



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Harford middle school students closing achievement gap

Harford students show solid gains on State tests at middle school level; continued sound elementary performance

Harford County Public School students performed well on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) tests taken by third through eighth graders in reading and math this past March. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) data released today regarding the 2009 MSAs, nearly 88 percent of elementary and 67 percent of middle schools in Harford County made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). An improvement in middle school performance was clearly evident. In 2008, only three of the nine middle schools achieved AYP, and in 2009, six out of nine middle schools achieved AYP.

In order for a school to meet AYP, all students in the school and each sub-group of students, as defined by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, must meet the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for reading and math. In addition, elementary and middle schools must meet the AMO for attendance rates and high schools must meet the AMO for graduation rates. The student sub-groups include students with disabilities, students who are Limited English Proficient, students in poverty, and students categorized by race/ethnicity. The percent required to make AYP, called a performance target, is established by MSDE each year.

Each year, the performance target for AYP increases so that by 2014, 100 percent of students are expected to achieve proficiency. For 2009, nearly 75 percent of elementary school students needed to achieve proficiency in both reading and mathematics in order for a school to achieve AYP. For middle schools, the performance target was 76 percent for reading and 64 percent for mathematics. For 2009 and 2010, performance targets in reading are increasing approximately five percent each year in both elementary and middle schools, while the target for mathematics is increasing by about seven percent for middle schools and five percent for elementary schools.

Harford County schools are on track to meet these ambitious targets. In 2009, for example, among the 32 elementary schools, reading proficiency rates for the total population topped 90 percent in 21 schools, and mathematics proficiency rates for the total population exceeded 90 percent in 20 schools. Of the nine middle schools, reading proficiency rates reached 90 percent in five schools.

Reacting to the high-level performance achieved by Harford students, newly appointed Superintendent Robert M. Tomback credited the staff, students and parents for the impressive gains. "Our teachers have risen to the challenge of not only preparing our students for the test but focusing on individual learning needs, while working collaboratively with the parents to ensure that the rigor of what is being taught in the classroom is reinforced at home," said Dr. Tomback. "We are especially pleased with the improvements made at the middle school level; however, we realize we must continue to concentrate our energy at this level in order to maintain this positive trend."

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Edgewood Middle School, now in its fifth year on the state's School Improvement list, demonstrated improvement in proficiency for previously failing sub-groups sufficient to enter Safe Harbor and achieve AYP for the 2009 school year. Students in the aggregate exceeded the 2009 performance target in reading, and they demonstrated an increase of seven percent in mathematics proficiency. A school must achieve AYP for two consecutive years to exit the School Improvement list.

According to Leeann M. Schubert, Coordinator of School Improvement for the school system, the solid improvements are a direct result of the school's intentional focus and unyielding dedication to achieve on many levels, including making AYP in all subgroup areas.

"The Alternative Governance Board recognized the hard work of the staff, students, administration, community, and families of Edgewood Middle School," Mrs. Schubert added. "We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to this success."

Reflecting on the success realized during his freshman year as Principal of Edgewood Middle School, Dr. Lawrence Rudolph commends his students and staff for remaining focused and working diligently toward a common goal. "I am very proud of our staff and students for taking the tests and the overall educational process seriously. We know we can and will continue to be successful in our educational endeavors."

This year, of the four middle schools previously classified as Schools in Improvement, two achieved AYP. The two remaining schools, Havre de Grace Middle School and North Harford Middle School, will enter Year 2 School Improvement and will continue to focus on improving the achievement of underperforming sub-groups. Three elementary schools that failed to achieve AYP in 2008 including Bakerfield, Joppatowne, and Riverside, achieved AYP for all subgroups and for students in the aggregate for 2009.

Entering the Local Attention list this year for the first time are Deerfield, Edgewood, Magnolia and William Paca/Old Post Road elementary schools, failing to meet AMOs in one or more subgroup areas but in most cases achieving proficiency for all students. Fallston Middle School remains on the Local Attention list this year for failing to reach the AMO in reading for a small Limited English Proficient population.

"To support the schools that have entered the Local Attention list, we must focus our energies on helping teachers to reach each child," said Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Roger Plunkett. "This is not only our goal for the schools in need, but all of our schools."

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