Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

July 7, 2004

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Overview of Organizational and Academic Performance Trends, 1999-2004

The past five years represent a tremendous period in the progress of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Enrollment has grown by some 12,000 children, to more than 140,000 students, creating one of the most diverse school districts in the nation. At the same time, student achievement has improved, contradicting the commonly held belief that large, diverse school systems, especially ones impacted by increased student poverty, are likely to undergo a decline in student achievement. We worked hard to prevent such a decline. We created more opportunity for parent, staff and community involvement in strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation. The collaboration created a groundswell of public support for academic reform that resulted in important school improvements, beginning with early childhood education and continuing through high school. The prioritization of public education in the county created the catalyst for increased financial investment that grew to more than $600 million in additional capital, operating, and external grant funding over the past five years. The combination of increased financial and political support was rewarded with improved student achievement on national and local measures, including a narrowing of the achievement gap by race and ethnicity.

There are ample data to demonstrate that this progress is not limited to a few programs or initiatives. Instead, the progress is evident systemwide and reflects not only the pursuit of rigorous academic standards, but also the achievement of organizational goals in building the foundation for long-lasting success. This report provides the highlights of the major performance trends and accomplishments since 1999, encompassing the most recently available data.

It is important to recognize that nearly all of the current organizational initiatives that are readily apparent today did not exist five years ago. At that time, for example, there was no strategic plan as we now know it.[1] The teacher evaluation system was antiquated. Business partnerships were haphazard. And, relationships with county elected officials needed strengthening. Now there is a strong professional development program and a process of peer review and assessment, involving not only teachers but also principals. There is a business roundtable for education

[1] *Our Call to Action, Pursuit of Excellence: Strategic Plan for the Montgomery County Public Schools, 2003-2008*. (Updated 2004). Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

supported by private and public funding. We have formed strong community partnerships, especially with the county executive and the County Council.

Background

The development of the original report, *Our Call to Action*, in November 1999 set the stage for nearly all of the subsequent reform initiatives. The reforms were just that—corrections to plans and programs already in place that were not working, improvements to existing successful efforts, and new initiatives in the absence of any apparent targeted efforts.

Examples of Organizational Improvements Since 1999	Status in 1999	Status by 2004
▪ Entrepreneurial Fund Revenue for Printing Services	0	$1.3 million over 4 years
▪ University Partnerships for Professional Development	9	23
▪ Teacher Removals Related to Poor Performance	35 in 1995-99	146 in 2000-04
▪ Percent of 10th Grade Students Taking the PSAT	30%	84%

The need for academic and organizational reforms was clear in September 2000 in the findings and recommendations from an external mathematics audit by Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc. In the report to the Board of Education, I concluded the following about the audit's findings: "The absence of a consistently implemented mathematics curriculum and the impact of ineffective teaching practices and instructional leadership in mathematics have a larger responsibility for underachievement by students in the Montgomery County Public Schools than previously realized."[2] Since then, of course, much has improved in mathematics instruction. Teachers have a greatly strengthened curriculum, and significant training has enabled more consistent program implementation countywide. An accelerated math program has been implemented in elementary schools in which highly able students can complete the first middle school math course (Math A) as early as Grade 3. Many regularly enrolled students are completing the course by the fifth grade. Math achievement also has improved. Completion of Algebra 1 or a higher level math course by the end of Grade 8 has risen steadily. Average math scores on the SAT over the last two years have been the highest in the school system's history.

Parents, students, and staff perceptions of school quality have improved, providing high marks on satisfaction surveys among elementary, middle, and high schools.

High Satisfaction Among Parents, Students, and Staff, 2003 [3]	Elementary	Middle	High
▪ Percent of positive perceptions of "satisfaction" among parents	89-96%	86%	85%
▪ Percent of positive perceptions of "satisfaction" among students	86%	68%	65%
▪ Percent of positive perceptions of "job satisfaction" among teachers	89%	83%	90%

[2] Weast, J. D. (2000). *Studies of Mathematics Instruction and Curriculum: Implications for the Future* (memo to the Board of Education). Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

[3] Bernstein, D. J., Loeb, C., & Wade, J. (2003). *Surveys of School Environment: 2001-02 and 2002-03 Districtwide Summary*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

Public perception of the school system has improved, as well. A poll conducted last year on a number of public policy issues related to government spending revealed that 29 percent of respondents viewed the school system as excellent, nearly double the finding of a survey in 2000. More detailed comparative data are not available, but the survey findings in 2003 underscore the value placed on maintaining quality public schools in Montgomery County, a priority reinforced by the focus of local, state, and federal officials on educational improvements.

Montgomery County Voter Support for Public Schools [4]	2003
▪ Voters who rated the Montgomery County Public Schools "excellent" or "good"	67%
▪ Voters who opposed cuts in school spending to balance county budget	86%
▪ Voters who were willing to pay higher taxes to avoid increases in class size	48%

The satisfaction and opinion studies reinforce a dynamic change in the operation of the school system over the last five years—the use of data to guide decision making. Just as importantly, consistent inquiry now forms the basis for evaluating the effects of educational policy on the design and implementation of academic and support programs. Instead of merely identifying problems, we now require that critical questions be asked and answered:

- *What do students need to know and be able to do?*
- *How will we know when they have learned it?*
- *What will we do when they haven't?*
- *What will we do when they already know it?*

The pursuit of such critical questions has opened the door to true academic and organizational reform, which has created a new environment of creativity and resourcefulness within the school system. It also has helped produce improved results in student performance and impressive acknowledgements nationally and internationally about the system's academic competitiveness.

National Reflections of High Academic Achievement	Source
▪ 8th grade students outperformed all but 7 countries in the world in mathematics, 14 countries in science	3rd International Math and Science Study, (Repeat), Boston College, April 2001
▪ 20 of 23 high schools ranked among the best in nation	*Newsweek*, May 2003
▪ 5 high schools named among top 100 most rigorous nationally	*Newsweek*, May 2003
▪ School system earns "Gold Medallion" for academic attractiveness for relocating companies for 9th straight year	*Expansion Management,* February 2004
▪ 3 high schools named among best 29 public schools in nation for prestigious college placements of their graduates	*Wall Street Journal,* April 2004

[4] *Montgomery County, Maryland, Voter Survey*. (March 2003). Silver Spring, MD: Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute (Gonzales/Arscott Research & Communications, Inc.).

The Benefits of Strategic Planning

The investment in academic reform has been enhanced by pinpointing where the improvements should be made. This support for continuous improvement has enabled the school system to focus specifically on achieving the success of *every child every day* through very detailed plans at every stage of the reform process since 1999.

Development of the Strategic Plans	Year
▪ *Our Call to Action*	1999
▪ *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*	2003
▪ *Bridge to Excellence in Public Education Master Plan*	2003
▪ *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence (Update)*	2004

Over the past five years, the reform efforts have included reorganization, restructuring, and modification of missions, departments, and staff responsibilities. These efforts continue for the upcoming school year. The executive leadership offices, for example, are being realigned to better serve and support teaching and learning. The realignment enhances our ability to ensure that priorities are met as we move forward with plans to improve student achievement. The evolution of strategic planning—which was highlighted this year by winning the bronze medal in the Maryland Quality Award competition, administered by the University of Maryland Center for Quality and Productivity—has remained focused on making improvements at each stage of the reform process.

Evidence of System Planning for Rigorous and Appropriate Instruction	2004
▪ Curricular standards at each grade level	✓
▪ An aligned program of studies, lesson plans, and course objectives	✓
▪ Individual professional development plans for every teacher	✓
▪ Individual school improvement plans	✓
▪ School cluster improvement plans for all schools	✓
▪ Office and departmental strategic plans for all central office units	✓
▪ Systemwide strategic plans	✓
▪ Public accountability and involvement in planning processes	✓

Prioritization of the Academic Reforms

Prior to October 1999, the academic priorities of the Board of Education were indistinct from the various efforts under way in the school system. The original *Success for Every Student Plan* adopted in 1992 remained little changed throughout the 1990's. Apart from constancy about a vision, goals, and outcomes, there were no specific priorities for academic improvement identified by the Board of Education that would independently guide the plan.

Since then, much has changed. The academic priorities that form the basis for current reform efforts were approved by the Board of Education in October 1999, followed a month later by the

adoption of the original *Our Call to Action*. Three years later on February 11, 2003, following significant community input and collaboration, the academic priorities were updated, and the Board of Education reaffirmed its focus on the strategic direction of the school system. The priorities established the basis for multi-year planning strategies.

Evidence of Academic Priorities of the Board of Education	1999	Updated 2003
▪ Organize and optimize resources for improved academic results	✓	✓
▪ Align rigorous curriculum, delivery of instruction, and assessment for continuous improvement of student achievement	✓	✓
▪ Develop, expand, and deliver a literacy-based pre-kindergarten to Grade 2 initiative	✓	✓
▪ Use student, staff, school, and system performance data to monitor and improve student achievement	✓	✓
▪ Foster and sustain systems that support and improve employee effectiveness, in partnership with MCPS organizations	✓	✓
▪ Strengthen family-school relationships and continue to expand civic, business, and community partnerships that support improved student achievement	✓	✓

Ongoing Planning for Continued Progress

The planning efforts now under way are designed to achieve common expectations and standards among and within all schools and offices. These initiatives actually preceded efforts under way by Maryland to achieve academic progress through the *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act* and respond to the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.* The county's initiatives include such programs as the Early Success Performance Plan[5] and other grade-level initiatives that target specific areas of improvement.

Ongoing Reform Initiatives and Improvements in Schools	2000-2004
▪ Enhanced early childhood education	✓
▪ Rigorous standards-based curricula	✓
▪ Significant class-size reductions	✓
▪ More rigorous and accelerated course work	✓
▪ Diagnostic formative assessments in elementary and middle school	✓
▪ Countywide semester exams in high school	✓
▪ Continuous professional development	✓
▪ Greater parent and community outreach and partnerships	✓

The continuous reform efforts have resulted in specific improvements in the work of school-based and central office staff, but the most visible changes have been made in the culture and

[5] *Early Success: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Our Youngest Learners*. (2004). Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

working conditions affecting classroom teachers. The improvements have strengthened the ability of teachers and other school-based personnel, particularly principals, to work together successfully in the improvement of programs and services for students. Concurrent efforts are being implemented to make similar improvements for administrators and support staff.

Strategically Planned Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality	2000-04
▪ Improvements in climate and working conditions	✓
▪ Establishment of a common language, expectations for reform	✓
▪ Improvements in hiring and employment practices	✓
▪ Retention of high-quality new and veteran teachers	✓
▪ Mentors for new teachers	✓
▪ On-site staff development for all teachers	✓
▪ A staff development substitute teacher program	✓
▪ A Professional Growth System for all teachers	✓
▪ Clear standards of evaluation	✓
▪ A Peer Assistance and Review System	✓
▪ Consulting teachers for novice and underperforming teachers	✓

Significant Financial Support Since 1999

Broad support for academic reform has enabled the school system to receive a significant increase in funding. This is due in large measure to the consistency of the priorities over the past several years and the capacity of the school system to respond to the needs of the community. The identification of the academic priorities provided a basis around which the community has coalesced in support of the annual operating and capital funding programs. Indeed, over the past four fiscal years, the Board of Education has received nearly all of its operating budget requests and a significant share of funding for its capital budget. The Board achieved this infusion of funding by working closely with county and state government officials on a shared belief in the need to adhere to the academic priorities.

Increase in Spending for Schools	FY2000	FY2005	Change
▪ Operating budget	$1.1 billion	$1.6 billion	+ $500 million
▪ Capital budget	$113.1 million	$165.5 million	+ $52.4 million
▪ 6-Year Capital Improvements Program	$567 million	$912.8 million	+ $345.8 million

The improved funding has allowed the school system to maintain highly competitive salaries for teachers and other staff, in collaboration with employee representative organizations. The result is a higher quality of new recruits. Of the 825 teachers hired last year, for example, 56 percent had completed course work for a master's degree or higher.

Higher Pay for Quality Teachers	FY2000	FY2004	Change
▪ Average teacher salary	$51,240	$62,156	+ 21.3%

Systemwide, the increased funding has meant significant progress in being able to successfully implement specific multi-year initiatives, including the investment of $67 million in new multi-year strategic plan initiatives that did not exist prior to FY 2000.

Reform Initiatives, FY 2001 – FY 2004	Positions	Amount
▪ Early Education Success	203.5	$11.1 million
▪ Class-size reductions	326.0	$14.3 million
▪ Special education	96.3	$3.6 million
▪ ESOL services	23.0	$1.4 million
▪ Counseling and mental health	17.0	$1.1 million
▪ High school reform	22.1	$1.5 million
▪ Other school improvements	108.5	$5.7 million
▪ Curriculum and instruction	79.0	$6.8 million
▪ Shared accountability	6.0	$0.4 million
▪ Technology	30.5	$2.5 million
▪ Community partnerships	16.2	$1.3 million
▪ Staff development	226.0	$17.2 million
Total	*1,154.1*	*$66.9 million*

The school system also has successfully competed for grant funding for innovative programs and services, in addition to other grants, greatly increasing resources over the past four years to supplement funding for reform initiatives and school improvement.

Increased Grant Funding for Initiatives	FY1999	FY2003	Change
▪ Competitive grants	$6.4 million	$23.3 million	+ $16.9 million
▪ Total grants	$54.8 million	$107.7 million	+ $52.9 million

Yet, even with the budget increases, the school system still implemented $15.6 million in internal budget reductions in FY 2004 alone through literally hundreds of redirections of resources within the system and a stringent freeze on expenditures. The Program Efficiency, Abandonment, and Redirection (PEAR) process and its integration with zero-based budgeting produced the savings. In fact, the reforms implemented over the past five years have been accomplished while overall staffing increased but the proportion of administrative staff decreased, resulting in more work being accomplished by comparatively fewer people.

Decrease in Administrative Staff	FY2001	FY2005	Change
▪ Percent of staff in central administration	2.5%	2.0%	- 0.5%
▪ Percent of staff in total administration	9.2%	8.2%	- 1.0%

Improvements Addressed Significant Strategic Challenges

The organizational improvements since 1999 were designed to address the changing dynamics of Montgomery County and the increased enrollment of greater numbers of children challenged academically by poverty, limited English proficiency, disabilities, mobility, and related factors.

Demographic Challenges	Description
▪ Increased student mobility	More than 13,000 students (10%) enter the system as new residents, while another 12,000 exit each year (not counting school transfers and graduations).
▪ More student diversity	The white student population last year declined to 45%, while other groups have increased: African American (22%), Asian American (14%), and Hispanic (19%). More change will occur. White student enrollment in Grade 1 was 42%.
▪ More English language learners	During the past three years, the enrollment in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program increased by nearly 20%, adding more than 2,000 new students. There were 12,195 ESOL students in the system last year.
▪ More disadvantaged children	The number of students participating in the Free and Reduced-price Meal System (FARMS) more than doubled in the past 12 years to 31,518 this past year.
▪ More challenged schools	The number of elementary schools with 40% or greater FARMS enrollment increased from 32 schools in September 1999 to 39 schools in September 2003.
▪ Greater concentration of poverty	An area from Takoma Park to Germantown includes 60 elementary schools that enroll the majority of students in FARMS (80%), students in ESOL (75%), as well as the majority of African American students (71%) and Hispanic students (78%).
▪ More students with disabilities	The number of students with an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) increased from 16,359 students in FY 2000 to 17,334 students in FY 2004.

The reforms also addressed issues related to the school system's capacity to maintain continuous improvement amid rising expectations and standards, more stringent state and federal requirements, and challenges associated with maintaining community support.

Organizational Challenges	Description
▪ Higher expectations for academic rigor and achievement	With ever-increasing regulatory mandates for student achievement, including those that link funding with accountability, the school system works toward goals of narrowing the achievement gap by race/ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency—while also increasing academic rigor.
▪ More stringent requirements for highly qualified staff	The school system hires about 2,000 faculty and supporting staff each year, a significant challenge made all the more difficult by state and federal regulations stipulating new definitions for personnel in instructional and support positions needing certification as "highly qualified."
▪ Need for more parent and public support	The school system's dependence on local county tax revenue is compounded by the fact that only 20% of local households have children in public school.

Implementation of Specific Initiatives, 2001-2004

Over the past four years, these challenges have been met by reforms and improvements that included new strategies and initiatives based on three basic ideals: improving already well-

established and successful programs, reforming other efforts that required major changes, and discarding those programs and activities that were not successful or necessary to achieve the school system objectives.

2001-2004 Strategic Plan Goals	Description of Strategic Plan Initiatives[6]
Goal 1: Ensure Success of Every Student	Early Success Performance Plan ▪ Pre-Kindergarten Programs Expanded ▪ Full-Day Kindergarten Expanded ▪ Reading Initiatives in Grades 1 and 2 Developed and Expanded ▪ Reading Interventions ▪ Reading First ▪ Support for the 60 Most Highly Impacted Schools Class-Size Reductions ▪ 15:1 in Full-Day Kindergarten in Targeted Elementary Schools ▪ 17:1 in Grades 1 & 2 in Targeted Elementary Schools ▪ Special Education Staffing Improvements Support Program Improvements ▪ Special Education Services ▪ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) ▪ Improved Student Services and Mental Health Support ▪ School Library Media Program Improvements ▪ Multicultural Education Improvements ▪ Alternative Programs Improvements Extended Time ▪ Extended Day and Year Programs (Elementary and Middle School) ▪ Summer School ▪ Evening High School Reorganization High School Reform ▪ High School Task Force Recommendations ▪ Signature Programs ▪ Northeast Consortium Programs ▪ Downcounty Consortium Programs ▪ Smaller Learning Communities ▪ Pilot Course Development ▪ Student Online Courses Organization ▪ Leadership and Supervision of Schools ▪ Vertical Articulation Among Cluster Schools ▪ Structured School Visits ▪ Cross-Functional Monitoring Teams ▪ Program Efficiency, Abandonment, and Redirection (PEAR) (continued)

[6] For detailed descriptions of each initiative, see the "Strategies/Initiatives" section of *Our Call to Action, Pursuit of Excellence: Strategic Plan for the Montgomery County Public Schools, 2003-2008*. (Updated 2004). Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

2001-2004 Strategic Plan Goals	Description of Strategic Plan Initiatives
Goal 1 (Continued): Ensure Success of Every Student	Safe and Secure Schools ▪ Systemwide Emergency Response Plan ▪ Individual Crisis Plans at all Schools and Facilities ▪ Security Personnel at all Middle and High Schools ▪ Closed Circuit Television in all High Schools ▪ Emergency Preparedness Drills ▪ Emergency Communication Procedures at all Schools ▪ Mental Health and Crisis Intervention Procedures ▪ Inter-Agency Emergency Preparedness Planning ▪ Educational Facilities Officers (EFO) ▪ Safe and Drug Free Schools ▪ Gang Prevention and Awareness ▪ Character Education ▪ Code Blue/Code Red Procedures
Goal 2: Provide an Effective Instructional Program	Curriculum and Instruction ▪ Implementation of a Standards-Based Curriculum ▪ Councils on Teaching and Learning ▪ Formative Assessments ▪ Curriculum Implementation Textbook Project ▪ Standards-Based Grading and Reporting System ▪ Information Literacy Skills ▪ Middle School Audit ▪ Skills for Success ▪ Mathematics Content Coaches ▪ Reading Specialists ▪ Reading Recovery® ▪ Fine Arts Education ▪ Arts Integrated Model Elementary Program ▪ System of Shared Accountability ▪ Increased Rigor ▪ Program Evaluations ▪ SAT Intervention Plan ▪ Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) ▪ Gifted and Talented Student Program Improvements ▪ Career and Technology Education Programs Technology ▪ Technology Modernization ▪ Digital Divide ▪ Integrated Quality Management System ▪ Data Warehouse ▪ Instructional Management System ▪ Teacher-Centered Instructional Planning Model

2001-2004 Strategic Plan Goals	Description of Strategic Plan Initiatives
Goal 3: Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education	Parent and Community Partnerships ▪ Montgomery County Business Roundtable for Education ▪ Study Circles ▪ Achievement Counts ▪ Project Change ▪ Family/Community Involvement ▪ PARTNERS in Business and Education ▪ Mentoring Programs ▪ Connection Resource Bank ▪ Various Advisory Committees and Work Groups ▪ County Government Partnerships ▪ Montgomery College Partnerships, including Adult ESOL ▪ Grade 10 Readiness Program ▪ University Partnerships for Professional Development ▪ Business Partnerships and Training ▪ Technology Partnerships ▪ Employee Organization Partnerships ▪ Saturday School Program
Goal 4: Create a Positive Work Environment in a Self-Renewing Organization	Career Development ▪ Professional Growth System for Teachers ▪ Professional Growth System for Administrators and Supervisors ▪ Professional Development for New Administrators ▪ Professional Growth System for Supporting Services Staff ▪ Supporting Services Training and Development ▪ Staff Development Teachers ▪ Skillful Teaching Courses ▪ Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Program ▪ Staff Development Substitute Teachers in Every School ▪ New Teacher Induction and Mentoring ▪ Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning ▪ Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction Grade-Level Training ▪ Continuing Professional Development Courses ▪ Diversity Training and Development ▪ Recruitment/Retention/Placement of Highly Qualified Staff ▪ Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence ▪ Baldrige-Guided School Improvement Process ▪ Human Resources Information System ▪ Employee and Retiree Services Center

Emerging Priority for Improved Technology

While technology improvements have been included throughout the reform initiatives since 1999, an emerging new emphasis has been identified to increase the scope and pace of technology innovation in the school system.

This effort is building on the progress already made in using technology to support the delivery of improved instructional services. Incremental advances have been made in providing timely solutions to problems teachers and principals face in using student performance data on a daily basis. More innovative uses of emerging technologies are being developed for implementation in the near future.

New Technology Systems	Description
▪ Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS)	Provides overall system management for information needed by teachers, administrators, parents, and the community
▪ Student Information Management System (SIMS)	Provides teachers and principals with information to plan instruction, monitor individual student progress, and evaluate school program.
▪ Instructional Management System (IMS)	Provides teachers and principals in Kindergarten through Grade 3 with ability to access and analyze individual student achievement data and differentiate instruction accordingly (to be expanded to Grades 4-5 in 2004-2005)
▪ Hand-held technology	Pilot effort under way to allow teachers to enter student performance data via hand-held technology and instantly download to personal computers.
▪ Data Warehouse	Provides web-based storage of and access to of longitudinal data from multiple information systems, permitting staff to examine performance trends by school, program, or student demographic characteristics.

Gains in Narrowing the Gap by Race and Ethnicity in Student Performance

One of the specific targets of the continuing reform initiatives is the closure of the academic achievement gap in student performance by race and ethnicity. The gap has not closed completely, but it has been significantly narrowed. Each of the major assessments over the past four years has demonstrated continued progress in improving the performance of African American and Hispanic students. Indeed, this progress has occurred while the performance of Asian American and white students also has improved.

Narrowing Gap on National Assessment[7]	2000	2004	Change
Percentage of Grade 2 Students at or above National Average, Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS)			
▪ African American students	45%	60%	+ 15
▪ Asian American students	76%	85%	+ 9
▪ Hispanic students	44%	61%	+ 17
▪ White students	76%	85%	+ 9

Narrowing the Gap on State Assessment[8]	2003	2004	Change
Percentage of Grade 3 Students Achieving Proficiency in Reading, Maryland School Assessments (MSA)			
▪ African American students	51%	65%	+ 14
▪ Asian American students	80%	86%	+ 6
▪ Hispanic students	45%	60%	+ 15
▪ White students	85%	89%	+ 4

[7] Stevenson, J. W., & Schatz, C. (2004). *Results of the Spring 2004 Administration of the Grade 2 TerraNova Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

[8] Stevenson, J., & Alban, T. (2004). *Results of the 2004 Administration of the Maryland School Assessment in Grades 3, 5, 8, and 10*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

Gains in Narrowing the Gap with Target Schools on State Tests[9]	2003	2004	Change
Percentage of Grade 3 Students Achieving Proficiency in Reading, MSA			
▪ Target Schools (with highest poverty) in Reading	48%	64%	+ 16
▪ Overall County in Reading	70%	78%	+ 8

Narrowing the Gap in Text Reading Skills in Kindergarten[10]	2003
Percentage of Students at or above the Benchmark	
▪ African American Students	72%
▪ Asian American Students	80%
▪ Hispanic Students	60%
▪ White Students	79%

Narrowing the Gap in Text Reading Skills in Grade 2[11]	2002	2003	Change
Percentage of Students at or above the Benchmark			
▪ African American Students	46%	57%	+ 11
▪ Asian American Students	73%	78%	+ 5
▪ Hispanic Students	35%	47%	+ 12
▪ White Students	74%	77%	+ 3

Preliminary Gains in Sub-Group Performance in Achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)[12]	
Based on Proficiency Attainment by Students on MSA, 2004	
▪ African American Students	Met AYP in All Schools, Except Alternative Programs and Mark Twain
▪ Asian American Students	Met AYP in All Schools
▪ Hispanic Students	Met AYP in All Schools, Except Alternative Programs
▪ White Students	Met AYP in All Schools, Except Alternative Programs
▪ Students in FARMS	Met AYP in All Schools, Except Alternative Programs and Mark Twain
▪ Students with Limited English Proficiency	Met AYP in All Schools, except one high school (Sherwood)
▪ Students with Disabilities	Met AYP in All but 19 of 191 Schools (90%)

[9] Stevenson, J., & Alban, T. (2004).

[10] Alban, T., Curry-Corcoran, D., & Nielsen, J. (2003). *Longitudinal impact of Early Success Performance Plan initiatives on student academic achievement: technical report on three years of implementation*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

[11] *Early Success: Closing the Gap for Our Youngest Learners.*(2004). Montgomery County Public Schools. Rockville, MD.

[12] Weast, J.D. (2004). *Preliminary Report on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2004 (memo to the Board of Education).* Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

Narrowing Gap in Rigorous High School Courses[13]	1999	2003	Change
Honors or Advanced Placement class enrollment			
▪ African American students	30%	47%	+17
▪ Asian American students	69%	81%	+12
▪ Hispanic students	28%	42%	+14
▪ White students	60%	79%	+19

Overall Improvement of Student Performance, 2000 through 2004

In addition to continuing to narrow the gap in student performance by race and ethnicity (as well as other demographic characteristics), continued progress has been made in overall student performance. This is a significant challenge, given the increased diversity of the school system, particularly the increased incidence of poverty, and the relationship of academic underperformance to student poverty.

Ninety percent of schools fulfilled the Maryland state requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2004—compared to just 75 percent the previous year. This qualified the school system to be designated as having met the AYP requirements this year for the first time since the implementation of the new state assessments and accountability program in 2003. The achievement rate was highest among elementary schools (95 percent).

Preliminary Status of Schools Achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2004[14]

Based on Proficiency Attainment by Students on MSA, 2004

	Total Number of Schools	*Number Meeting AYP*	*Percent Meeting AYP*
▪ Elementary	125	119	95%
▪ Middle	37	28	76%
▪ High	23	20	87%
▪ Special Schools	6	4	67%
▪ All Schools	191	171	90%

There also were improvement gains among middle and high schools. Students achieved the highest level ever in the percentage enrolled in rigorous courses, including Algebra 1 in middle school and honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school. In a related measure, there was a significant increase in students taking AP tests for potential college credit—the highest number ever in the school system—and, yet, there was a marginal impact on the average score and the percentage of students scoring the highest scores.

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[13] Steinberg, L. (2003). *Key Areas of Progress in Secondary Schools: Successful Completion of Algebra I or Higher-level Mathematics and Enrollment in Honors/Advanced Placement Courses, 2002-2003*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools.

[14] Weast, J.D. (2004).

Gains in Students Taking More Rigorous Courses in Secondary School [15]	1999	2003	Change
▪ Students completing Algebra 1 or higher level math by end of Grade 8	33%	51%	+ 18
▪ Students completing Algebra 1 by end of Grade 9	69%	77%	+ 8
▪ Students enrolled in at least one Honors or Advanced Placement class	54%	67%	+ 13

Gains in Students Taking Advanced Placement Tests [16]	1999	2003	Change
▪ Number of Advanced Placement tests taken	7,167	16,954	+ 137%
▪ Number of students taking at least one Advanced Placement test	3,935	8,841	+ 125%
▪ Average score of the Advanced Placement tests	3.63	3.36	- 0.27
▪ Percent of scores at a score of 3 or above	83%	76%	- 7 %pts

Continued improvements in secondary school achievement are foreshadowed by the gains being made in the elementary schools. Among the indicators are two important measures: the increase in the percentage of kindergarten students at or above the benchmark in reading and the rise in the national median percentile rank among second grader students in reading. The latter achievement placed these students among the highest achieving children in the nation.

Gains in Text Reading Skills in Kindergarten [17]	2001	2003	Change
Percentage of Students at or above the Benchmark			
▪ Spring Text Reading	39%	70%	+ 31

Gains on National Assessment in Grade 2 [18]	2000	2003	Change
Percentage of Grade 2 Students at or above National Average, CTBS			
▪ All students	65%	75%	+ 10

Indeed, the continued improvement in elementary school achievement is evident in more than reading and includes student performance in mathematics and language. This is apparent in the longitudinal data available on the performance of second grade students over the past four years on a nationally normed assessment of basic skills.

The most recent improvements were propelled by third grade students who were the first to receive the kindergarten reforms four years ago and second grade students who were the second group to receive the reforms.

[15] Steinberg, L. (2003).
[16] Andrews, J., & Jaffe, D. (2003). *2003 Advanced Placement Test Results*. Rockville, MD.: Montgomery County Public Schools.
[17] Alban, T., Curry-Corcoran, D., & Nielsen, J. (2003).
[18] Stevenson, J. W., & Schatz, C. (2004).

Gains in National Ranking of Elementary School Performance[19]	2000	2004	Change
Median National Percentile Rank, Grade 2, CTBS			
▪ Reading	64th	73rd	+ 9
▪ Mathematics	70th	79th	+ 9
▪ Mathematics Computation	68th	83rd	+ 15
▪ Language	55th	68th	+ 13
▪ Language Mechanics	77th	87th	+ 10

Gains in Elementary and Middle Schools on State Tests[20]	2003	2004	Change
Percentage of Students Achieving Proficiency, MSA			
▪ Grade 3	70%	78%	+ 8
▪ Grade 5	75%	76%	+ 1
▪ Grade 8	72%	72%	0
▪ Grade 10	73%	73%	0

Conclusion

We know that the rapid change in the demographic challenges faced by our schools requires continued vigilance in providing the necessary academic supports for teaching and learning. At the same time, it also requires greater continuity and consistency from the leadership of the school system, especially as the most challenging reforms continue to make their way to the classroom level—such as the improvements to grading and reporting. This report summarizes the progress made in a relatively brief period of time. It also demonstrates the continued work ahead. This fall the results of an audit of the middle school program will be provided to the Board of Education, and I anticipate recommendations will be made for a significant reform initiative affecting Grades 6-8. The above results of the MSA for Grades 8 and 10 suggest that more secondary school reform is necessary if we are to continue improving the academic performance of our students. I am confident that continued improvement is possible. Certainly, the progress made thus far clearly demonstrates that a growing school system of 140,000 students in 192 schools with 20,000 employees can implement successful school reforms and validate that success with gains in student achievement.

I will continue to keep you informed.

JDW:kmy

Copy to:
Executive Staff

[19] Stevenson, J. W., & Schatz, C. (2004).
[20] Stevenson, J., & Alban, T. (2004).