

MSDE BULLETIN

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BALTIMORE CITY SCHOOLS SHOWING PROGRESS; FACING MORE CHALLENGES

Baltimore City public schools have made consistent, steady progress over the past five years, according to the system's CEO, but there remain many short- and long-term concerns.

Dr. Andres Alonso came before the State Board last week to provide the annual report of the city schools. While he highlighted some of the many improvements made by students in the system, he spent a great deal of time pointing out deficiencies in such areas as mathematics and middle school achievement.

"There is a story of improvement, which is in some ways remarkable," Dr. Alonso said, pointing out rising reading and mathematics scores in grades three, four, and five. "There is no question we have a far, far way to travel."

The percentage of students performing at the proficient or advanced level in third grade reading has jumped nearly 30 points, from 39.1 percent in 2003 to 68.8 percent last year. Likewise, there has been significant improvement in elementary school mathematics. The percentage of students performing at proficiency levels in fifth grade math increased more than 30 points, from 31.3 percent in 2007.

Scores are not as positive at the middle school level, which Dr. Alonso said is an unfortunate part of a "national phenomenon." Although mathematics scores rise steadily at the middle grades, a high percentage of students test at levels below proficiency. For example, just 24 percent of eighth grade math students score at the proficient or advanced levels.

Also of great concern to Dr. Alonso is the system's graduation rate. The rate stands at just over 60 percent, up slightly from 54.30 percent in 2004 but well below the State average of 85.25 percent.

"Nobody would get on an airplane if they thought they had only a 60 percent chance of reaching their destination," Dr. Alonso noted.

This is his first school year at the helm in Baltimore City, and Dr. Alonso noted that there was a learning curve involved after he took over. While he's been pleased with the many



Dr. Andres Alonso, Baltimore City School's CEO, describes some of the programs being implemented in the system.

partnerships forged with colleges and nonprofits, he noted that at times it can be difficult coordinating their efforts. Also difficult for the system is the crime that affects the neighborhoods in which the students live and the schools are located. "The reality is we are constantly responding to what is around us in the city," he said.

Dr. Alonso said he and his staff will continue studying the data and looking for ways to improve schools. There needs to be attention paid to what works at certain schools and how it might be replicated, he said. Also high on his list: Increasing parental participation in the schools.

Board members complimented Dr. Alonso on his efforts so far. "What you have brought to Baltimore City is a 'make no excuses' mentality," said Board member David Tufaro. ■

STATE BOARD APPROVES ANNE ARUNDEL'S ONGOING PLANS FOR ANNAPOLIS HIGH

The Maryland State Board of Education last week put its seal of approval on Anne Arundel County's restructuring plan for Annapolis High School.

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STATE BOARD APPROVES ANNE ARUNDEL'S ONGOING PLANS FOR ANNAPOLIS HIGH (Cont.)

Anne Arundel had been proactive with its work on Annapolis High, moving to restructure the school a year before it would have been necessary under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The school system chose to zero-base its staff, requiring that each teacher and administrator reapply for his or her job. It also instituted 12-month contracts for the staff, and teachers were required to give a three-year commitment to the school.

Anne Arundel County Superintendent Kevin Maxwell said the initial reaction in the community to the dramatic changes was not favorable, but that has changed.

"We are seeing some early successes," Dr. Maxwell said, including improvements in grades, reductions in suspension, and an increase in attendance through the first half of this year.

The school continues to have challenges, he admitted, such as moving more African American and Hispanic students into rigorous AP and IB programs, and finding qualified African American and Hispanic teachers. But there is optimism at Annapolis High School.

Prior to the changes, "there were pockets of hopelessness," Dr. Maxwell said. Now, thanks to a dedicated staff, he said there is renewed commitment to making Annapolis High School succeed. ■

MARYLAND STUDENTS CONTINUE THEIR SUCCESS ON RIGOROUS AP TESTS

Maryland continues to rank among the nation's best in the rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) program, both in the percentage of students scoring at college-mastery levels and in the growth of that percentage in recent years, according to a new report from the College Board.

Robert Alig, regional vice president of the College Board, was among those bringing the results to the State Board last week. He joined Roni Jolley, MSDE's College Board liaison in presenting the data to Board members.

"Every time I've come to this table, I've been able to bring good news," Dr. Jolley said. "Today is no different."

Maryland made the second-largest gain over the past five years in the percentage of students scoring at high levels, according to the College Board, which administers the AP program. The percentage of Maryland students earning a score of 3 or higher on AP exams increased 6.0 percentage points between 2002 and 2007, from 16.4 percent to 22.4 percent, second only to Vermont.



Dr. Roni Jolley, MSDE's liaison to the College Board (left), and College Board Vice President Robert Alig present the State Board with results of the latest AP test administration.

A score of 3 or better on the 5-point scale is considered a demonstration of college mastery, as many colleges consider awarding full credit for AP results at that level.

"Advanced Placement Report to the Nation: 2008," the College Board's fourth annual analysis of the rigorous assessment program, gives high marks to efforts taking place in Maryland schools. Maryland ranks second only to New York in the percentage of high school students scoring at mastery levels. Maryland is the only state to rank in the top two in both the percentage of students scoring at the college-mastery levels and the growth in that percentage.

In recent years, Maryland has dramatically increased the AP participation rate among minority students. The new report recognizes Maryland for increasing Hispanic participation to the point of eliminating the "equity and excellence gap," as well as for its efforts to bring more African American students into the program. ■

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