration among school systems, universities, and other educational agencies. Professional development is most effective when it is job-embedded and thus relevant to the day-to-day realities and requirements of the school and the classroom. Effective professional development for exemplary leaders should not only be ongoing throughout their careers, but it should also serve as a model of life-long learning for teachers and others within the educational enterprise. McCay indicates that elements of effective professional development include: “...opportunities to work with principal colleagues on a regional level, outside the immediate local politics, pressures, and issues of the school district; peer coaching, including feedback; individualized professional development; translation of theory into practice; opportunities for hands-on application of the concepts being presented; and access to research and resources from local colleges and businesses” (1999, p. 43).

Strategies

- Develop and implement professional development opportunities that build principals' capacity for instructional leadership.
- Collaborate with Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to assure that principal preparation programs connect theory to practice and are aligned with adopted state standards.
- Require that all candidates for school leadership programs, whether from traditional or non-traditional backgrounds, demonstrate solid grounding in teaching and learning and a clear understanding of effective school improvement strategies.
- Aggressively recruit and provide quality training for underrepresented populations in leadership positions.

Recommendation #4

Local school systems should more closely link compensation, incentives, and evaluation to reflect more accurately the new responsibilities of the principalship.

Rationale

Local school systems develop compensation packages, career development activities, and evaluation processes. Changing the role of educational leaders as prescribed in this report will necessitate substantial changes in these areas in order to align them better with the new emphasis on instructional leadership. If educational leaders are to be held accountable for student achievement in a much more direct fashion, commensurate improvements in these three elements will be necessary.

Compensation is a complex issue, even within a small state like Maryland with its 24 school systems. Nevertheless the Maryland Task Force on the Principalship set forth a strong rationale for needed change in compensation packages for principals when it reported that multiple research studies in recent years underscored that two factors were making the principalship unattractive to both existing principals and potential candidates for leadership positions. These two factors are the impossibility of the job as it is currently configured, and the inadequacy of the compensation compared to the demands of the position. The leadership of the principal is of primary importance in insuring the success of standards-based reform. While other roles are important, the principal is the linchpin that determines whether significant reform that leads to improved student performance occurs in a school, and, ultimately, in a school system.

Finally, evaluation and accountability systems must be carefully aligned with the role expectations for *instructional leadership*, not *school administration*, as is currently the case in most systems. Designating the principal as instructional leader, but largely judging his or her performance on the basis of how well the school runs is both disingenuous and self-defeating. What gets measured gets done, as the aphorism goes. Why should anyone be surprised that instructional leadership seems always to fall to a lesser priority than school administration?

Strategies

- Develop a model salary schedule that provides compensation for principals that is significantly higher than the compensation provided to a twelve-month teacher.
- Change the Maryland State Teachers Retirement System (MSTRS) to provide incentives for individuals serving in the principalship (e.g., weighted retirement credit of 1.2 years for each year of principal service; average of the top two years' salary as base instead of top three).
- Establish a career ladder leading to the principalship and beyond based on options of choice rather than a lock-step prescription (e.g., teacher leader, department chair, assistant principal, leadership intern, principal, master principal, and various roles in system-wide leadership, including superintendent). Provide appropriate professional development programs to support these career development opportunities.
- Institute means of providing job security for principals undertaking high-risk, difficult school leadership challenges. These might include specific-term (e.g., 3-5 years) assignments with bonuses linking performance and accountability for results.

These four recommendations are straightforward in nature, but comprehensive in their scope, in that they will profoundly reshape the paradigm of educational leadership in Maryland in the years ahead. Standards-based reform is the freight train barreling down the tracks of education both nationally and here in Maryland. Leadership is the key to successful educational reform, but only if it changes dramatically in what is done and by whom. The role of leadership is not something vested in a single individual, but rather a capacity that must exist throughout an organization in order for it to be successful in today's complex and rapidly changing environment. Educational reform must work. The consequences of failure are unthinkable.

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Appendix A

Standards for Instructional Leadership

Standard One: Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.

- Create and foster a community of learners
- Embody learner-centered leadership
- Seek leadership contributions from multiple sources
- Tie the daily operations of the schoolhouse to school and student learning goals

Standard Two: Set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults.

- Articulate a clear vision that reflects the beliefs, values, and commitments of the school community
- Ensure that all students have adequate and appropriate opportunities to meet high standards
- Develop a school culture that is flexible, collaborative, and supportive of efforts to improve achievement of all students

Standard Three: Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards.

- Hire and retain high-quality teachers and hold them responsible for student learning
- Monitor alignment of curriculum with standards, school goals, and assessments
- Observe classroom practices to assure that all students are meaningfully engaged in active learning
- Provide up-to-date technology and instructional materials
- Review and analyze student work to determine whether students are being taught to standards

Standard Four: Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.

- Provide time for reflection as an important part of improving practice
- Invest in teacher learning
- Connect professional development to school learning goals
- Provide opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and think together
- Recognize the need to continually improve principals' own professional practice

Standard Five: Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify, and apply instructional improvement.

- Consider a variety of data sources to measure performance
- Analyze data using a variety of strategies
- Use data as tools to identify barriers to success, design strategies for improvement, and plan daily instruction
- Benchmark successful schools with similar demographics to identify strategies for improving student achievement
- Create a school environment that is comfortable using data

Standard Six: Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.

- Engage the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school
- Share leadership and decision making
- Encourage parents to become meaningfully involved in the school and in their own children's learning
- Ensure that students and families are connected to the health, human, and social services they need to stay focused on learning

From *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*. National Association of Elementary School Principals, Arlington, VA, 2001.

Learning Task Group

Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools

December 3, 2001

Presented by Bonnie Copeland and Dunbar Brooks, Co-Chairs

Introduction

Retrospective on the 1990s

Just as the 1990s got underway, the Governor's Commission on School Performance joined the nascent standards-based reform movement by issuing a series of recommendations governing school and school system accountability, such as establishing a comprehensive assessment system; collecting, managing, and reporting performance data; and instituting rewards and sanctions for progressing and failing schools, respectively.

Calling for “a method for testing student achievement statewide that measures fundamental, important things in the curriculum ...” the commission also set in motion the development of the Maryland Learning Outcomes (MLOs), the knowledge and skills the state would test in grades K–8, and the Core Learning Goals (CLGs), the knowledge and skills the state would test in grades 9–12.

By the mid–90s, the state had begun developing content standards, which, in clarifying *tested and non-tested* content for grades K–12, subsume the MLOs and CLGs. These content standards — completed in July 1999 for English/language arts, math, science, and social studies — specify what should be *taught* (not just tested) in every Maryland classroom.

Now that Maryland has established an essential curriculum, we must focus on simplifying its language, expanding its scope, updating its content, and helping teachers translate it into their daily instruction. This last point is especially important, for while accountability has effectively raised expectations for all students, individualized instruction will help all students meet them.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

Curriculum

- Rising student mobility and a global economy driven by technology demand consistency in what students will know and be able to do by certain grades. By the same token, increasing student diversity demands a certain amount of flexibility in how teachers deliver that knowledge and those skills and how students acquire them.

- By assuming a greater role in determining what students should be taught, then, the state will free local school systems to focus more staff time and school resources on how to teach the prescribed content. No amount of curricular specificity can replace a competent teacher in every classroom who is qualified and trained to deliver that content.
- While nothing changes classroom instruction faster than assessment, curriculum should not be assessment-driven. Practitioners and stakeholders must first determine what they want students to know and be able to do and then determine how that knowledge and those skills will be measured. Assessing a curriculum well does not necessarily mean it's a good curriculum.

Changes to Instructional Practice

- If the only true constant in education is the outcome (student attainment of academic standards), everything else (e.g., time for learning, school setting, instructional practices and resources) must be flexible enough to achieve that outcome. “Unless students are treated according to their particular needs, they will be mistreated. Standardized practice is, in essence, malpractice” (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1998).
- What individualized instruction presupposes is a fundamental shift in priorities: from gauging average student performance to gauging each student's performance. It demands nothing short of reassessing the way we use time, allocate money, and, ultimately, judge our success as educators.

Intervention

- While standards and assessments have dominated the education dialogue for the last several years, issuing standards alone will not produce students who can meet them, just as administering tests alone will not yield students who can pass them. Moreover, neither social promotion nor retention — the most common answers to student failure — sufficiently addresses the problem and its causes. They are reactions to failure after the fact, often when a student's pattern of failure is well established and most difficult to correct.
- Getting all students up to standards takes an early, ongoing, and individualized program of academic intervention for those not meeting expectations.

Preface to Recommendations

While the Learning Task Group acknowledges that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are inextricably linked (and that the state and local school systems share responsibility for each), the Learning Task Group does not define curriculum so broadly as to *include* instruction and assessment. “Curriculum is not a process. A more precise view of curriculum — and the common understanding of curriculum among laypeople — is that it is what is taught in school

or what is intended to be learned. It does not refer to what is to be done in school or what is to happen in the learning process” (Posner & Rudnitsky, 1997).

Following, then, are the Learning Task Group’s definitions of these three essential terms.

Curriculum: What students should know and be able to do.

Instruction: The methodology used in the classroom; teaching strategies.

Assessment: The process of measuring student learning.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

From the existing content standards (which include the Maryland Learning Outcomes and Core Learning Goals), the state will develop an understandable, aligned, essential K-12 curriculum that specifies, in discrete goals and objectives, what students need to know and be able to do in each subject, at every grade level.

Strategies

- The state will begin providing this curriculum in reading, writing, and math, and then expand to the other content areas.
- The state will use the high school content standards to identify the skills and knowledge students must obtain in each subject, by each preceding grade.

Rationale

In July 1999, Maryland finalized content standards in English/language arts, math, science, and social studies. These standards describe what students statewide should know and be able to do by the end of grades 3, 5, 8, and 12. As the standards specify only the *essential* knowledge all students should be taught, local school systems are encouraged to supplement them with additional material, as instructional time permits.

Contained in the content standards are the Maryland Learning Outcomes (MLOs) and Core Learning Goals (CLGs), which identify material that will be tested by the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) and the High School Assessments, respectively.

While Maryland’s content standards won high marks from the American Federation of Teachers for clarity and specificity January 2002, the Learning Task Group recommends improving upon them by developing content standards for all subjects not currently governed by standards and for each grade within the K–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–12 grade bands.

Grade-specific standards will better help school systems and schools develop local curricula aligned to the standards, and will prove especially important for small school systems, which frequently lack the staff and money to develop well-aligned curricula.

Grade-by-grade specificity is also important for monitoring individual student progress toward standards and for illustrating the alignment among Maryland’s assessment programs — Work Sampling System (administered to kindergartners), CTBS (grades 2, 4, and 6), MSPAP (grades 3, 5, and 8), and High School Assessments (end-of-course exams in English, algebra/data analysis, geometry, government, and biology).

“The essential point of standards is to convey with precision what students should master. Far too many states cast their standards in terms that will likely leave curriculum developers, students, and teachers scratching their heads as to just what is expected of them.” (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1998)

Recommendation #2

Local school systems will align the curriculum they provide to teachers with the state curriculum.

Recommendation #3

The state will develop a process to ensure that each local school system’s curriculum is aligned with the state curriculum.

Rationale

While state and local curricula alignment is essential — the whole point of content standards is to guarantee all students equal access to a challenging curriculum — the state will not mandate nor review those aspects of the curricula that fall under local discretion, namely textbooks, instructional resource materials, and lesson plans.

Recommendation #4

The state will establish a process to review, regularly, the state curriculum to ensure that it is current, relevant, and aligned with national standards and business and higher education expectations.

Rationale

If standards are to define high expectations rather than minimal requirements, states need to develop processes for continually reviewing them, revising them, and “ratcheting them up” to keep them challenging for all students (Doherty, 2001). And yet teachers — and teachers’ unions — frequently complain that there are simply too many standards to cover during the school year, and that creative teaching and learning experiences are forfeited as a result. Therefore, the state must continually and keenly assess not only what content must be *added*, but what can be *eliminated*.

Recommendation #5

The state will build local school systems’ capacity to translate curriculum into instruction by providing:

- **bridge/clarifying documents (documents that link standards and curriculum);**

- **examples of grade-level activities that may be used to teach the curriculum;**
- **model lessons and best practices; and**
- **professional development in proven instructional techniques.**

Rationale

In *Making Standards Matter 2001*, the American Federation of Teachers (2001) contends that states should strengthen standards by providing information on instructional strategies or techniques that help teach the standards and by developing lesson plan data banks that include exemplary lessons and student work related to the standards.

As Maryland's school improvement Web site, mdk12.org, provides access to many of the resources listed in Recommendation 5, the state should not only expand its provision of these documents, but more effectively advertise their availability and improve staff development in their use.

Recommendation #6

Maryland's colleges and universities will ensure that their preservice and inservice teacher education programs support Maryland's model of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Rationale

Teachers will be far more effective in the classroom if teacher education programs more practically and explicitly prepare them for it. Therefore, we endorse the Teacher Quality Task Group's Recommendation 2: *Create a comprehensive performance-based system of teacher preparation, initial certification, and certification renewal that promotes full alignment of quality teacher practice with preK–12 student achievement.*

We also endorse full implementation of the Redesign of Teacher Education predicated, in large part, upon the systemic collaboration of schools and higher education.

Recommendation #7

The state will help local school systems align curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

Rationale

The state will provide to local school systems:

- Exemplars of formative assessments, including *rubrics* (descriptions of student responses that would earn each possible score) and *anchor papers* (examples of student work that would earn each possible score). The state will first provide these resources in reading, writing, and math, and then expand to the tested content areas.

- Professional development in *assessment literacy* (teachers' capacity to examine — individually and together — student achievement data and student work, and to make critical sense of it).

While Maryland's standards and accountability system earned the nation's top score (98%) in *Education Week's* "Quality Counts 2001: A Better Balance," it's clear the state needs to provide more help to local school systems in aligning the two. The American Federation of Teachers (2001) says that key to improving the alignment between curriculum and assessment is providing examples of student work at various grades and performance levels so that teachers, students, parents, and the public have a shared understanding of what is expected.

Recommendation #8

The state and local school systems will develop aligned strategic plans to ensure that schools are organized to support learning.

Rationale

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge (1990) writes that systems thinking helps people see the "structures" that underlie each complex situation and, in so doing, restores in them the responsibility for changing the situation and the confidence to do it. Dismantling the system, in essence, allows you to build a better one.

Strategy

The state will require that schools investigating comprehensive school reform implement only those reform models that are systemic, research-based, and fully aligned with Maryland's curriculum.

Rationale

Comprehensive school reform (CSR) is (1) a systematic approach to schoolwide improvement that incorporates every aspect of a school — from curriculum and instruction to school management; and (2) a program and process designed to enable all students to meet challenging academic content and performance goals.

But while Maryland's CSR eligibility criteria stipulate that schools use only systemic, research-based models, the state has little assurance that the models selected actually support Maryland's system of standards and assessments — the very content and performance goals all schools are required to meet.

Strategy

Local school systems will reorganize the school day and/or lengthen the school calendar to make more effective use of instructional time.

- The state will increase the minimum number of days that schools must be open for all students, and will increase above that minimum the number of days schools must be open for students not demonstrating proficiency in grade-level or course content.

- Local school systems will increase the amount of time afforded teachers for collaborative planning, such as interdisciplinary and vertical teaming, and for developing Individualized Learning Plans (see Recommendation 12).

Rationale

The National Education Commission on Time and Learning concluded in 1994 that the fixed clock and calendar is an enormous design flaw in American education and offered six time-related recommendations to fix it, among them keeping schools open longer to meet the needs of children and communities and giving teachers more time for teaching and instructional planning.

Various analyses show that remedial strategies providing a substantial dose of instruction (e.g., extra subject periods, Saturday and summer classes) prove particularly effective in raising the achievement test scores of public school students who have fallen behind in reading and mathematics (MacIver, 1991).

Time is as important a variable for teacher performance as it is for student performance. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) estimates that elementary teachers have just 8.3 minutes of preparatory time for each hour they teach, and high school teachers, just 13 minutes. To define teachers' professional activity solely as time spent in front of students, says the Commission, is to guarantee failure.

Organizing *student* learning time better should also free up significant opportunities for *teachers* to use their time more productively — both in and out of the classroom. And these extended learning opportunities may be the answer to engaging teachers in sustained professional development and collaboration at comparatively little extra cost.

The Learning Task Group endorses the recommendation of the Teacher Quality Task Group to place teachers on 12-month contracts as a means of creating more time for this sustained professional development and collaboration.

Strategy

The state will partner with local school systems to develop new school models and diverse learning environments that meet students' learning needs and allow for significant variation in how long students may take to meet standards.

Rationale

In "Transforming the American High School," Michael Cohen says, "the one size-fits-all approach of today's high school must yield to a system that presumes students will learn through different pedagogies, institutional arrangements, and amounts of time." The arbitrary constancy with which we approach time and paths to learning, he continues, produces unacceptably large variations in student performance.

Career academies; specialized, magnet, and charter schools; work-based learning; schools-within-a-school; Web-delivered courses; and dual enrollment — all tried to some degree around the state and across the nation — are a step toward substantially rethinking the structure and sequence of learning, and where and how learning takes place.

While we should explore the benefits of these programs and delivery systems more thoroughly, we should also investigate other innovative models that vary time and place to keep student achievement constant. The Learning Task Group is particularly intrigued, for instance, by the Rochester public school district, which allows students to complete high school in three, four, or five years, depending on their learning needs.

Strategy

Local school systems will engage parents and the community in the learning process by:

- extending teaching and learning to community settings;
- tapping community resources for mentors and tutors;
- developing capacity-building programs for families (e.g., parenting skills, family literacy);
- including parents in school decisions, governance, and advocacy, and in classroom activities; and
- using online tools for communication and engagement.

Rationale

The establishment, maintenance, and efficacy of home-school partnerships yield some troubling patterns:

- Partnerships tend to decline across grades.
- Affluent communities enjoy more positive family involvement.
- Schools in economically depressed communities make more family contacts concerning student problems than accomplishments.
- Single parents, parents who are employed outside of the home, parents who live far from school, and fathers, on average, are less involved at school (Epstein et al, 1997).

And yet almost all the educational research on the topic indicates that the family makes critical contributions to student achievement from the earliest childhood years through high school, and efforts to improve children's outcomes are much more effective when the family is actively involved (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Recommendation #9

The state will implement the Maryland Strategic Technology Plan, and will facilitate classroom, school, and central office use of technology to improve instruction.

Strategy

Local school systems will use technology to support:

- instruction;
- collection, analysis, and reporting of academic performance data;
- assessment and instructional planning, especially related to Individualized Learning Plans;
- digital learning resources (e.g. Web sites, online databases, video-on-demand, audio files, simulations, data files);
- student access to online courses;
- educator access to online professional development;
- access to curriculum resources linked to state standards; and
- communication with families.

Rationale

Since issuing the first Maryland Plan for Technology in Education in 1995, the state has made significant progress in building a strong technology infrastructure in schools and in providing equal access to that technology. The state has also substantially improved teachers' skills in using basic technology. Where the progress stagnates, however, is in integrating technology across the instructional program.

That's precisely where *State of Innovation: The Maryland Plan for Technology in Education (2002-2005)* picks up. The revised plan outlines a vision in which technology and its accompanying digital content are "seamlessly" integrated into the curriculum to create dynamic and challenging learning environments that enable independent thinkers, effective communicators, and creative problem solvers. This vision is crystallized in one overarching goal — to achieve improved student learning in core content areas and in the technology knowledge and skills critical to students' ability to contribute in today's information technology society.

Supporting objectives govern universal access, educator capacity, integration, administrative and operational efficiency, and continuous improvement.

Strategy

The state will develop an electronic network that gives educators access to their students' grade-by-grade academic achievement records.

Rationale

While educators are privy to their students' academic records, access to the records of new entrants is often delayed. (Without an automated records system, the school from which the

student withdraws must send records to the school in which the student enrolls. This transfer, however, is not always timely.) A statewide electronic network would enable not only immediate access to these records, but perhaps just as importantly, anytime access (i.e., teachers could review the records when there is sufficient time to identify the student's learning needs and plan appropriate instruction).

Recommendation #10

The State Department of Education and local school systems will fully implement *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner*, and will expand selected *Every Child Achieving* recommendations.

Rationale

In December 1997, the Maryland State Board of Education authorized the development of the High School Assessments — rigorous, end-of-course exams that students would eventually have to pass in order to graduate. Realizing that high-stakes testing raises serious concerns about responsibility, equity, and accountability, the Board instructed MSDE to put in place for the 1999-2000 school year a comprehensive K-12 program of intervention assistance for students not succeeding in one or more core content areas.

This intervention program became *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner*, adopted by the Board in 1999. The plan recommends strategies to prevent student failure through Academic Intervention; to strengthen teachers' skills and administrators' leadership by improving Educator Capacity; and to enhance learning experiences for very young children to ensure Student Readiness. It is a framework for state and local efforts to change the fundamental systems that affect children's development and learning and to focus resources (including time and money) more sharply on individual students who are struggling to meet the state's increasingly rigorous standards.

While, to date, MSDE has received only a fraction of the money required to implement the plan's recommendations, and while the Learning Task Group believes strongly that the plan must be fully funded, the group believes, as well, that many of the plan's components can and should be implemented with existing funds.

We have expanded the following plan components.

- *Local school systems will develop, implement, and monitor Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) for students who haven't demonstrated proficiency in reading, writing, or math, and then expand them to all students.*

A pivotal recommendation in *Every Child Achieving* reads: Based on the results of ongoing monitoring of student progress, local school systems will develop, implement, and monitor an ILP for students in grades K–8, with mandatory extended learning opportunities for students with deficiencies in reading and/or math.

While the Learning Task Group believes that priority should be given to developing ILPs for students with deficiencies in core content (i.e., those not demonstrating proficiency in reading, writing, and/or math), we believe, too, that with extended time for instructional planning and the technology to facilitate and expedite it, meaningful ILPs for every student (identifying areas of need or even those ripe for acceleration) will eventually be possible.

- *Local school systems will ensure that all students demonstrate proficiency at key transition points (pre-K to elementary school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, high school to post-secondary education or career).*

The transitions listed above are pivotal points in a child's school career, during which we know, with certainty, many children struggle academically and socially. Yet many schools do little or nothing to prepare children and their families for these critical transitions, which disadvantaged children find especially difficult. In fact, "children's long-term success can be made more certain or placed in jeopardy by how they negotiate school transitions" (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992).

Moreover, neither retention nor social promotion remedies the problem of student failure. Intensive and ongoing intervention — especially as students approach these transitions — is the only method that's consistently proven effective.

- *Local school systems will develop a process whereby, at key transition points (see above), students, teachers, and parents collaboratively develop the students' academic paths.*

This collaboration is an outgrowth of the ILP process, which requires that the teacher, student, parents, and principal participate in, and share responsibility for, plan development and implementation. Substantial research indicating that parent involvement predicts higher student achievement (see Recommendation 8 (D)) supports this strategy.

- *For students who earn a certificate of attendance, the state will develop a credentialing process that documents the attainment of knowledge and skills within a prescribed program.*

A very small proportion of special education students (approximately 1% during the 2000-01 school year) is not able to earn a high school diploma and receives, instead, a certificate of attendance, which documents little more than time spent in school.

However, the complexity of knowledge and skills these students acquire over the course of their schooling nonetheless varies greatly. Therefore, the Learning Task Group recommends establishing a credentialing process that will identify for potential employers the skills these students have acquired and their level of proficiency in each.

This credentialing process could include a portfolio or competency profile and could be supported by the Independence Mastery Assessment Program or Maryland Functional Testing Program.

Recommendation #11

The state will require that teachers, upon certification and recertification, demonstrate the knowledge and skills to diagnose learning needs so they may determine and apply appropriate interventions.

Strategies

- All Maryland colleges and universities will require teacher candidates to demonstrate proficiency in applying diagnostic and prescriptive practices to determine students' learning needs.
- Maryland will require all certification/recertification candidates to demonstrate the ability to identify learning needs and apply appropriate interventions.

Rationale

If we truly believe that early and effective intervention is the key to getting all students up to standards, then, clearly, we need teachers who can accurately diagnose learning deficiencies and prescribe appropriate interventions.

While the first strategy under Recommendation 11 would ensure these skills only in new Maryland-trained teachers (typically comprising only 25% of those hired each year), the second strategy would capture the many more experienced Maryland teachers and those who were trained or last taught out of state.

As certification renewal in Maryland is already tied to satisfactory performance evaluations, diagnostic and prescriptive skills could constitute a competency area assessed by principals during the evaluation process.

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Public Support Task Group

**Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools
December 3, 2001
Presented by Phyllis Brotman, Chairwoman**

Introduction

Retrospective on the 1990s

Public opinion about education and policy is very complex, and in many cases the most vocal publics represent extremely small numbers of the overall public. In addition, certain publics often stand in complete opposition to other sectors of the public who represent equal or greater numbers. In other words, developing public policy that exclusively keeps in line with public opinion is impossible and needs to be used as a guide but not a steadfast precursor to policy implementation.

Communication strategies undertaken by the State Department of Education, according to outside experts and the consensus of the Task Group, are admirable considering budget constraints and the enormity of audience. However, there are improvements that can be made and that the Task Group is addressing in its recommendations.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

Over the course of the past several months several fundamentals or common understandings have emerged as most important to the development of the Public Support Task Group's recommendations, including:

- The overall focus must be on developing sound education policy. Public engagement and media strategies should be implemented to support sound policies.
- MSDE has extremely limited monetary resources for outreach efforts to so many publics, underscoring the increasing importance of collaboration among state, local, and school-based efforts in this area.
- Maintaining a flow of two-way communication between MSDE and its various publics must play a significant role in ongoing public support efforts.
- The use of existing and future technology must be addressed in public engagement.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

Through job-embedded professional development, we recommend building the capacity of school-based personnel to communicate effectively with parents, students, and the community at large.

Rationale

“Teachers are not only the main actors in any school, they are also the chief communications channel to parents and the community. ”

“Just Waiting to Be Asked,” Public Agenda, 2001

The vital importance of all school-based personnel (from principal and teacher to office secretary) as communicators cannot be underestimated, and not just in terms of communicating ideas about school reform. These are the people responsible for talking with students, parents, and community members every day. They are the ones who greet guests and can either create a welcoming, collaborative environment or one where parents feel unwelcome. They must communicate how well a child is doing or what kind of help a child needs and how to get that help. They must communicate about standards, testing, behavior, violence, and numerous other issues and concerns.

Strategies

It is our obligation to provide teachers and school-based personnel with the necessary tools and resources that will empower them to handle the multitude of tasks set before them. In order to do their jobs effectively, they need the public to fund public education, and must be armed with the tools to communicate the messages that resonate with the public. Strategies for the state include:

- Collaborating with higher education institutions to incorporate communications training in teacher preparation programs.
- Adopting a leadership role in developing communication tools or “templates” about various issues for school-level personnel to customize to their school’s and community’s needs.
- Developing a strategic support plan to provide guidance to systems and schools in implementing these efforts.
- Collaborating with school system public information officers and professional development experts to organize train-the-trainer models to utilize training resources more effectively.
- Evaluating current state and system professional development activities to see how communications training might fit into existing models.
- Researching MSTTA’s “Improving Maryland Schools” communications training

models.

A poll commissioned by the (national) Business Roundtable asked parents who they would pay “a lot of attention” to when it comes to states’ standards and tests. More than half said teachers. Communication Works, a nationally recognized firm that specializes in helping those committed to raising the quality of American schools communicate their ideas and gain support for their work, emphasized that “teachers are a critical piece of the outreach puzzle,” when reporting to our Task Group.

Another group of experts, KSAPlus Communications, a strategic communications and public affairs firm with a national reputation for helping education leaders increase public support for schools through effective communications, indicated that helping teachers develop the skills and knowledge they need for success is part of “getting the policy right,” and among the six best practices from around the country in terms of effective communication strategies. Research indicates that teachers are widely regarded as the most credible, although sometimes the least convinced, communicators about school reform and that reformers must make teachers and principals the key audience for communications efforts. Further, both teachers and experts in the field agree that giving educators the “tools to succeed” in terms of communications and curriculum is key. This recommendation focuses on the communications piece.

Many changes are occurring in the area of professional or staff development, and national standards do exist. Anne Arundel County Public Schools has designed its program around the job-embedded approach, which relates to these national standards. While the school system does not have quantifiable results at this point, anecdotal results show an increased focus on and discussion about improving instruction at the school level by teachers and principals as a result of key job-embedded staff development programs.

Essentially, job-embedded staff development is professional training, assistance, and the like that is done at the school level, focusing on school-level issues, rather than generalized sessions taking place off-campus. The message to be communicated vs. how best to deliver it would be very different in Baltimore City vs. Montgomery County. Anne Arundel County Public Schools issues teacher stipends and believes that is an important incentive for teachers to participate. The school system was able to reprioritize resources that were once used for piecemeal staff development efforts to transition to this more coordinated, school-based approach.

Members of our Task Group, which includes teachers, believe that any conversation about implementing staff development to help facilitate improved instruction and communication must address issues of consistency and sustainability as well as resources of time. A handout from Anne Arundel County Public School’s staff development training course, “How Staff Development is Changing,” highlights the vision that this Task Group has for how staff development can be utilized to provide teachers, principals, and other school-based personnel with the tools they need to become better instructors and communicators.

Today staff development does not include communications tools, and we believe that in order

to take Maryland and its students where we need to be in the decades ahead, this must be a priority.

Recommendation #2

We recommend that Maryland enlist a broad-based, multi-constituency advocacy and support group to strengthen communication of reform efforts.

Rationale

As the saying goes, “No man is an island.” The wisdom of this saying cannot go unheeded when dealing with the complexities of education reform and the need for public understanding and strong public support to make the changes necessary to provide students with improved opportunities. Maryland, and MSDE, can learn from the practices of other states — that some of the burden for building public support for education initiatives must rest on others.

In its 2001 “Just Waiting to Be Asked? A Fresh Look at Attitudes on Public Engagement,” Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization, shares the message that there “are times when community or district leaders need to rally support or when partisan or interest groups need to take on particular missions and activities.” Two of the experts that addressed this Task Group clearly saw the need for “external and independent credibility that is coordinated with the state,” which an outside education advocacy group can provide. While Maryland and MSDE benefit greatly from the work of the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, experts point to other examples in Kentucky (Prichard Commission), Massachusetts (Mass Insight), Texas (Texas Business and Education Coalition), and Washington (Partnership for Learning) that may prove useful to Maryland.

In its audit of MSDE’s outreach, Communications Works pointed to the “absence of signs of partnerships with other groups outside of state government to help disseminate information and build support.”

This Task Group researched several examples in other states and believes that Mass Insight, as well as others (The Prichard Commission and The Kentucky Partnership for Better Schools in Kentucky, the Partnership for Learning in Washington, the North Carolina Public School Forum in North Carolina, and the Texas Business Council in Texas), may serve as models for Maryland. Mass Insight has been a particularly effective external supporter, communicator, trainer, and policy facilitator for key statewide education reform initiatives. It pools talent from all education stakeholder groups. The Task Group also feels Mass Insight serves as a model for Maryland because it incorporates, under one umbrella group, several enhancements to Maryland’s public support strategies, including:

- targeted public outreach to raise awareness of the purpose and value of state standards and tests, and to build support for schools as they transition to higher standards, including the development and distribution of publications;
- a coalition of schools that represent best practices;

- a school leadership program to train teachers and school leaders;
- an Education Leadership Group and State Leadership Group that target various stakeholders with policy review, feedback, implementation, and progress; and
- financial support for efforts that comes from member businesses and organizations and grants.

Mass Insight utilized evidence learned from other states to develop its approach and subsequent activities, serving as a tried-and-true model.

There are lessons to be learned from Massachusetts since it has already instituted its end-of-course exams for high school students, similar to the Maryland High School Assessments that will count as a graduation requirement shortly. Having an external advocacy group to support these complex reforms ensured that Massachusetts was able to stay its course even as pockets of criticism arose and public support swayed during the initial phases of implementation.

Mass Insight, the Kentucky Partnership for Better Schools, and Washington’s Partnership for Learning specialize in areas related to communication, involvement, and building public support.

The Task Group does not underestimate the enormity of such an undertaking, and it is precisely for this reason that we recommend further research into the models in other states as well as current organizations, such as Leadership Maryland, that might be able to transition into this type of an external advocacy partner.

Recommendation #3

In order to help the public better understand and support school reform, we recommend targeting communications to key stakeholder groups, increasing two-way communications with all groups with a special focus on poor, minority, and culturally diverse communities, and communicating a consistent message about Maryland’s cutting-edge education reform movement with state, system, and school-level stakeholders.

Rationale

The Task Group believes that the number of publics MSDE must communicate with is staggering, and agrees with experts that “MSDE has done a great deal to reach out.” However, data, expert testimony, and the collective expertise of the Task Group point to enhancements that will help the many publics better understand the complexities of and gain greater support for school reform.

The Task Group recommends organizing and prioritizing stakeholder groups as follows:

- Core Group: teachers, principals, students, parents
- Facilitators: higher education, foundations, local, state, and federal elected and appointed officials, businesses, school system leaders
- Broad Group: general public, early learning community, faith community, senior

citizens, neighborhood associations, community associations, education organizations, media, advocacy groups, health and human services, cultural groups and organizations

Three experts that presented to our group all agreed that MSDE needed to learn more about the impact of what has already been done and its audiences. In order to build the kind of public support necessary to affect positively the future of Maryland schools, MSDE must:

- utilize focus groups of key audiences;
- conduct more frequent research polling; and
- use more frequent feedback mechanisms.

We understand that increasing budgets is not always an option, so we further recommend less costly alternatives to focus groups and polling that still increase the two-way communication between MSDE and its audiences, such as: better utilization of technology through e-mail, LISTSERVS, bulletin boards, and chat rooms, as well as a tear-off feedback form, toll-free number, or e-mail address to facilitate responses on all written publications.

MSDE should investigate other means of increasing two-way communication as stated above, as funds allow.

Expert testimony as well as deliberations of other Task Groups, such as Achievement Gap, remind us that interactivity cannot be limited to technology or publications, but that MSDE must provide state leadership and work with local school systems to ensure that the same is being done at the grassroots level to reach poor, minority, and culturally diverse communities where traditional outreach tools may not be effective. For instance,

- produce more publications in multiple languages;
- utilize faith community to disseminate written and oral messages;
- simplify publications, using bigger type and graphics that can quickly and easily be understood; and
- hold meetings at community centers rather than at schools.

The Task Group developed a sample strategy that demonstrates a focused message on school reform and its benefits to all Marylanders.

Strategies: Media

What Maryland offers is a rich slice of diversity. Each of our 24 school districts represents a broad cross-section of constituents, but what we all have in common is that we are *in Maryland*. Given that, the following slogan was developed:

Theme: Together Maryland: Building the Blocks to Improve the Quality of Your

Life through Educational Reform

Premise of a Video Commercial: Maryland is a state of not just a high quality of life, but where educational reform is at the forefront of everyone's mind. Maryland leads the nation in its commitment to setting a standard for children of all walks of life. (The imagery could be video shots of every corner of Maryland from the shore to the city, with comments from all races, genders, and ages talking about why they love Maryland and how the state's moves to reform education have helped them improve their lives). As Maryland's educational testing standards are far ahead of many other states, this would be an important message to reinforce to the stakeholders and the community.

Core Groups: Must be all of the major stakeholders involved, which include:

- Government officials: No change in slogan
- School-level personnel: No change in slogan
- Parents: No change in slogan
- Children: School districts may differ, but for the most part, children do not. The message to them has to be simple yet effective, and it has to meet their educational level.
 - For elementary school students, focus must be on making learning fun.
 - For middle school students, it could be making it less about competition and more about personal challenges.
 - For high school students, it should focus on helping them reach their goals in the future.

The Task Group has identified an advertising agency that is willing to work with MSDE on a pro bono basis on the segment of this recommendation that calls for developing a consistent, branded message and campaign.

Any overall media campaign about school reform should keep in mind these practices, which we've culled from our expert presentations:

- Show how policies help all children learn and succeed.
- Explain clearly and often.
- Make reform concrete and visible.
- Stress the benefits to all parties.

- Have umbrella messages that say powerful things about the mission to improve schools.
- Use other messengers. Don't rely only on the state.
- Use all the information available that can help. (Don't focus on test scores, or one test score.)

Unranked Recommendation: The task group feels this recommendation warrants review but may require further research beyond the scope of this panel.

- To increase communications among teachers, students, and parents — and by extension gain broad public support for an innovative, effective public schools program — set forth the vision of equipping, first, high-risk/at-risk students, then all students, with Internet communications devices.

Summary of Recommendation: In studies reviewed by this Task Group, it was shown that the most effective communicator for education reform is the teacher. Both students and parents give greater weight to the information the teachers provide than they do information from administrators or MSDE. It is essential to education reform to facilitate teacher communications with the key target audiences.

To accomplish this, the Task Group recommends the implementation of a technology solution that will result in equipping students' homes with the ability to communicate effectively with their teachers through the Internet.

The key components of this program will be:

- implementation of statewide e-mail capabilities in the schools;
- development of applications to provide homework information, progress reporting, and teacher/student/parent forums;
- selection and development of a hardware platform, communications, and accompanying infrastructures that the state and school districts are capable of supporting and willing to support indefinitely (e.g., if the state cannot support broadband indefinitely, do not introduce it initially then reduce service three years later); and
- innovative funding and support programs.

To accomplish this, the Task Group recommends that a study group be established to:

- Analyze the qualitative/behavioral and quantitative/performance results of the three-year pilot program Logan Online at Logan Elementary School in Baltimore County. Reports of that program indicate that many students, parents, and teachers

experienced benefits including improved communications, family involvement, work habits, and attitudes toward practical learning. Analysis of student performance and school testing results should be broadened to learn whether improved learning capacity of participating students becomes evident in later grades.

- Analyze computerization and online programs of private schools such as McDonogh and Calvert Hall, not for economic guidance, but for indications of improved learning behaviors and performance.
- Analyze benefits and results of the use of handheld computers and a wireless network at River Hill High School in Howard County. This school has aggressively pursued business-school partnerships resulting in support by a growing list of businesses, the local chamber of commerce, and the Maryland Business Roundtable. This program uses Mindsurf Networks, a joint project of Sylvan Ventures and Aether Systems. A Baltimore City middle school is a development site for a similar program. Wireless devices eliminate challenges of connectivity or an additional Internet service provider (ISP). Technical support in this program is provided by designated student monitors and the online Mindsurf technical support team, rather than the costly use of onsite professional technicians in the Logan Online program.
- Identify and analyze unique or nontraditional information technology programs within and without education elsewhere. Example: the Washington town that has been completely networked.
- Analyze programs using these technologies or less expensive methods to accomplish interactive communications. For example, a Baltimore City middle school has installed a computerized telephone system for intra-school and external communications, such as parents calling in to learn their children's assignments or to leave messages for teachers.
- Recommend that all schools have web sites with the option for links to departments and individual teachers' web sites, enabling e-mail communications.
- Identify methods of sponsorship, cost sharing, and continued support in ways that can ultimately establish a program universally and in perpetuity throughout Maryland public schools. Include innovative programs such as:
 - requiring support or contributions in IT contracts awarded by the state and counties (The state/county could require a percentage — the actual percentage proposed by a vendor could be a selection criteria — of revenues earned from a contract be contributed to a fund to finance this program. Other innovative contract provisions should also be considered.);
 - providing for income tax check-off similar to the Chesapeake Bay & Endangered Species Fund and Fair Campaign Financing Fund for a special fund to finance this program;
 - offering tax breaks to new corporations locating in Maryland or one of the

counties in return for promised support and contributions to the fund;

- establishing (and publicizing) easy-to-use collection programs for collecting used equipment from corporations and *the public*;
- creating a state-owned corporation — similar to TEDCO — to perform specialized IT services normally contracted out (The profits earned would be placed in the fund.); and
- using the lottery to create games specific to this fund.

Teacher Quality Task Group

Final Report to the Visionary Panel for Better Schools

December 3, 2001

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Introduction

The highest priority of the Teacher Quality Task Group is to ensure that each child in Maryland has a fully qualified, competent, and caring teacher. To promote the highest quality teacher workforce, Maryland must ensure an adequate supply of quality teachers, the alignment of teacher preparation and PreK-12 priorities and initiatives, and exemplary professional development for teachers at all career stages. The Task Group developed three major recommendations that are essential steps toward meeting this priority:

- Create high-powered incentive and support systems to recruit and retain quality teachers.
- Create a comprehensive performance-based teacher preparation and certification system that is aligned with PreK-12 student achievement.
- Create Teacher Development Academies where local school systems and higher education partners will collaboratively provide career preparation and professional development.

Retrospective on the 1990s

Adopted as state policy in 1995, the *Redesign of Teacher Education (Redesign)* emphasizes a systemic approach to improving teaching and learning in schools through a solid teacher preparation program, grounded in a foundation of content knowledge and pedagogy. This reform joins the preparation of teachers to the ongoing professional development of the teacher workforce and school improvement initiatives. Moreover, the *Redesign* provides a basis for a high degree of alignment of state, national, and federal priorities. The success of future teacher quality initiatives rests on the full realization that the *Redesign* is not a static document but an evolving policy framework that is as relevant to local school systems as it is to higher education. To ensure continued implementation of the *Redesign*, Maryland must develop a program to assess the degree to which PreK-16 institutions meet the recommended priorities.

As a result of the adoption of the *Redesign*, higher education and local school system partners have come together within the past decade to create a new environment for professional education: Professional Development Schools (PDS). A PDS is a partnership for the academic and clinical preparation of interns and the continuous professional development of both school system and higher education faculty and administrators. Because the PDS strives to

promote student achievement, it has become a primary vehicle for school reform as recommended by the Redesign. Future challenges include discovering ways to extend the benefits of collaborative PreK-16 partnerships beyond those schools identified as PDS. In 1994, the Maryland State Department of Education overhauled the teacher certification structure to provide greater responsiveness to state needs for flexibility. These regulations are currently being revisited in an ongoing continuous improvement process. In response to a recommendation of the *Redesign*, most teacher education institutions now have multiple points of entry for early and late deciders, as well as career changers. These programs provide alternative routes to certification with full state approval. In addition, other routes to certification are available within school systems through the Resident Teacher program, under the direction of the local school system superintendent. Maryland certification regulations now include a variety of ways to become a certified teacher including undergraduate programs, post-baccalaureate programs with Master's degrees, resident teacher programs, "credit count," inter-state reciprocity, and successful teaching under a provisional certificate. While having several routes to certification is desirable, there is currently a need to provide common, consistent requirements so that all paths to Maryland certification are guided by a performance-based, standards-based accounting of an individual's knowledge and skills.

In recent years, state policy makers have attempted to address recruitment and retention problems by establishing numerous incentives, as well as increased scholarship opportunities for aspiring teachers and support structures for new teachers. Supply and demand issues have led to a variety of financial incentives; however, the dollar amounts have been minimal, and there is no evidence that the minimal supports that have been offered have actually had an impact on teacher supply. Currently, there is an absence of statewide continuing professional development support, structures, and funding, and little time in local school systems devoted to job-embedded professional development.

While much progress has been made, Maryland continues to face serious immediate and long-term teacher quality challenges. The *Redesign of Teacher Education* has promoted collaborative arrangements between higher education and local school systems to achieve improved teaching and learning throughout PreK-16, but serious work lies ahead, especially in the many ways that higher education can help Maryland schools promote high-level learning by all students.

Principles and Underlying Beliefs

- Teacher quality is defined as teacher performance that positively affects student achievement. Teacher preparation and certification ensure that teachers are able to demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to promote student achievement.
- The recruitment, preparation, and retention of quality teachers must be met through PreK-16 collaborative structures that provide adequate incentives, support, professional development, and compensation for new and veteran teachers.

- Accountability measures are essential to ensure that the preparation and performance of all teachers are aligned with standards and with school improvement.
- An effective certification process is flexible, developmental, and performance-based. While allowing for multiple paths to certification, the process must ensure rigor through adherence to a common set of standards, as well as to the major tenets of the *Redesign of Teacher Education*.
- Becoming a teacher is a process in which effective professional development is continual, job-embedded, and career-long. On-site facilitation and individual guidance and support are needed as teachers plan and carry out professional development plans and certificate renewal requirements.

Recommendations

The following recommendations apply to the full spectrum of a teacher's career, including preparation, induction, and career-long professional development. Taken together, they ensure that each child in Maryland has a fully qualified, competent, and caring teacher.

Recommendation #1

Create high-powered incentive and support systems to recruit and retain quality teachers.

Rationale

The ability to attract high-quality teachers depends in part on salaries and benefits available, as well as on teacher support systems and public perceptions of the profession. Teacher salaries have not kept pace nationwide with other professions. Additionally, after cost-of-living adjustments, the American Federation of Teachers' 2000 teacher salary comparison data indicate that two of Maryland's neighboring states, Pennsylvania and Delaware, rank second and fifth nationally, while Maryland ranks eighteenth. Current salary structures make it difficult for Maryland to compete with neighboring states' recruitment and retention of quality teachers. Regional data indicate that high-needs areas such as Baltimore City and Prince George's County have difficulty competing with contiguous districts for quality teachers. Finally, the shortage of teachers in specific content areas is a state and national problem that is reflected in the Maryland Teacher Staffing Report 2001-2003.

Maryland principals, as well as national research, point out that new teachers say that on-the-job support is their greatest need as they seek job placements. To be effective teachers, they need extensive preparation in academic content and pedagogy that is supported during their induction years. Retention of teachers in these schools, and indeed in the profession, is largely dependent upon their support systems, which include principal and peer support, access to job-relevant professional development, and time to master skills. Too often teachers find that opportunities for professional development are not school-based and accessible only after full days of teaching and during the summer.

Teacher support and professional development needs are widespread. The major reason teachers give for leaving is lack of support. National reports show that 20-30% of teachers abandon the profession within their first three years. A recent MetLife study suggests that 50% of teachers in urban areas leave within the first five years. Clearly, the highest attrition rates are in school districts where students have the greatest needs.

The strong instructional leadership of school principals is an essential component of teacher retention. Every school must have a principal who sets and maintains a quality school environment and is committed to effective teaching and high student achievement. This key factor is critical to recruiting and retaining excellent teachers.

Strategies

The state legislature should establish a statewide salary base schedule to help attract teachers to the state and to promote equitable distribution to high-needs areas within the state.

Financial incentive packages, co-sponsored by the state legislature and local jurisdictions, should include strategies such as: stipends and insurance for career changers, exempting public school teachers from state income tax, and tuition waivers and/or scholarships for potential teachers. Plans should be developed at local levels in consultation with teacher associations.

The state legislature should increase funding of departments of education in Maryland colleges and universities to expand and enhance teacher preparation opportunities across the state, emphasizing all areas of critical shortage.

The state legislature should appropriate baseline funding for Professional Development Schools as a means to integrate ongoing professional development beginning with the pre-service preparation period and continuing through the induction years into lifelong learning and teaching. Funds should be tied to an organizational structure of collaborative professional development that emanates from the needs of the individual school and seeks its outcomes in standards-driven, performance-based PreK-12 student achievement.

Local school systems in partnership with local teacher associations should advocate modified teaching schedules and focused mentoring during the first three to four years of the teacher's experience and should build the resources to facilitate such an advocacy.

State and local funding should support local school systems in establishing teacher contracts expanded to 11-12 months. This would help to ensure that teachers are offered meaningful and accessible professional growth and development and would enhance the status of the teaching profession.

Schools that are perceived as "difficult," those that are truly low-performing, as well as those in areas of high poverty, must be made more attractive and satisfying to excellent teachers. The state legislature should provide matching funds to local school systems to create and sustain programs to recruit dynamic instructional leaders as principals of such schools. Systems should be encouraged to build those programs around their commitment to placing such leaders in high-needs areas, and funding should be scaffolded accordingly.

Recommendation #2

Create a comprehensive performance-based teacher preparation and certification system that is aligned with PreK-12 student achievement.

Rationale

For PreK-12 students to achieve academically, Maryland's local school systems need a specially prepared teacher workforce. School systems need access to standards- and performance-based preparation, and they need teacher preparation institutions to customize their state-approved programs to meet the needs of career changers, as they become available for hiring. School systems also need access to academic content and job-relevant pedagogy at advanced levels for their teachers' professional growth and certificate renewal.

Maryland's colleges and universities are implementing the *Redesign of Teacher Education*, which requires that their teacher education programs are standards- and performance-based and linked to the major elements of state PreK-12 school reform. State-approved programs for beginning teachers are available all over the state, with graduate-level programs designed for career changers at almost every institution. To meet state approval and national accreditation requirements, institutions are developing data systems to provide evidence that their teacher candidates have the knowledge and skills to teach effectively. The Maryland State Department of Education authorizes institutions to customize their programs to meet candidate needs. Completion of state-approved certification programs and successful completion of required certification tests ensures that candidates have met performance-based requirements for initial teacher certification.

At this time, Maryland allows candidates to enter teaching from several other routes. Out-of-state teachers become Maryland certified as a condition of an interstate reciprocity contract. Others enter teaching and earn their provisional and initial professional certification via "credit count" conducted by the Maryland State Department of Education. This latter approach to teacher credentialing involves verification that applicants have taken certain prescribed courses. This approach is based on neither standards nor candidate performance. Course alignment with PreK-12 standards and assessments may be incidental. Candidates essentially shop for the courses they need to become certified. The state must establish consistent standards- and performance-based quality controls aligned with PreK-12 student achievement for all paths leading to certification. Finally, as certified teachers seek professional development and certificate renewal, the importance of standards and alignment with PreK-12 student learning needs remains.

Strategies

The state should continue its continuous improvement efforts in teacher preparation and certification reform. New procedures should follow these principles:

- *Flexibility.* Certification procedures should be able to address professional quality, changing PreK-12 student achievement outcomes, and needs of career changers.

- *Developmentally and incrementally appropriate.* Certificate renewal should include a five-year renewal cycle that is tiered and supports professional growth at different levels.
- *Content knowledge.* State program approval for initial certification and state certification regulations for renewal should demand rigorous knowledge of academic content.
- *Reading.* All teachers must understand and be able to apply current research on the teaching of reading.
- *Data-based.* All teachers must understand and be able to apply the use of student achievement data in instructional planning and decision making.
- *Performance-based.* All initial certification should be performance-based, not course based.
- *Standards-based.* All initial certification should be based upon state standards, such as the Essential Dimensions of Teaching (EdoT), and state-recognized national standards, such as those of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), International Reading Association (IRA), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).
- *State-Approved Programs.* Candidates for initial certification should complete state-approved preparation programs that are consistent with the *Redesign of Teacher Education*.
- *Web-supported.* With new technology now available, the state should provide web support for individualized certification information and certification processing.

The thorough planning of a restructured certification system to eliminate or minimize “credit count” would require the efforts of a subsequent task group of representative stakeholders. This new group would recommend a valid, reliable process that would include multiple performance indicators associated with teacher quality. A result of their work would be an entry portfolio and program planning principles that teacher education programs could use with their nontraditional teacher candidates. Candidates who now earn certification through “credit count” would then complete state-approved programs.

As the state restructures preparation and certification to create a comprehensive and unified performance-based system, it is strongly recommended that this system be thoroughly evaluated. Standardized PreK-12 student measures and other performance indicators should be used to assess teacher effectiveness with students. Program completers’ on-the-job performance should be assessed and summarized so that higher education institutions would

have a critical basis for ongoing program improvement. School and school system feedback should be a major component of ongoing improvement. An important indicator would be local school system satisfaction with evidence that preparation and certification needs are being met. Institutional accountability will be critical in both higher education and local school systems.

Recommendation #3

Create Teacher Development Academies where local school systems and higher education partners will collaboratively provide career preparation and professional development.

Rationale

Maryland teachers, administrators, and other support and professional personnel do not have sufficient information about and access to content-rich, highly relevant preparation and professional development. As professionals, they have specific job-related needs that are not always being met sufficiently by current options. Often the professional development that is available is not easily accessible. With higher demands placed on every Maryland student through Maryland's assessment systems, the need is now greater than ever before for all teachers to have extensive content knowledge and skills to provide instruction aligned with state PreK-12 outcomes. To retain quality teachers, sustained efforts must provide supportive environments where teachers grow professionally and have opportunities to use teaching strategies that enable all students to achieve at high levels.

Local school systems in Maryland express their interest in having greater connections with higher education institutions to help them address their systems' professional preparation and development needs. For example, they say that their faculties and administrators need to know much more about student assessment data. They stress the need for their teachers, especially in middle school, to have greater academic content knowledge. They also say that they need much greater cooperation in preparing new teachers to meet certification requirements. Local school systems need new structures now to meet the demands they face.

Teacher Development Academies would be a powerful approach to bringing together local school systems and higher education institutions to address collaboratively teacher quality needs. Modeled after the PDS and viewed as a "mega-PDS" in terms of outreach, a Teacher Development Academy would be a place where joint planning produces strategies to promote PreK-12 learning, teacher candidate preparation, and ongoing professional development. Teacher education institutions would deliver their state-approved programs, customizing them when appropriate to meet school system priorities and candidate learning needs. Career changers would have their certification needs met without resorting to "credit count" credentialing. Institutions would provide courses in academic content and pedagogy at advanced levels for teachers' professional development. Arts and sciences faculty would participate with education faculty to help meet local school system needs. Delivery systems could be Academy-based, at a center such as the Southern Maryland Higher Education Center; site-based at a local school; college-based at a local college or university that is located near the participants; or technology-based through distance-learning or other electronically enhanced systems.

Strategies

Academies will require joint governance. Governance committees would include representatives from each participating local school system and institution of higher education, representatives from local teachers associations or disciplinary fields (e.g., the Maryland Science Teachers Association), and representatives from local parent-teacher associations. The state education agencies would participate in an advisory capacity. Participation by the Maryland State Department of Education specifically would ensure that program approval and state credit for continuing professional development requirements are being met.

Academy functions could include supports for new teachers as well as those in new career roles, and supports for teachers seeking National Board Certification. Support could be enhanced through electronic learning communities sponsored by the Academy and serving all participants, including all school and higher education faculty, staff, and administrators.

The state education agencies should seek funding from the state legislature as well as other sources, such as federal grants. Catalyst funding, made available through competitive grants, should be used to sponsor Academy innovations and experimental approaches.

A key component of a statewide system of Teacher Development Academies would be the placement of a school-based professional development facilitator in each participating school. The facilitator would work with individual faculty and at the school level to coordinate and support professional development related to individual professional development plans as well as the identified needs of the school. The facilitator would serve as a liaison to the local Academy, higher education representatives, professional associations, and other external organizations.

Conclusion

To ensure that each child has a fully qualified, competent, and caring teacher, Maryland must continue its resolve to address issues of recruitment, preparation, and retention. In their preparation, teacher candidates must have content-rich, job-relevant knowledge and skills, and the disposition to grow professionally during their induction. Quality teachers require and deserve supportive and enriching environments in which they grow professionally, so that they too succeed as the students they teach succeed.

The Teacher Quality Task Group strongly recommends to the Visionary Panel the following recommendations, briefly summarized: 1) creation of a high-powered teacher incentive and support system; 2) creation of a comprehensive performance-based teacher preparation and certification system; and 3) creation of Teacher Development Academies with a reach throughout the state. Taken together, these recommendations constitute a visionary blueprint for sustained workforce development in Maryland.

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