



# A PARENT'S GUIDE to Achievement Matters Most



Revised January 2004

**A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST**

MARYLAND STATE  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

Edward L. Root  
*President*

Jo Ann T. Bell  
*Vice President*

Philip S. Benzil  
Dunbar Brooks  
Calvin D. Disney  
Rev. Clarence A. Hawkins  
Walter S. Levin  
Karabelle Pizzigati  
Maria C. Torres-Queral  
John L. Wisthoff  
Vacancy  
Christopher J. Caniglia (*Student Member*)

Nancy S. Grasmick  
*Secretary-Treasurer of the Board*  
*State Superintendent of Schools*

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.  
*Governor*



MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Academic Policy

Ronald Peiffer, Deputy State Superintendent  
200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595  
PHONE 410-767-0600/888-246-0016 • FAX 410-333-2275  
[www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org)

The Maryland State Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, or disability in matters affecting employment or in providing access to programs. For inquiries related to departmental policy, please contact the

Equity Assurance and Compliance Branch  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595  
PHONE 410-767-0433 TTY/TDD 410-333-6442  
FAX 410-767-0431

**A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Changes in Maryland Public Education	2
Achievement Matters Most	4
High Expectations	6
Curriculum	8
Measuring Progress	10
Maryland School Assessment	10
Maryland High School Assessments	16
Testing Students with Special Needs and/or Limited English Proficiency	21
Accountability	22
Family Involvement	24
Encouraging Achievement	26
For More Information	28

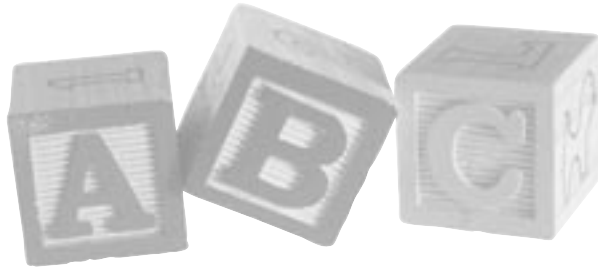
## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# CHANGES IN MARYLAND PUBLIC EDUCATION

**A**s a parent, you want the best for your children. That includes a first-class education that will prepare them for a successful future. The state of Maryland wants the best for children, too.

To raise the achievement of every student, Maryland designed **Achievement Matters Most**, a plan for public schools that sets goals in the areas of achievement, teaching, testing, safety, and family involvement in schools. Achievement Matters Most is based on the work of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools and also includes the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act.

The **Visionary Panel for Better Schools** was a group of parents, teachers, administrators, college professors, policy makers, and national education experts that reviewed Maryland's school reform efforts and made recommendations for improvement. State Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick brought Panel members together to help her plan a new decade of school improvement in Maryland. Their recommendations are the backbone of Achievement Matters Most.



The **No Child Left Behind Act** was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law on January 8, 2002. The law requires states to develop standards and measure students' progress toward them, publish "report cards" on schools, make sure

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

teachers are highly qualified, and take action when schools aren't safe or aren't making enough academic progress. Maryland has done these things for many years. However, the new law gives Maryland national guidelines and deadlines for improvement.

The **Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act** was passed by the Maryland General Assembly in spring 2002. The Act increases funding to public schools, directs more funding to students with special educational needs, and gives school systems greater flexibility in how funds are spent. In exchange for these funds, each school system must develop a plan to improve achievement for all its students.

School systems must also establish full-day kindergarten programs for all children and pre-kindergarten programs for children from low-income families.

The state of  
**Maryland**  
wants the best for  
children, too.



## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

**A**chievement Matters Most sets five simple but challenging goals for Maryland public education.

**Goal 1: Achievement will improve for *each* student.** The goal of any educational plan or policy is to improve student achievement. But what makes Maryland different is its attention to each student. Maryland is serious about eliminating performance gaps among students of different races and ethnicities, family incomes, native languages, or disabilities. To make sure all students achieve, schools are expected to show academic progress among all children regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, disability, poverty status, migrant status, or limited English proficiency. All of the following goals support success in this goal.

**Goal 2: Curriculum, instruction, and testing will be better aligned and understandable.** Curriculum, instruction, and testing are education's building blocks. A close connection, or alignment, among the three is critical. Maryland is developing a new curriculum to make clear for teachers what content and skills should be taught in each subject, at every grade. Maryland's tests will measure how well students have learned the content and skills in the curriculum. Test results will help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and improve instruction. Test results also will give parents a better picture of their child's academic performance.

**Goal 3: All educators will have the skills to improve student achievement.** If students are to meet high standards, they need skilled teachers who thoroughly understand the curriculum and

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

how to teach it. Maryland must recruit the best candidates into classrooms and give them reasons to stay in the profession. New teachers need support and mentoring; all teachers need ongoing training and time to plan lessons. And every school needs the leadership of a highly qualified principal.

### **Goal 4: All schools will be safe, drug-free, and conducive to learning.**

All children have the right to attend schools in which they can achieve. This means schools must create a safe, healthy climate for learning. In the wake of school violence and terrorist incidents, Maryland schools have made safety a top priority. All Maryland schools must follow state regulations designed to increase safety and reduce harassment and bullying. Further, every school has a safety plan and code of conduct based on a local school system plan. Contact your child's school to discuss its discipline and safety policies.

### **Goal 5: Parents and legal guardians will be involved in education.**

As a parent or legal guardian, you probably know that children whose families are involved in school earn higher grades, are better behaved, and are more likely to graduate from high school and continue their education. Parent involvement in education also boosts teacher morale and brings families and communities closer together. Regular, two-way communication between the school and home is important. To encourage parent involvement, schools need to communicate frequently, clearly, and meaningfully with families and ask for parents' input in decisions that affect their children.



## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# HIGH EXPECTATIONS

If all children are to have an equal chance for success, schools must hold high expectations for all students. Here are just a few ways that Maryland encourages high expectations and helps schools to improve for all children:

- **The Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum** makes clear for teachers and parents what students should learn in each subject and grade.
- **Maryland schools have annual goals for improving** students' reading and math performance and for improving the attendance or graduation rate. Schools must meet all of their goals among all subgroups of students in order to make Adequate Yearly Progress. There are eight subgroups: five race/ethnicity subgroups, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and students receiving free or reduced-price meals (an indicator of poverty).
- **Schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress** for two years will be identified for State School Improvement. See page 22 for more information on accountability and the State School Improvement Process.



- **School performance is reported each year in an annual report card** (the Maryland School Performance Report) so that parents and communities know how well their schools are doing. Your child's school will provide you with a copy of the report. It is also available on the Web at [www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org).



## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST



- **Each school has a school improvement team** that works to improve student learning. These teams are made up of teachers, parents, and community members who study school performance data and determine improvements to instruction.
- **Financial rewards and public recognition** may be given to schools that make strong improvements in performance among all groups of students.
- **A state family involvement policy** encourages school leaders, families, and communities to work together and share responsibility for children's education.

The following pages explain more about how Maryland is helping schools reach the goals of Achievement Matters Most. There are also suggestions and tips for how you can be more involved in your child's education. After reading *A Parent's Guide to Achievement Matters Most*, you may want to talk with your child's teacher or principal about what your school is doing to raise student achievement and what you can do to help.

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# CURRICULUM

**M**aryland has been working to develop a voluntary statewide curriculum.

### What is a curriculum?

A curriculum is a document that describes what students should learn in each subject and grade. It guides teachers in planning their lessons and is an important part of improving instruction. Traditionally, each of Maryland's 24 local school systems develops its own curriculum based on the Maryland Content Standards, which describe what students should learn in elementary, middle, and high school.

### Why create a state curriculum?

There are differences among school systems in what is taught and when it is taught. To help teachers understand what should be taught, Maryland is developing a voluntary statewide curriculum that will be clear and detailed.

### Why will the state curriculum be voluntary and not required?

Decisions about curriculum are made by local boards of education, not the state. The new Maryland curriculum will be available to all school systems to adopt as their own or to incorporate into their own curricula. Adopting the state curriculum will not be mandatory.

### How will the voluntary state curriculum differ from the Maryland Content Standards?

The Maryland Content Standards describe the minimum students should learn in elementary, middle, and high school. All state tests are based on the Maryland Content Standards. But the Maryland Content Standards do not describe what should be taught *at each grade*. Maryland's voluntary curriculum will be more specific than the content standards. The curriculum will describe what should be taught in *every subject*

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

(reading/English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, health, physical education, and foreign languages) *at each grade.*

### What will the curriculum look like?

Maryland's voluntary curriculum will have three levels of detail: content standards, indicators, and objectives. Indicators define what will be assessed from state content standards. Objectives detail the specific content or skills a student will learn at each grade level. These three levels of detail will help teachers plan lessons and assignments for students. Below is what a small portion of the curriculum might look like. This particular example shows just one of many math skills sixth-graders will learn: how to solve equations and inequalities.

#### **Grade 6 Math**

- Content Standard: Knowledge of Algebra, Patterns, or Functions. Students will algebraically represent, model, analyze, or solve mathematical or real-world problems involving patterns or functional relationships.
- Indicator Statement: Identify, write, solve, and apply equations and inequalities.
  - Objective:
    - Write equations and inequalities to represent relationships.
    - Determine the unknown in a linear equation.

### When will the curriculum be complete?

The Voluntary State Curriculum is being piloted in reading/English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades preK-8 and in grade 10 reading. State and local school system educators are currently developing Maryland's voluntary curriculum for foreign language, fine arts, health, and physical education and for subjects covered on state tests at the high school level—algebra/data analysis, geometry, English I, government, and biology. Check the Maryland State Department of Education Web site, [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org), for updates on the development of the voluntary curriculum.

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# MEASURING PROGRESS

**S**chools give tests so that they know how well students are learning. Test scores help principals and teachers improve instruction and plan school programs. Individual test scores help teachers and parents understand a student's academic strengths and weaknesses. Your child's school will let you know what tests he or she will be taking. Maryland has two statewide testing programs, the Maryland School Assessment and the Maryland High School Assessments.

## Maryland School Assessment

### What is the Maryland School Assessment?

- The Maryland School Assessment (MSA) is a test of reading and math achievement. The MSA will also test science achievement as early as 2008.
- The MSA meets the testing requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
- It measures basic as well as higher level skills.
- Students work by themselves, rather than in groups, to complete the test.
- Students take the tests for approximately 90 minutes each day. There are four days of testing—two days for reading and two days for math.
- The test includes multiple-choice questions and questions requiring written responses.
- Sample test questions are shown on pages 12-15. More questions are available on the Web at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org).

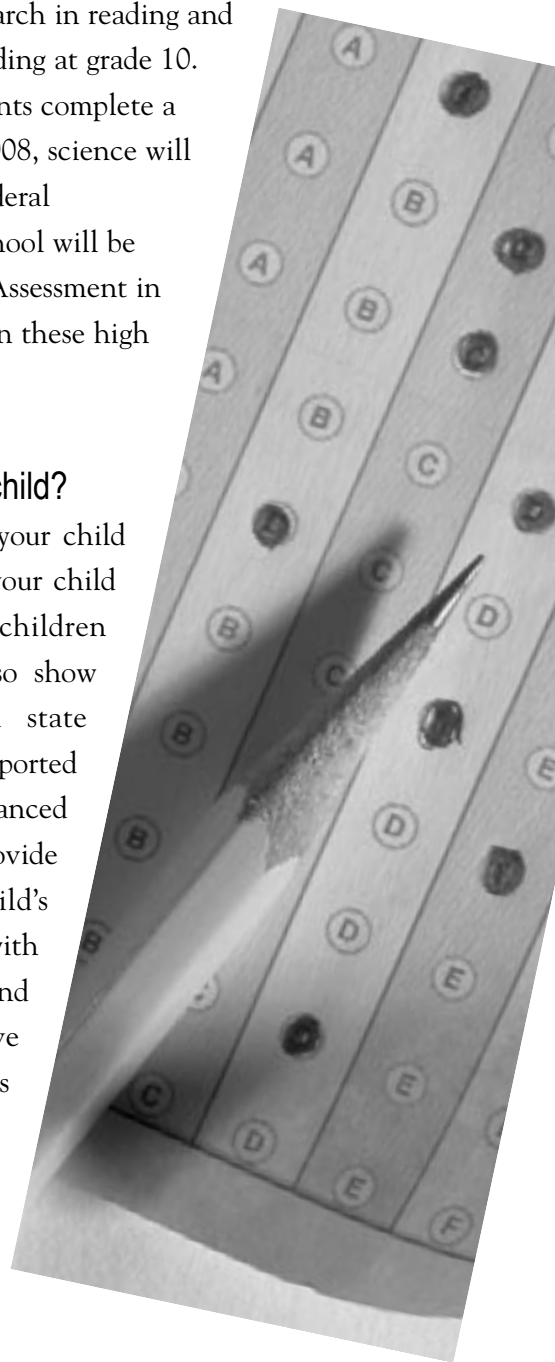
## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

### When do students take the MSA?

The test is given each year in early March in reading and math at grades 3 through 8 and in reading at grade 10. It is also given in geometry after students complete a geometry course. As early as March 2008, science will be added in grades 3, 5, and 8. The federal requirement to test science in high school will be met with the Maryland High School Assessment in biology. See page 16 for information on these high school tests.

### Will I receive MSA scores for my child?

Yes. The scores will show how well your child learned the subject matter and how your child performed compared to other children nationally. The score report will also show school, local school system, and state performance on the tests. Scores are reported in terms of basic, proficient, and advanced performance. MSA scores alone provide only a partial picture of your child's academic performance. But together with your child's classwork, homework, and other test scores, MSA results will give you a good snapshot of your child's performance.



# Maryland School Assessment Sample Test Questions

The following are examples of the types of test questions students can expect on the Maryland School Assessment. More sample test questions are posted on the Web at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org).

## **Sample Question—3rd Grade Math**

**Directions:** Shade in the circle that matches your answer.

Daria found some coins in her pocket. Look at the coins below.



How much money did Daria find in her pocket?

Student Response:

- |                                    |        |                         |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| <input type="radio"/> A            | \$0.92 | <input type="radio"/> C | \$0.41 |
| <input checked="" type="radio"/> B | \$1.02 | <input type="radio"/> D | \$0.42 |

### Sample Question—5th Grade Math

**Directions:** Look at the fractions below.

$$\frac{5}{4}$$

$$2\frac{1}{2}$$

$$\frac{13}{8}$$

#### Part A

Put the numbers in order from the least to greatest.

Student Response:

$$\frac{5}{4}$$

$$\frac{13}{8}$$

$$2\frac{1}{2}$$

#### Part B

Use what you know about equivalent fractions to explain why your answer is correct. Use words and/or numbers in your explanation.

Student Response:

I first changed  $\frac{5}{4}$  into  $1\frac{2}{8}$  and then  $\frac{13}{8}$  to  $1\frac{5}{8}$ .

After that I changed  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{4}{8}$  and then I put them in

order.  $1\frac{2}{8}$  goes first because  $\frac{2}{8}$  is less than  $\frac{5}{8}$  and

both fractions are less than 2.

*Note: Students may arrive at the solution in a variety of ways.*

Following are examples of the types of questions found on the reading portion of the Maryland School Assessment. The test at each grade level contains a mix of question types (multiple choice and written response) that cover a wide range of skills.

### **Sample Question—3rd Grade Reading**

**Directions:** Read this question and choose the best answer. Then mark the space for the answer you have chosen.

In which word does tri mean three?

**Student Response:**

- A trip       B countries       C tricycle

### **Sample Question—5th Grade Reading**

**Directions:** Choose the word or group of words that means the same, or about the same, as the underlined word. Then mark the space for the answer you have chosen.

After lunch the class was drowsy and had trouble paying attention to the movie. Drowsy means—

**Student Response:**

- A full       C patient  
 B late       D sleepy

### **Sample Question—8th Grade Reading**

*Note: Students were asked to read the stories “Arachne” and “Damon and Pythias” and answer the following question.*

**Directions:** Read this question and choose the best answer. Then mark the space for the answer you have chosen.

By allowing Pythias to settle his affairs, Dionysus shows that he can be—

**Student Response:**

- A brave       C indifferent  
 B compassionate       D indecisive



Some questions on the Maryland School Assessment require a written answer. Teachers refer to these questions as “constructed-response items,” because students must construct their own answers rather than select them from a list of possible answers. The question below is an example of the type of brief constructed-response item that students can expect on the Maryland School Assessment.

### **Sample Question—8th Grade Reading**

*Note: Before answering this question, students would read two letters to the editor that represent opposing views on whether Rossie Heights Junior High School should replace its mascot, the “Mighty Mule.” After reading the two letters, students would answer a series of multiple-choice and constructed-response questions. Following is an example of what a constructed-response question and answer might look like.*

**Directions:** Read Margaret Caldwell’s letter to the editor. Then read Anton Lazlo’s letter.

Write a summary of Margaret Caldwell’s letter. Be sure to include the important points in your summary.

#### **Possible Student Response:**

Even though some want to get rid of the mascot, Margaret Caldwell hopes you’ll agree with her. Years ago, a student rode his mule to a game, and the team won although they had been losing. That was Margaret’s grandfather, and that mule became the mascot. It’s been the mascot for years, and she hopes it won’t change, because the mule has been a good mascot.

*Note: This response shows a thorough understanding of Margaret Caldwell’s letter. However, a variety of answers would be acceptable.*

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST



### Maryland High School Assessments

#### What are the Maryland High School Assessments?

The Maryland High School Assessments (HSA) are tests in English 1, algebra/data analysis, government, and biology. Students take each test after they complete each course. (This includes middle school students taking high-school level courses.) The tests include multiple-choice questions and questions requiring written responses. Scores are reported for individual students, schools, local school systems, and the state.

#### Does my child have to pass the HSA to graduate?

Not at this time. **All students are required to take the HSA, but passing is not yet a requirement.** The earliest group of students that could be required to take and pass the HSA as a graduation requirement is the graduating class of 2009.

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

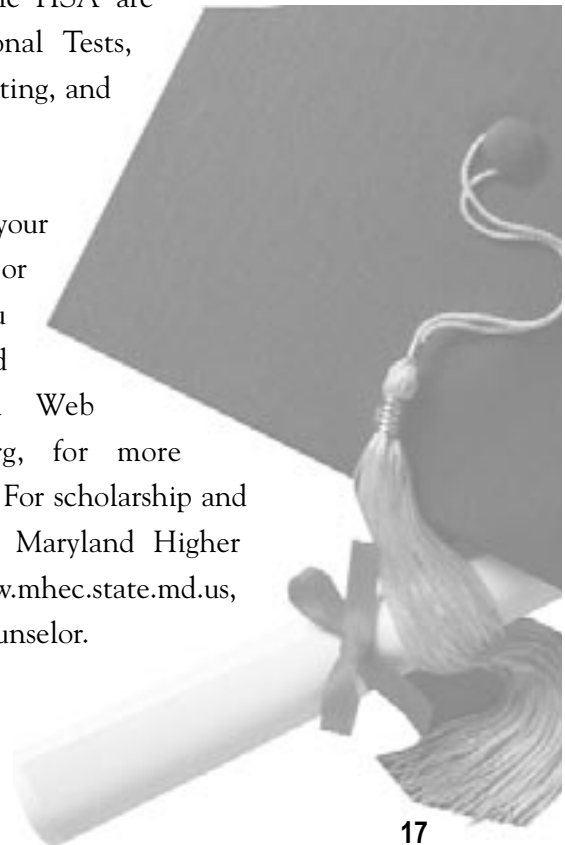
### Are students accountable for their HSA performance?

Yes. Parents receive individual test scores for their children. Also, the state requires that local school systems print English 1, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government HSA scores on the transcripts of students who entered grade 9 in or after fall 2001, so your child will want to try his or her best on the tests.

### Must students pass the Maryland Functional Tests to earn a high school diploma?

In August 2003, the Maryland State Board of Education decided to terminate the Maryland Functional Testing Program. The graduating class of 2004 is the last class of students required to pass the Maryland Functional Tests to earn a diploma. The State Board ended the Functional Testing Program so that schools can focus on preparing students for the HSA. The HSA are more challenging than the Functional Tests, which measure only basic reading, writing, and math skills.

If you have questions about the tests your child will take in school, talk to his or her teacher or guidance counselor. You can also check the Maryland State Department of Education Web site, [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org), for more information and links to sample tests. For scholarship and financial aid information, visit the Maryland Higher Education Commission Web site, [www.mhec.state.md.us](http://www.mhec.state.md.us), and talk with your child's guidance counselor.



# Maryland High School Assessments

## Sample Test Questions

### *Excerpts from the Algebra/Data Analysis Assessment*

The following test items are taken from the algebra/data analysis assessment that was field-tested during January and May of 2000. To see test questions from 2001, 2002, and 2003 administrations, visit [mdk12.org/mspp/high\\_school/look\\_like/](http://mdk12.org/mspp/high_school/look_like/).

#### **Directions:**

Use the Response Grids in the Answer Book to complete the problem below.

Keisha charges \$5.50 per hour for yard work. She also charges a \$2.00 fee for supplies for each job. How many hours will she need to work at one job in order to be paid \$35.00?

#### **Student Response:**

6				
	⊘	⊘	⊘	
⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
●	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙

**Directions:** Complete the following problem in the Answer Book.

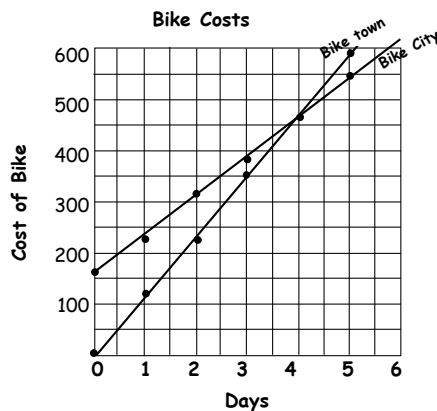
Two bicycle shops build custom-made bicycles. Bicycle City charges \$160 plus \$80 for each day that it takes to build the bicycle. Bike Town charges \$120 for each day that it takes to build the bicycle.

- Write an equation for each store that describes the charge (C) to build a custom-made bicycle in x days.
- For what number of days will the charge be the same at each store? What will be the charge for that number of days? Use mathematics to justify your answer. (If you solve the problem graphically, use the grid provided in the Answer Book to add to your written response.)
- When is it less expensive to use Bicycle City to build a custom-made bicycle than Bike Town? When is it more expensive? Use mathematics to justify your answer.

**Student Response:**

Bike City  
 $160 + 80x = C$   
 $160 + 80(4) = 480$

Bike Town  
 $120x = C$   
 $120(4) = 480$



At 4 days the charge will be the same at each store \$480

Less expensive

Bike City

$X > 4$

the line is lower after 4 days

More expensive

Bike City

$X < 4$

*Note: Students may arrive at the solution in a variety of ways.*

**Directions:** Darken the appropriate circle to indicate your answer.

The table below shows the number of dogs in the United States that can perform certain tricks.

### Dog Tricks

Trick	Number (in millions)
Sit	5.3
Shake paw	3.8
Roll over	2.9
Stand on hind legs	1.9
Sing	0.8
Fetch newspaper	0.4

Steve adds the values in the table for dogs that can stand on hind legs and dogs that can sing. He concludes that there are 2.7 million dogs in the United States that can stand on their hind legs or sing. Why is this statement a misuse of data?

**Student Response:**

- A Steve did not consider some dogs do no tricks.
- B Steve did not consider some dogs do only one trick.
- C Steve did not consider all the dogs in the United States.
- D Steve did not consider that some dogs can do both tricks.

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# TESTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND/OR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

**S**ome of Maryland's students have special needs. For example, a student with a disability might have special instructional and testing needs, as might a student who has just begun to learn the English language. Because Maryland is committed to improving achievement for each student, measuring the progress of students with special needs and/or limited English proficiency is very important. All students have a legal right to be included to the fullest extent possible in all statewide tests and to have their test results be a part of Maryland's accountability system. Students also have a legal right to instructional and testing accommodations that will help them demonstrate what they have learned.

**Students who receive special education services will take all state tests,** unless their Individualized Education Program (IEP) states that they will take the Alt-MSA—formerly called the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP). The Alt-MSA is a test designed for students who are not participating in the general curriculum.

**All students who receive instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages programs must participate in all state tests.** Each school's Limited English Proficient (LEP) committee makes decisions about appropriate accommodations for limited English proficient students' participation in state tests.

**Accommodations for state tests will be the same as those provided during classroom instruction and that are spelled out in the IEP** for a student with a disability or in the plans for eligible 504 or limited English proficient students.

If your child has special needs or limited English proficiency, contact your school to learn more about instruction and testing plans for him or her.

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# ACCOUNTABILITY

**M**aryland holds schools and school systems accountable for improvement by reporting achievement data, rewarding progress, and taking action when schools are not improving.

### How are results reported?

School achievement results are printed in an annual “report card” (the Maryland School Performance Report) so that parents and communities know how well their schools are doing. This report is available on the Web at [www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org). To make sure all students are making progress, state, school system, and school results are reported by race/ethnicity, gender, disability, poverty status, migrant status, and limited English proficiency. (Individual student scores are not made public. That information is for you and your child’s teachers.)

### Are schools rewarded for making progress?

If schools improve, they may receive monetary rewards and recognition.

### What happens if a school does not make progress?

Maryland sets annual goals for student achievement. Schools must meet all of their goals among all subgroups of students in order to be making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires Maryland to monitor AYP, report the results to parents, and take action when schools are not making progress.

- A school that does not make AYP for two consecutive years will be identified for State School Improvement Year 1. The school must revise its school improvement plan to address problems in student achievement. If the school participates in the federal Title I



## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

program for high-poverty schools, it must offer parents the option of transferring their child to a higher achieving school in the area.

- If the school does not make AYP for a third year, the school will move into State School Improvement Year 2. The school must continue to follow its improvement plan. If the school is a Title I school, it must provide extra services, such as tutoring, to students who are economically disadvantaged. Students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals are considered economically disadvantaged.
- If the school does not make AYP for a fourth year, it moves into Corrective Action, and the school system must take specific actions to improve the school. These actions could include replacing school staff, adopting a new curriculum, or extending the school year.
- If the school does not make AYP for a fifth year, it moves into Restructuring. Restructuring might include state or local school system takeover of school operations or other actions.
- If a school is required to take the actions listed above, parents will be notified. Schools will exit State School Improvement after making AYP for two consecutive years.

It is important to remember that State School Improvement is an opportunity for improvement. If a school is identified for State School Improvement, it does not mean that the school is not a good school. In fact, the school could be high-performing on the average but need to work on improving the performance of one or more subgroups. For a list of schools in State School Improvement, visit [www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org).

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST



### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

**R**ecognizing that family involvement is a powerful influence on student achievement, Maryland has adopted a family involvement policy. In fall 2003, State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick established Maryland's Parent Advisory Council (M-PAC) to help the state meet its goal of increasing parents' involvement in education (see page 5). M-PAC is a group of 140 parents and advocates that will serve in an advisory role to the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education on parent involvement issues. More information about M-PAC can be found at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org).

Maryland schools welcome parents and legal guardians into schools, encourage them to ask questions, and include them in making decisions. Look for the following signs that families and educators are communicating and working together in your child's school.

#### **Schools and families communicate regularly.**

- Schools publish newsletters with tips for families on helping children learn.

## **A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST**

- Schools communicate with families about programs available at the school.
- Parents understand how and when to contact their child's teachers.

### **Parents play a role in helping students learn.**

- Teachers help parents understand how to help children with homework.
- Parents are involved in setting goals for their child.

### **Parents are welcome in the school, and their help is appreciated.**

- Schools encourage parents and family members to become involved in school activities.
- Parents are aware of opportunities to volunteer at the school.

### **Parents are included in making decisions that affect their children.**

- The school has a clear process for making decisions and solving problems.
- Parents have access to up-to-date information on school policies and on student and school performance.
- Teachers and administrators encourage parents' involvement in decisions affecting their child (e.g., course selection, career planning).
- Parent representatives are included on the School Improvement Team.

These are just some of the ways in which families and schools can work together to improve schools. You may want to ask your child's teacher or principal how you can become more involved. When families and schools work together, everybody wins.

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST



### ENCOURAGING ACHIEVEMENT

**Y**ou want your child to succeed in school and in life. There are many ways to encourage him or her to achieve. Following are some of the different ways you can help your child get the most out of school:

- Set high expectations for your child. Make it clear that school should be his or her first priority.
- Talk with your child's teachers regularly about your child's progress and what you can do to help him or her improve.
- Meet with your child's guidance counselor early in middle school to plan high school course selection.
- Dedicate at least 15 minutes each day to talking with your child and reading with him or her. (For a list of suggested family activities and

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

daily tips for parents, visit *Take 15 for the Family* on the Web at [www.marylandpublicschools.org/family\\_literacy/take15.htm](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/family_literacy/take15.htm).)

- Provide a quiet place for your child to study.
- Help your child with his or her homework.
- Show interest in what your child is doing in school.
- Limit the amount of television your child watches and discuss what he or she sees on TV.
- Monitor the time your child spends playing video games or is on the Internet.
- Volunteer to help with school activities and try to get other parents involved as well.
- Encourage your child to take challenging courses.
- If your child is in middle or high school, make an appointment with his or her guidance counselor to discuss post-high school opportunities.

**Dedicate at least  
15 minutes each day to  
reading and talking  
with your child.**

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ACHIEVEMENT MATTERS MOST

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions about student or school performance, the best place to start is with your child's teacher, principal, or guidance counselor. Your local school system is another good source of information. And don't forget your public library! You can use library computers to connect to the Web, and library staff can help with your research. The following organizations can help you learn more about student achievement and school improvement.

### MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
PHONE 410-767-0600 or 888-246-0016  
FAX 410-333-2275  
TTY/TDD 410-333-3045

[www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org)  
*for press releases and program information*

[www.mdk12.org](http://www.mdk12.org)  
*for information on instruction, school improvement teams, and more*

[www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org)  
*for school performance data*

### MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

*for information on colleges, financial aid, and scholarships*

839 Bestgate Road, Suite 400  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
PHONE 410-260-4500 or 1-800-974-0203  
*for general inquiries*

PHONE 410-260-4565 or 1-800-974-1024  
*for financial assistance inquiries*

FAX 410-260-3200  
TTY 800-735-2258  
[www.mhec.state.md.us](http://www.mhec.state.md.us)

### MARYLAND PTA

5 Central Avenue  
Glen Burnie, MD 21061  
PHONE 410-760-6221 or 1-800-707-7972  
FAX 410-760-6344  
[www.mdpta.org](http://www.mdpta.org)

### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
PHONE 1-800-USA-LEARN  
FAX 202-401-0689  
TTY/TDD 1-800-437-0833

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)  
*for general information*

[www.nochildleftbehind.org](http://www.nochildleftbehind.org)  
*for information on the No Child Left Behind Act*



# HOW ARE WE DOING?

We'd like to hear from you on how well this publication helped you understand Maryland's goals for public education, school improvement efforts, and what parents can do to encourage achievement in their children and schools. Please take a few moments to complete the questionnaire below.

## 1. Did you understand the material in this publication?

Yes  No  I understood some parts better than others.

Please explain your choice:

## 2. Did we talk about things that you care about?

Yes  No  I cared about some things more than others.

Please explain your choice:

## 3. Did we provide the right amount of detail on each topic?

Yes  No, *too much* detail  No, *not enough* detail

Please explain your choice:

## 4. Additional Comments

Thank you for taking the time to let us know how we are doing. Please cut this page out and fax it to 410-333-2275 or mail it to the Maryland State Department of Education, Community and Strategic Planning Office, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595.



# Maryland State Department of Education Information Request

The materials listed below are available on the Web at **www.marylandpublicschools.org**. To request hard copies, please use this form.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Maryland School Performance Report* (an annual report on state and local school system performance)

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Fact Book* (public education statistics)

*Fact Sheets* (a series of one-page information sheets)

\_\_\_\_\_ Maryland High School Assessments

\_\_\_\_\_ Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act

\_\_\_\_\_ Schools in Improvement, Corrective Action, Restructuring

\_\_\_\_\_ \* *Testing in Maryland: A parent's guide to the Maryland School Assessment*

\_\_\_\_\_ \* *Maryland High School Assessments: A message to parents from the State Superintendent of Schools*

\_\_\_\_\_ \* *A Parent's Guide to Achievement Matters Most* (to request more copies of this publication)

\* *This publication is available in selected foreign translations. Please specify desired language.*

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: The Maryland State Department of Education  
Communications and Strategic Planning Office  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595

Or FAX to: 410-333-2275

