



Harford County Public Schools

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Harford students show solid gains on MSA tests

Local elementary/middle school students continue to outpace state counterparts

Harford County Public School students showed significant gains in results from the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) tests taken by third through eighth graders in reading and math this past March. The composite results, released by the Maryland State Department of Education on July 15th, showed HCPS elementary students improving by 4.5 percent in reading and 3.9 percent in math compared to a year ago; with their middle school counterparts showing even greater gains, their composite scores rising by 6.2 percent in reading and 5.7 percent in math compared to the 2007 results.

The 2008 composite scores show 90.3 percent of Harford Public School elementary students scoring at the proficient or advanced levels on the reading test, and 89.3 percent reaching that level on the math exam. At the middle school level, 86.2 percent of the students tested achieved at the proficient or advanced level in Reading and 73 percent at Proficient or better in math. The results show Harford Public School students achieving well above the established Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) at the elementary level (71.8 percent in reading and 69.1 percent in math, respectively) and in the middle schools (71.1 percent in reading and 57.2 percent in math, respectively).

Part of the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative, the reading and math tests are intended to assure that students are effectively learning the material appropriate to the curricula at each grade level measured. Each year, the AMOs are raised, heading toward the 2013-14 school year when all students are expected to achieve at least at the proficient level.

HCPS students scored well above their state counterparts at each grade level in the elementary schools in both reading and math. At third grade, Harford's percentage of students meeting standards in reading/math of 87.4 percent and 88.5 percent compared to the state's 83.0 and 82.6, respectively. In fourth grade, the HCPS percent passing in reading and math of 90.1 and 91.4 compared to the state's 88.5 and 88.5, respectively. In fifth grade, the HCPS percent reaching standards in reading/math of 91.5 and 85.8 compared to the state percentages of 86.7 and 80.5, respectively.

In the middle schools, at sixth grade, Harford students met standards at the rate of 87.8 in reading and 79.4 in math for 2008, compared to Maryland's 81.8 and 75.8 in those areas. At the seventh grade level in reading and math, HCPS students achieved standards at the rate of 85.8 and 71.9 compared to the state percentages of 81.2 and 68.2, respectively. And, in eighth grade, 82.0 percent in reading and 63.5 percent in math of Harford students met standards compared to 72.8 percent and 61.8 percent in the same areas statewide.

During the five years since the MSA testing program began in 2003, Harford Public School students' composite proficiency rates have improved in Mathematics from 62.3% to 78.8 per cent proficient in grades 3, 5, and 8 (the only grades tested both years). In Reading, proficiency rates across those three grades has increased from 73.1 in 2003 to 86.8 in 2008.

Reacting to the performance of students in the local school system, Superintendent Jacqueline C. Haas credited the efforts of staff and students for the impressive gains. "Instructional leaders and teachers have done what was necessary to align what we teach with the expectations on the tests and to increase the rigor of what is being taught," said Dr. Haas. "And, our students have met the challenge by taking seriously their role as learn-

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ers and in doing their very best on the MSA tests.”

Governor Martin O’Malley credited parents, teachers, administrators, and, especially, students in Maryland’s public schools for the progress on the MSA exams. “These results demonstrate our shared commitment to our children and public education and indicate that Maryland’s greatest competitive advantage – the knowledge, innovation, and talent of our citizens – is secure for generations to come.”

State Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick also praised the continued dedication to educational excellence. “Hard work in the classroom and strong grade-by-grade standards are really paying off for Maryland students, thanks to their efforts as well as those of principals and teachers,” she said. “Our vibrant Voluntary State Curriculum has given birth to creative and consistent instructional programs (and) these scores tell us that schools are improving in every corner of the state.”

In Harford, 11 of the 32 public elementary schools improved their composite reading scores by five percent or more; and ten of the 32 schools saw their math composite scores rise by at least five percent. Twenty of the elementary schools had 90 percent or more of their students reach the proficient/advanced levels in reading; and 18 of the schools had 90 percent or more of their students reach the proficient/advanced levels in math. Every HCPS elementary school had at least 70 percent of its students achieve at proficient/advanced in reading and in math and each school’s composite score was above the AMO in both reading and math.

At the middle school level, all eight of the schools whose students took the MSA tests in 2007 and 2008 (Patterson Mill Middle School opened last August) saw improvements of at least two percent in reading and at least one percent in math. All nine middle schools met their composite AMOs in reading.

Among the schools with the most impressive improvement was Magnolia Elementary where the composite reading scores rose by 12.8 percent compared to 2007 and the math scores were up by 8.4 percent. Newly appointed Principal Patricia G. Mason, who was assistant principal at the school last year, pointed to several factors, including the regrouping of students for guided reading and working with words portions of their reading block. The Magnolia Elementary composite MSA reading scores for 2008 saw 81.5 percent of its students earn proficient or advanced scores. In fifth grade, one-third of the students scored at the advanced level in 2008 compared to 8.8 percent the year before.

And, Mrs. Mason said, an after school intervention program for math, which lasted from Thanksgiving through March, provided the impetus for her students’ impressive performance with 82.7 percent reaching the proficient/advanced level this year. In third grade, the percentage of students scoring at the advanced level went from 8.1 percent in 2007 to 20.3 percent in 2008. In the first MSA administration in 2003, just short of half (49.5) percent of the Magnolia Elementary third, fourth, and fifth graders were at the basic (failing) level in the test results. In the 2008 test, just 18.8 percent were at that level.

“Using Title 1 money, we were able to have a full day ‘summer camp’ for math and reading,” noted Mrs. Mason of the 2007 month-long initiative. “And, our gifted/talented teacher co-taught with the regular classroom teacher – both of which may have had something to do with the increased number of our students scoring at the advanced level in the MSAs.”

Magnolia Elementary had failed to reach its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for the first four years of the testing program, reaching standards last year. (AYP results have not been released for 2008.)

Among Harford Public middle schools, Edgewood Middle showed the most significant composite gains with 10.6 percent more of its students scoring at proficient or advanced in the 2008 Reading test compared to the previous year; and 10.8 percent more reaching standards in math.

According to Leann M. Schubert, Coordinator of School Improvement for the school system, the improved results were the result of intentional and focused efforts by staff and students. “We had weekly job imbedded professional development with all teachers focused on careful monitoring of student needs and data-driven instructional decision making,” said Mrs. Schubert. “There was a staff commitment to school-wide excellence and high achievement.”

Mrs. Schubert pointed to a change in the daily student schedule which had them in core content areas for three-quarters of their school day. “There was a systemic delivery of interventions for all Edgewood Middle school students,” said the Coordinator for the Alternative Governance Board which worked with staff at the

school in the process addressing School Improvement there. “There was also an extended year program in the areas of reading and mathematics.”

Aberdeen Middle School also reflected solid gains in the reading and math 2008 results compared to 2007 with 11.7 percent more reaching standards in reading and 8.5 percent more scoring at proficient or advanced on the math test. In the eighth grade, the percentage of students achieving at the advanced level on the reading exam more than doubled from 17.5 percent in 2007 to 37.4 percent in 2008. Similarly, the percent of sixth graders scoring at the advanced level grew from 24.2 percent in 2007 to 32.7 percent last school year.

The No Child Left Behind program requires that progress be measured for the overall student enrollment in grades and areas tested as well as that of students receiving any of three categories of special services – free and/or reduced price meals (FARMS), special education, and limited English proficiency. It also follows the success of students in five racial subgroups – American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, White, and Hispanic. Special education students’ reading proficiency rates increased in every grade, from a low of 4.4% to 16.7% at grade 5. In mathematics, special education students saw a proficiency rate gain of 10% in grade 3 and positive changes in all but one of the other grades. Other subgroups’ performance changes generally paralleled the performance of students in general.

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