



## **Executive Summary**

May 2, 2008

Revised May 30, 2008, June 27, 2008

*Updated February 2009 to include interventions for schools with 100% special education population*

# **Maryland Proposal for Differentiated Accountability Pilot**

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## **Introduction**

Maryland's proposal for a pilot program for Differentiated Accountability under No Child Left Behind is designed to help the State maintain continuity with current efforts and strengthen the effectiveness of those efforts. The proposal adheres strictly to U.S. Department of Education (USDE) guidelines for the proposal while bringing focus to reform work at all of Maryland's schools not achieving State standards. Maryland finds the core principles of the differentiated accountability model suggested by USDE can easily be implemented beginning with the 2008-09 school year and based on 2007-08 school year results.

The proposal uses carefully researched methods for categorizing schools in need of improvement and places them on pathways that provide an amalgam of State and local supports designed to accelerate achievement. While it permits school systems significant latitude in determining what interventions should take place in each improvement category, it also incorporates appropriate State technical assistance and approvals for such interventions. This pilot will allow Maryland to target resources and interventions to the specific needs of schools and take a more aggressive approach to chronically underperforming schools.

## **Maryland's Eligibility**

Maryland's State standards, assessments, and accountability system was approved by USDE in June 2006. Maryland entered the NCLB era with a decade-old State accountability system that included State standards, assessments, and an accountability system not entirely unlike the current NCLB framework. Consequently, the State has a long history of accountability that continues to evolve as federal law and national research further inform the process.

The State further qualifies to submit this proposal because it does not have any substantial findings from federal monitoring; has an approved plan for Highly Qualified Teachers, accepted by USDE in August 2007; and has a carefully delivered system of reporting results and making AYP determinations and notifications as evidenced by:

- the State's school report card website, [www.MdReportcard.org](http://www.MdReportcard.org),
- the State's School Improvement website [www.Mdk12.org](http://www.Mdk12.org),
- and the State's main website, [www.MarylandPublicSchools.org](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org).

## **Priority Criteria**

Maryland meets all of the priority criteria outlined in the March 20, 2008 letter from USDE. Whereas it is expected that at least 20% of Title I schools are to be identified as in need of improvement, 40% of Maryland's Title I schools are so identified.

Maryland's proposal calls for local school systems to begin working with all failing schools the first year they do not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools demonstrating the greatest needs will be required to begin work in the fourth year on reforms that were previously reserved for the fifth and sixth years. Engaging schools directly in this work earlier should help divert more schools from "deep-end" reforms.

The Maryland proposal offers a coherent method of utilizing more appropriate interventions and nomenclature so that communities will better understand the needs of their schools and can make appropriate decisions regarding options for their children. The details in this executive summary outline the methods proposed and the anticipated benefits for schools and school systems.

## Key Features of Maryland's Proposal

The Differentiated Accountability pilot will help Maryland better manage the changing profiles of schools that are now entering the School Improvement process. When Maryland first began its own accountability system in 1991, it initiated interventions in a number of schools as early as 1994. By 2003, when the State transitioned into the NCLB framework, many of those schools were demonstrating broad patterns of failure for virtually all subgroups and were transitioned into School Improvement in the Corrective Action stage. Consequently, NCLB accountability in Maryland focused largely on schools with comprehensive needs.

As Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) under NCLB rise each year, Maryland has found that more schools slipping into School Improvement are doing so because of the failures of relatively smaller portions of the populations—frequently students with disabilities or limited English language challenges. The differentiated pathways will help the State better respond to those focused needs. In 2007, only three in 10 schools failing AYP for the first time experienced failures for *All Students* or for three or more subgroups or cells. At the same time, 45% of the same schools failed AYP for one subgroup cell only. This contrasts dramatically with patterns seen five years ago. Consequently, the data leads Maryland to propose:

**Differentiated Pathways.** Maryland's proposal uses transparent methods to categorize schools into two pathways. One pathway is similar to the traditional NCLB School Improvement route Maryland has been using with all schools. This pathway will now be reserved for schools not achieving standards across the board, and a second differentiated pathway will be added to account for schools with more focused needs.

**Breakthrough Center.** The proposal outlines a broad array of State and local supports for schools across the continuum, some of which will be provided through a new *Breakthrough Center* now under development in partnership with the *Education Alliance at Brown University*. The *Breakthrough Center* will revolutionize the work with low performing schools and will help assure very high quality outcomes.

**Strong Parental Options.** The State will continue its commitment to strong parental options through quality Supplemental Educational Services (SES)

and Parental School Choice (PSC). Maryland will maintain or improve its 68% participation rate among Title I schools and is evaluating the work of providers. Program ratings will be published for parents, and those not meeting standards of delivery and performance will become ineligible.

**Earlier Supports for Schools.** The first year schools do not achieve AYP they will undergo an appraisal of their reasons for failure, including an examination of the school's assets and issues. Schools with comprehensive patterns of failure that are in School Improvement a fourth year will begin planning for the most serious stage of School Improvement — one year earlier than required under NCLB.

## Two New Pathways for Schools

After failing to achieve AYP for two consecutive years, school results will be analyzed. Schools that missed AMOs in the same reported area (reading, mathematics or the other academic indicator) for the two consecutive years will be placed on two different pathways, pending the scope of school needs demonstrated in those results. The two pathways are:

**Comprehensive Needs Pathway.** This pathway is similar to the NCLB traditional pathway that is currently required for all schools in terms of requirements and sequence of steps, but it will be limited to schools with a wider pattern of student subgroup failures. Typically, these schools will have failed to meet the AMO for either reading or mathematics for the *All Students* group and/or will have failed to achieve AMOs for three or more subgroups in either reading or mathematics.

If these categories are applied to the 2007 Schools in Improvement, more than six in 10 of the 233 schools now in improvement will be in this pathway. However, the data indicate that there is a need for a separate pathway for schools with more focused needs.

**Focused Needs Pathway.** This new pathway includes schools that have not achieved the AMO in one or two subgroups in the same reported area. The Focused Needs pathway will permit school systems to attend to the specific needs of each school in that pathway. While the 2007 data indicate that four in 10 schools could be categorized in this pathway now, it is highly likely that in future years, the majority of schools will be in this pathway, as approximately nine of 10 schools that initially did not make AYP in 2007 failed to do so because of more focused needs.

It is important to note that the two pathways are not designed to reduce services to some schools in favor of others. Rather, it assures that schools can focus on what is needed to exit School Improvement earlier by applying differentiated interventions in accordance with the observed needs of schools.

### Two New Phases for School Improvement

The Comprehensive Needs pathway and the Focused Needs pathway will take schools through two separate phases of School Improvement. The two phases parallel the traditional No Child Left Behind steps currently in federal law, but present a simpler array of categories for the public and for school system leaders working with these schools. The phases — called stages in the Maryland model — are as follows:

**Developing Schools Stage.** The first three stages of NCLB-mandated School Improvement include

- *School Improvement Years 1 and 2* and
- *Corrective Action*.

These stages will be subsumed into the *Developing Schools* stage.

**Priority Schools Stage.** Schools that repeatedly fail to achieve AYP over several years despite the early interventions will move into the *Priority Schools* stage. The Priority stage replaces *Restructuring Planning and Implementation* from the NCLB-mandated stages. The most significant interventions will be required for all schools in the Priority Schools stage regardless of their pathway (*Fig. 1*).

Figure 1  
Comparison with NCLB Stages

NCLB Stages	Proposed Differentiated Pathways	
	Comprehensive Needs Pathway	Focused Needs Pathway
School Improvement Year 1	Developing Schools Stage	Developing Schools Stage
School Improvement Year 2		
Corrective Action		
Restructuring Planning	Priority Schools Stage	Priority Schools Stage
Restructuring Implementation		

### Local School System Master Planning Directed by the State

Much as they do now, school systems will be required to redirect staff, leadership, and resources to the schools with the greatest needs. School systems will focus on interventions specific to the targeted needs of differentiated schools and look to broader changes at the school level for those schools in the traditional pathway.

All 24 local school systems in Maryland are engaged in a legislatively mandated annual Master Planning process. Local school systems report on the performance of the school system and schools and detail the measures that are taken locally to remedy low performance. The Maryland State Department of Education reviews the plan with over 100 State and local experts before making recommendations to the State Board of Education on the approval of the plans.

In Maryland, with an adequacy-based state aid model introduced with the State’s Bridge to Excellence law in 2003, the State’s current education aid program includes no categorical funding. Local superintendents and school boards assess their own school needs and allocate State, federal, and local funding to support needed programs as per State and federal law. This unique funding device places more than \$3 billion in State aid in local school systems while requiring accountability for student performance in exchange for that aid.

### Interventions Start Earlier

It is important for the local school system to assess the school’s challenges and assets when the school first fails to achieve AYP so that work to accelerate student performance can begin immediately. Increasingly, a school’s initial AYP failure is attributed to a single group of students with like needs. Therefore, beginning early has a greater chance of success because the focus of interventions can begin earlier. Maryland’s proposal calls for schools to self-assess the school’s assets – programs and personnel who will be key to meeting the targets in the next academic year – as soon as the school fails to make AYP the first time. The Alert Schools Inventory will help schools analyze their results to determine the size and nature of gaps that are emerging and will determine what strategies are necessary to close the gaps.

## Intervention Options for Schools with 100% Special Populations

There are several intervention options specific to special schools that serve 100% special education populations. These include:

- Requiring the school to develop a School Improvement Plan in cooperation with the MSDE Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services. The School Improvement Plan would include specific academic interventions delivered through IDEA AYP grants from MSDE.
- Grants provided by MSDE to focus on meeting Highly Qualified Teacher standards provided through State Improvement Grants. When a school is designated a Priority School, a public private partnership with a specialized provider identified by MSDE will be one of the options that can be pursued.
- Participation in an online, data-driven decision-making module will be available to assist principals and other school-based leaders to improve instructional outcomes for the special education subgroup. Seminars which incorporate these strategies, will be made available as part of the online learning community activities and be integrated with efforts to improve the focus on individual student needs.

## Earlier Groundwork for Priority Schools

Planning and interventions will start earlier for schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway than for those in the Focused Needs pathway. A broad array of options for schools in their fourth year of failure will provide a menu for such schools. Meanwhile, detailed plans equivalent to the NCLB restructuring plans will be required of schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway one year earlier. Some school systems in Maryland are already developing such intervention plans with such schools earlier as they see opportunities for change.

## Innovative State Supports for Schools

Maryland is working with Education Alliance at Brown University to finalize a design for a Breakthrough Center that will redirect and coordinate services for both Developing and Priority Schools to better train and support school leaders and staff. Existing MSDE services will be better directed to these schools in accordance with needs, and other new innovative services will be provided. New and existing technologies will help ensure that assistance and training will be provided efficiently and effectively and that a sharing of expertise across

Maryland will be brokered by the Center. Priority will be given to schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway. However, an array of additional services will be available for schools in the Focused Needs pathway.

## Timelines for Pathways

Schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway will begin preparing for their most serious work on revamping school programs while in the *Developing* stage. Generally, schools may remain in the *Developing* stage for up to four years.

Schools in the Focused Needs pathway will begin planning for their most intensive work during their first year in the *Priority* stage. In the *Priority* stage, schools in the Focused Needs pathway and schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway will both be provided with State and local supports targeted to their needs. The ability to differentiate this work between pathways should help bring proper focus to work with both school pathways at both the *Developing* and *Priority* stages.

## Analysis of Impact of Differentiation

Figure 2 shows how Maryland's 233 schools currently in School Improvement would be distributed under the proposal.

Figure 2  
2007 Estimated Distribution of Schools\*

Stages	Pathways	
	Comprehensive Needs Pathway (147)	Focus Needs Pathway (86)
Developing Stage (127)	51	76
Priority Stage (106)	96	10

**Future Need for Differentiation.** Because federal law requires that the NCLB targets be raised each year, the likelihood increases over time that School Improvement schools will more often be schools failing one or two subgroups. School distributions for future years will likely include a larger number of schools in the Focused Needs pathway and fewer schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway. However, the numbers of schools in the Comprehensive Needs pathway may further increase if Focused Needs schools are unable to meet targets

with traditionally successful subgroup populations. Maryland's proposal suggests that Focused Needs schools continuing to show failure with a few subgroups should in time be subject to the array of interventions found in the Comprehensive Needs pathway.

**Large Overall Differences Among Schools.** An analysis of 2007 Schools in Improvement finds that the lowest overall performance is consistently found in schools that will be in the Comprehensive Needs pathway. This is particularly true of schools in the Priority stage. Further, such schools frequently have the lowest performance among both race and special services subgroups. The analysis led Maryland to focus its differentiation on the appearance of failures among subgroup cells. It further emphasizes the differences between Comprehensive Needs schools and Focused Needs schools.

### **School System Pathways**

The differentiated pathways proposed for Maryland schools are mirrored in its proposal for a parallel model system for school systems. Currently, only two school systems are categorized in School System Corrective Action, under federal law. Each school system developed a Corrective Action Plan that was approved by the State Board of Education, per State regulations and federal rules. In the four-year duration of the pilot, it is anticipated that additional school systems will eventually fall into System Corrective Action. However, it is likely that these systems will have more focused needs, similar to those of the schools in the Focused Needs pathway. Maryland is proposing to delay the implementation of a differentiated pathway for systems to 2010, pending the result of further study of such a proposal and the emerging data for those school systems.

### **Adherence to the Ten Core Principles**

The U. S. Department of Education identified 10 Core Principles that states are to meet in their proposals. Maryland's proposal meets all 10 of the principles.

1. **AYP determinations made for all public schools.** The State will continue to make AYP determinations annually based on State collected data.
2. **Transparent AYP determinations and accountability for all students.** The State prides itself in maintaining a detailed and accessible system of web-based and traditional reporting to the public. The introduction of the differentiated accountability nomenclature and structure will streamline and clarify this information

for the public. All students are included in the State's accountability system as detailed in the State's Accountability Plan.

### **3. Identification of Title I schools for improvement.**

Maryland's accountability plan calls for all schools, including Title I schools to be identified for School Improvement when they do not achieve AYP two years and more. The procedures in place will continue and be enhanced by the differentiated accountability system proposed.

**4. Technically and educationally sound proposal.** The Maryland proposal is based on a thorough analysis of the 2007 AYP data to determine the nuances of identification and flow of schools through the new differentiated pathways. They clearly place high needs schools on an accelerated pathway and offer a more robust array of supports for schools.

**5. Careful transition from old model.** Maryland will change the labels for schools currently in School Improvement to promote better public understanding of the system. The State will transition intervention requirements so as not to disrupt the continuity of the improvement efforts already in progress

**6. Data-driven, understandable process.** The categorization of schools will be very transparent as will the movement of schools through the process. Further, the expanded supports for schools through the Breakthrough Center and other sources will help schools make better use of student results in making decisions about interventions.

**7. Title I schools subject to interventions.** All schools, including Title I schools will be subject to the complete array of interventions. The offering of Supplemental Educational Services (SES) and Public School Choice (PSC) options will continue for all Title I schools per federal rules.

**8. Educationally sound interventions.** Maryland will introduce interventions through the Breakthrough Center and other State and local resources that are thoroughly researched and scrutinized for effective track records and sound educational principles. Maryland's unique local Master Planning process required of all local school systems further tracks the progress of those interventions.

**9. Increased SES and School Choice participation.** Though Maryland has been challenged, like most states, in engaging parents in School Choice options, the State has perhaps the highest participation in SES

options in the nation. The State is committed to maintaining that high level of participation and is now monitoring and rating the quality of services of providers to ensure strong results for all schools.

10. A category for the lowest performing schools. There are numerous benefits from maintaining a system that helps focus interventions for schools where fewer students are failing, but there are even more benefits to be realized for schools with broad patterns of need. These Comprehensive Needs Schools in the Priority stage will likely constitute about four in 10 of all schools in School Improvement and will continue the current high level of focus. Based on past experience with these schools, they have too seldom exited School Improvement, particularly at these later stages. Maryland will implement a mandatory audit for such schools, if after 10 years of failure they are still in School Improvement.

### **Annual Evaluation**

The Maryland proposal is for a four-year pilot that will be evaluated annually for impact on school performance. The proposal calls for an examination of the overall performance of the schools as well as an in-depth analysis by subgroup. The evaluation will also examine results by intervention to appraise the effectiveness of approaches as they relate to the kinds of challenges each school faces.

### **For Additional Information**

For additional information or clarification regarding this proposal, please contact:

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