

ESEA Flexibility: Priority, Focus and Reward Schools

Reward Schools

Maryland strives to reward all of its high achieving schools, but also to offer particular recognition and support to those schools designated as Title I schools, which must overcome additional challenges as a result of their high poverty populations. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Request granted to the state of Maryland, Title I schools will be divided into three categories to allow for the most specialized attention and help for each specific school and to focus on closing the achievement gaps within all schools. By focusing more specifically on the needs of each school, Maryland can continue to help students in all subgroups including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and any students facing other challenges. Local Education Agencies will communicate with schools and teachers to effectively provide resources or recognition to each type of Title I school. These new categories are reward schools, priority schools, and focus schools.

Reward School Distinctions

Reward Schools are recognized in two categories: 1. Title I schools that have been the highest performing or, 2: Title I schools that have shown the highest amount of progress over a period of time on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA). Schools that are determined to be High Performing Reward Schools (Category 1) will have met the Annual Measurable Objectives for all subgroups for two consecutive years. High Performing Reward schools must also have a 10% or less achievement gap between students in subgroups and the rest of the student body.

High Performing Reward schools will also receive additional recognition based on their performance. Of the schools that are considered High Performing Reward Schools, those that are in the top 10% of Title I schools, indicating the maximum amount of improvement in student performance on MSA tests, will be designated as Distinguished High Performing Reward Schools.

In addition, if a High Performing Reward School has improved its performance, and the school is made up of 50% or more economically disadvantaged students, it will receive the title of a Superlative High Performing Reward School.

High Progress Reward Schools are those Title I Schools that have significantly reduced the gap in achievement between subgroups. These schools must have made at least an 18 percentage point gain in the “all students” subgroup and have a 10 percent or less gap between any other performing subgroup. Reward Schools in either category will be recognized by the State Department of Education and act as models of success for other Title I schools.

The Maryland State Department of Education has identified 30 Reward Schools, based on 2011 MSA data.

Priority Schools

Priority Schools are five percent of all Title I schools that are the lowest achieving on MSA. These schools have not reached adequate performance standards in reading and mathematics for the “all students” subgroup, not just for low-performing subgroup populations.

Schools or local education agencies have the option to use one of the USED approved “turnaround models” or they can develop their own measures to implement to improve the

school. If schools choose to use their own model they must address a number of Turnaround principles including strong leadership, effective teachers and instruction, additional time for student learning, school instructional programs, a safe school environment, and family and community engagement.

The Maryland State Department of Education expects that school districts with priority schools will use a certain portion of their Title I funding from the federal government to implement their choice of turnaround models or turnaround plans for intervention.

Maryland has identified 21 priority schools. Sixteen of the priority schools are currently being served with funds from Title I, Section 1003(g). The additional five schools will be served using Title I, Part A funds reserved by the district. All Priority schools are eligible to receive between \$50,000 and \$2 million per year for the next three years to help execute their turnaround models or interventions.

Priority schools will take an additional measure of attention and support, therefore, it is expected that these schools will implement multifaceted plans for school reform including recruiting staff, enriching instructional programs, professional development, and developing a system of accountability that will help turnaround models and intervention measures. All priority schools will be monitored by the LEA and MSDE.

All priority schools are in one of two schools systems, Baltimore City Public Schools or Prince George's County Public Schools.

Focus Schools

Focus Schools are ten percent of all Title I schools having the largest gap between the "all students" subgroup and the lowest performing subgroup or a Title I eligible high school with graduation rates 60% or lower.

These schools are unique in that they do not require whole school reform measures, rather school interventions will focus on one or two subgroups that are low achieving and contribute to an increased achievement gap between other subgroups of students in the school. Maryland's focus schools will implement intervention plans mainly for students with disabilities or students who are second language learners with cultural barriers. Many of these students have unique challenges.

Focus schools will be expected to collect and analyze data to identify problematic areas of instruction and learning. This will allow schools and LEAs to address the particular areas through professional development, parental involvement, instructional teams, and the development of other specialized strategies that they deem necessary. These measures will be monitored by LEAs and MSDE to ensure that they effectively work to close the gaps between subgroups and all students within the school, thus improving the overall performance of the school.

The Maryland State Department of Education has identified 41 Title I Focus Schools. Under ESEA Flexibility, Focus schools will receive interventions by the State and local school system for three years, beginning with the 2012-2013 school year.

For more information about Priority, Focus, or Reward Schools, please contact Maria E. Lamb, Director, Program Improvement and Family Support at mlamb@msde.state.md.us or call 410-767-0286.