

A Publication from the Maryland State Department of Education

Maryland Classroom

Maryland School Assessment Scores Continue to Rise

For the second consecutive year, reading and math scores on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) have improved in all 24 school systems. Moreover, they've improved for students of all races and for most receiving special services.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Race

As test scores continue to rise sharply for African-American and Hispanic students, the achievement gap among races is narrowing. In 5th grade, for instance, White students posted a two-year, 6.1-percentage-point gain in the number reaching proficiency. Asian students recorded an 8.4-percentage-point gain. But the improvement among African-American and Hispanic students was even more dramatic. Over those same two years, the number of African-American 5th-graders scoring Proficient or better in reading jumped 12.6 percentage points, and the number of Hispanic 5th-graders reaching proficiency climbed 11.9 points.

Minority 3rd-graders showed significant progress, as well. The share of African-American 3rd-graders scoring Proficient or better in math increased from 47.1 percent in 2003 to 63.5 percent in 2005. The share of Hispanic 3rd-graders scoring Proficient or better in reading jumped from 39.2 percent to 63.3 percent.

Poverty

The achievement gap between low-income students and their wealthier peers is gradually narrowing, as well. The proportion of 5th-graders receiving free and reduced-price meals (FARM) and scoring Proficient or better in math improved from 2003's 33.3 percent to 50.6 percent last spring. The proportion of 3rd-graders receiving FARM and scoring at or above Proficient in reading jumped from 36.9 percent to 60.5 percent.

Disability

Students receiving special education services are making striking progress in the early grades. The share of 3rd-graders in special education reaching proficiency in reading has more than doubled in two years: Twenty-five percent met the Proficient standard in 2003; 51.3 percent met the standard in 2005. However, a 44-point performance gap separates 8th-graders in special education from their regular education peers.

Language

Among English language learners, the biggest reading improvement came in grade 3, where 47.2 percent made Proficient or Advanced, up from just 17.8 percent in 2003. Fifth-graders improved quite a bit, too: Fifteen percent more—38.7 percent—reached proficiency than did two years ago. In math, 3rd-graders again made the

most progress, with 55.7 percent reaching proficiency in March, up from 38.2 percent in 2003.

Middle School Challenges

While middle schools are improving at a steady pace, they have a bigger deficit to make up than elementary schools. In fact, since the MSA was first administered in 2003, reading and math scores have typically decreased with each grade, bottoming out at grade 8. The math gap has grown especially wide: Despite a two-year, 12-percentage-point gain, just 51.7 percent of 8th-graders met the math proficiency standard—compared with 76.8 percent of 3rd-graders. The more modest reading gap between 3rd- and 8th-graders—75.8 percent of students at proficiency versus 66.4 percent—is still significant. Upon releasing the scores in June, Dr. Grasmick said accelerating middle school achievement will be a key objective this year.

For More Results

State, system, and school data are available on the Maryland State Department of Education's report card Web site: www.mdreportcard.org ■



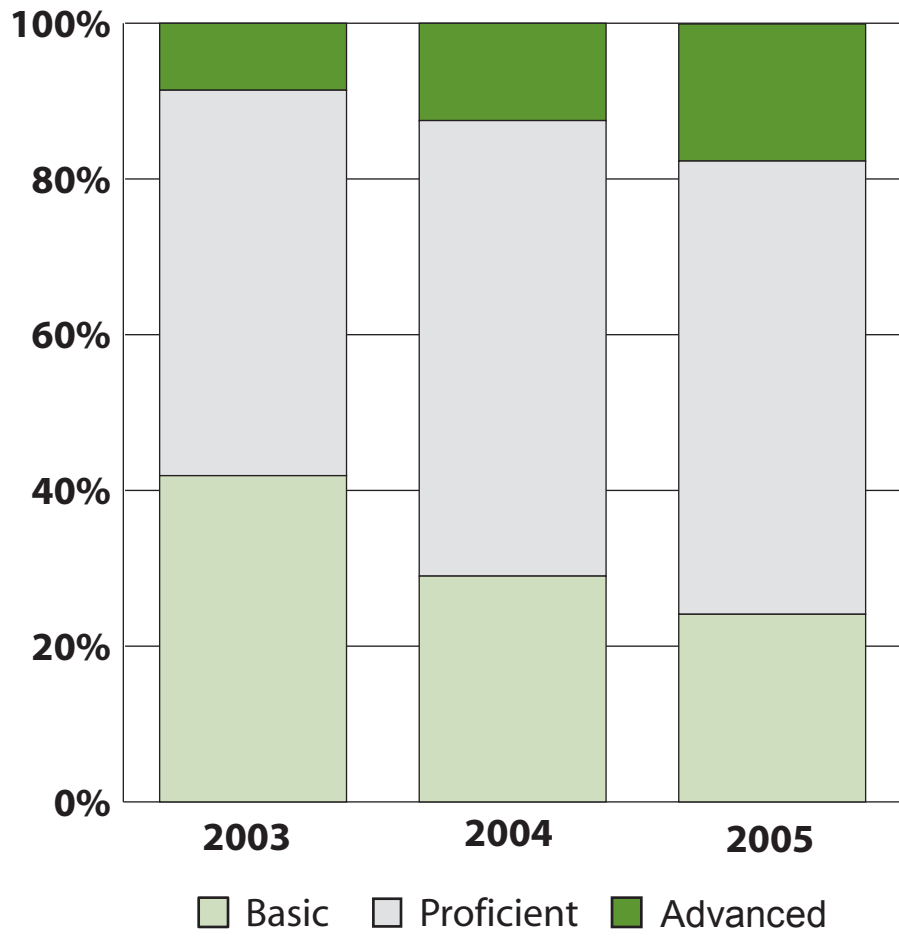
Mod-MSA: New Flexibility for Students with Disabilities

In May, the U.S. Department of Education announced a new policy for testing students with disabilities. Citing research showing that certain students with disabilities can make significant progress toward grade-level standards, but may not be able to meet them in the same timeframe as other students, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings gave states permission to develop modified achievement standards for these students and modified assessments based on them.

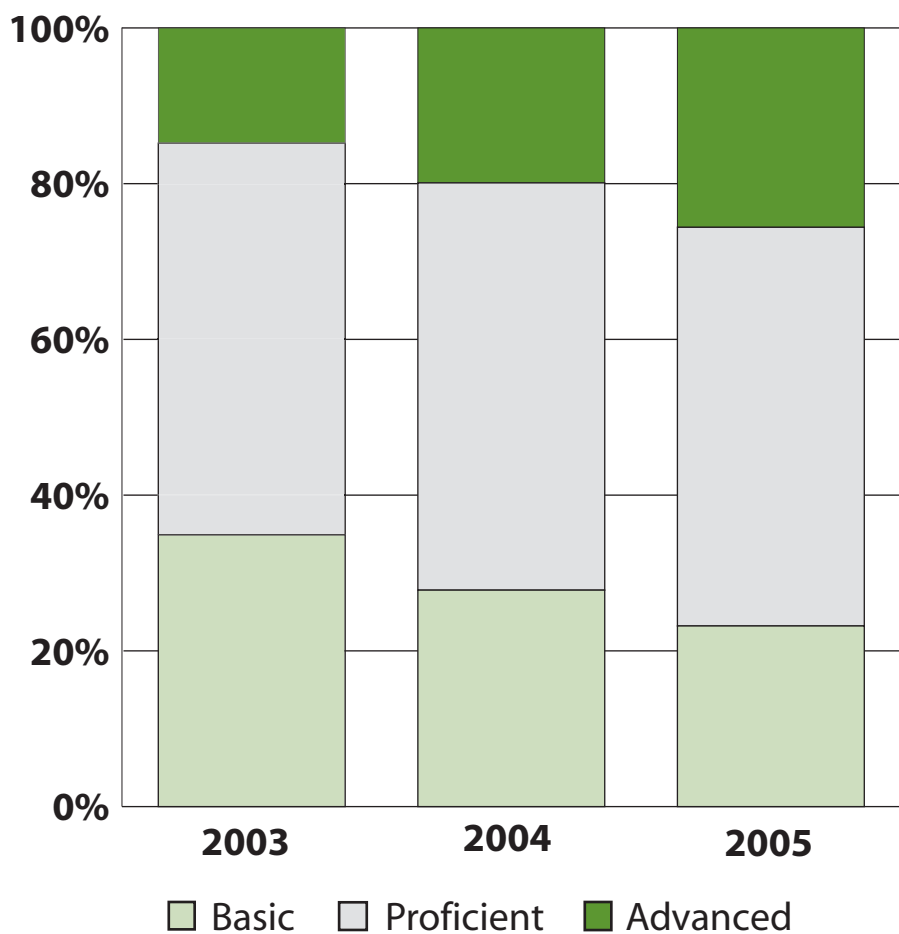
Maryland will likely unveil its modified assessments (Mod-MSA) next school year. Under the new policy, students scoring Proficient or better on these assessments cannot comprise more than 2 percent of the overall student population at the school, system, and state levels. (Students taking the Mod-MSA will not overlap with the 1 percent of students with significant cognitive disabilities currently taking the Alt-MSA.)

Secretary Spellings also gave states permission to adjust their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations with these students in mind—even before the modified assessments are administered. Therefore, in June, MSDE offered school systems the opportunity to appeal their schools' 2004-05 AYP designations (and, if applicable, their status in the School Improvement process) if the only students missing the Annual Measurable Objective(s) were those in special education. Schools were allowed to identify students who might have reached proficiency on the Mod-MSA had it been available to them and to recalculate AYP based on their removal from the Basic performance level. School systems' appeals, due in mid-July, were still pending at the time of publication. ■

MSA: Grade 3 Reading



MSA: Grade 3 Math



Writing

From 1998–2002, the proportion of Maryland 8th-graders scoring Proficient or Advanced on the National Assessment of Educational Progress writing test grew by 52%. Maryland ranks 6th in the nation for the proportion of 8th-graders scoring at the highest two levels and 9th for the proportion of 4th-graders at the highest two levels.

Science

Maryland ranks 5th in the nation in the proportion of high school seniors taking an Advanced Placement science exam. Maryland ranks 9th in the nation in the proportion of middle and high school science teachers with majors in their field.

Did You Know

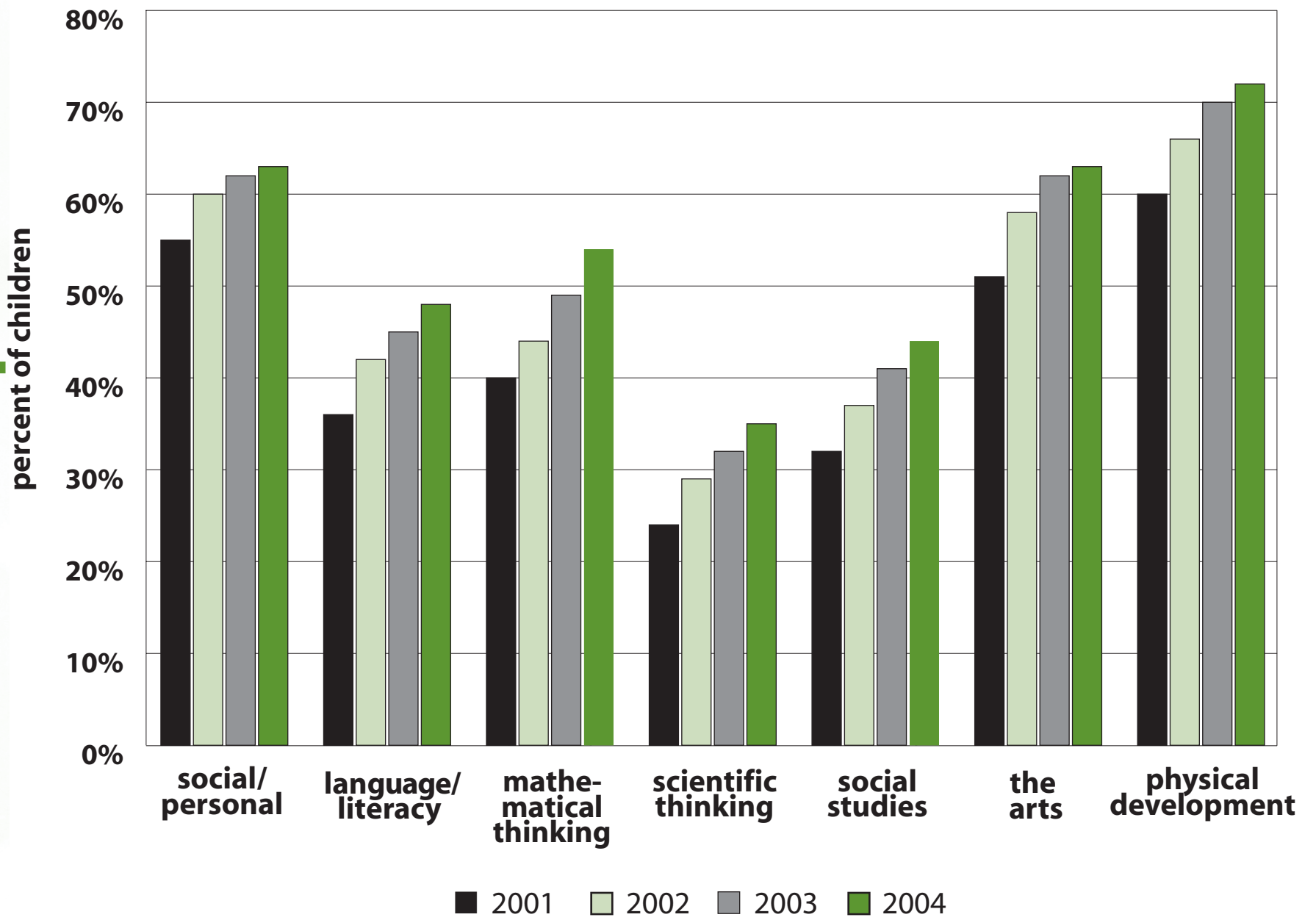
Fewer than one-quarter of all 3rd-graders scored Proficient on the 2005 reading and math Maryland Assessments.

More children are entering school ready to learn. Fifty-eight percent of all kindergarteners were ready for the kindergarten curriculum in 2004—up from 49% in 2001.

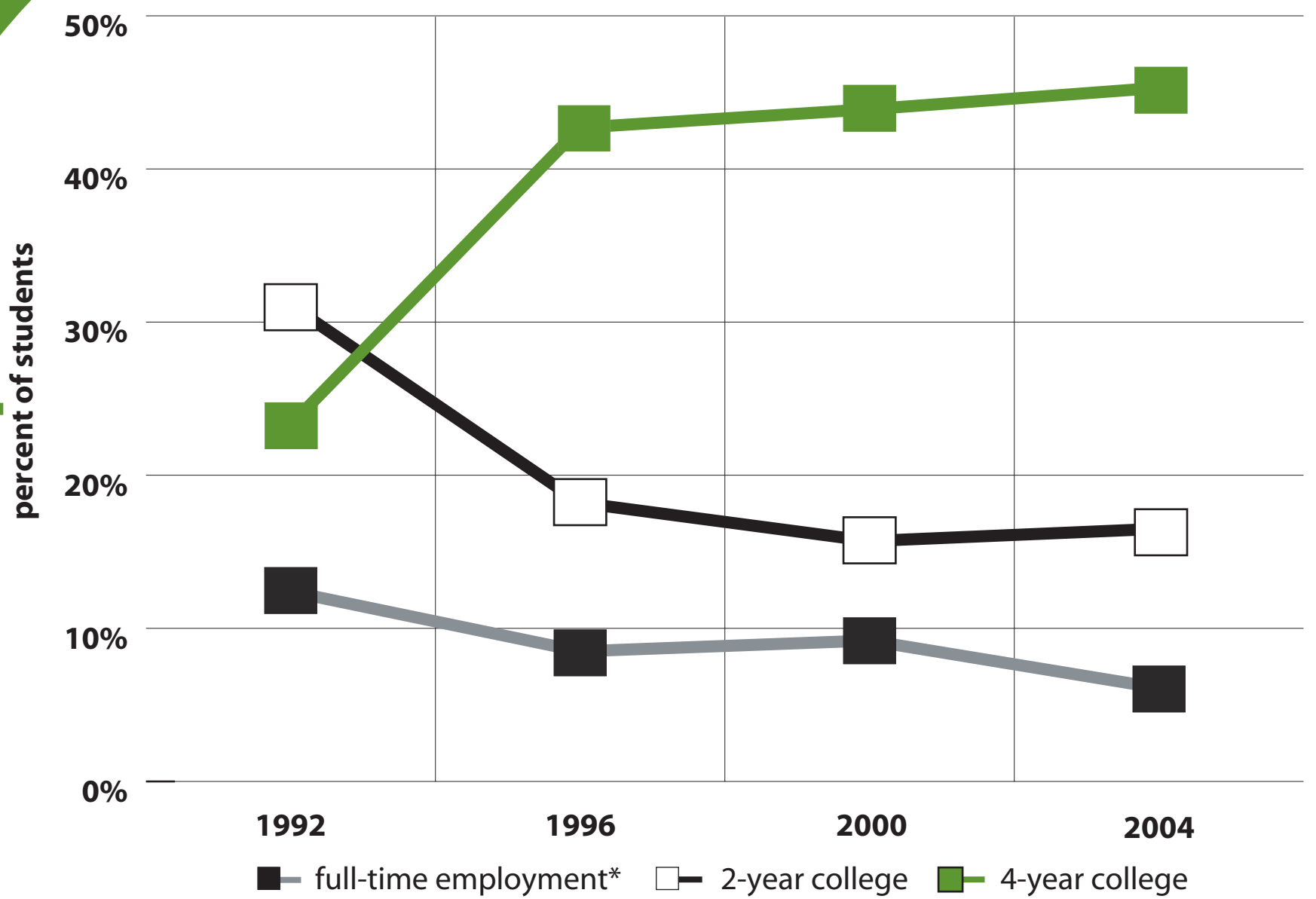
Maryland outperforms nearly every other state in preparing students for and enrolling them in college. The number of Marylanders aged 18–24 attending college jumped 22% over the last decade—the nation's 7th largest increase. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education gave Maryland an A- in college preparation, citing high reading and math test scores, exemplary AP participation and performance, and outstanding teacher quality.

PRIDE

Children fully ready for kindergarten



Students' post-secondary plans



*employment is unrelated to student's high school program

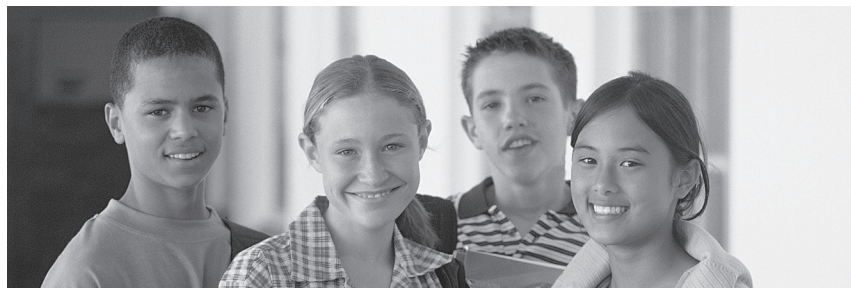
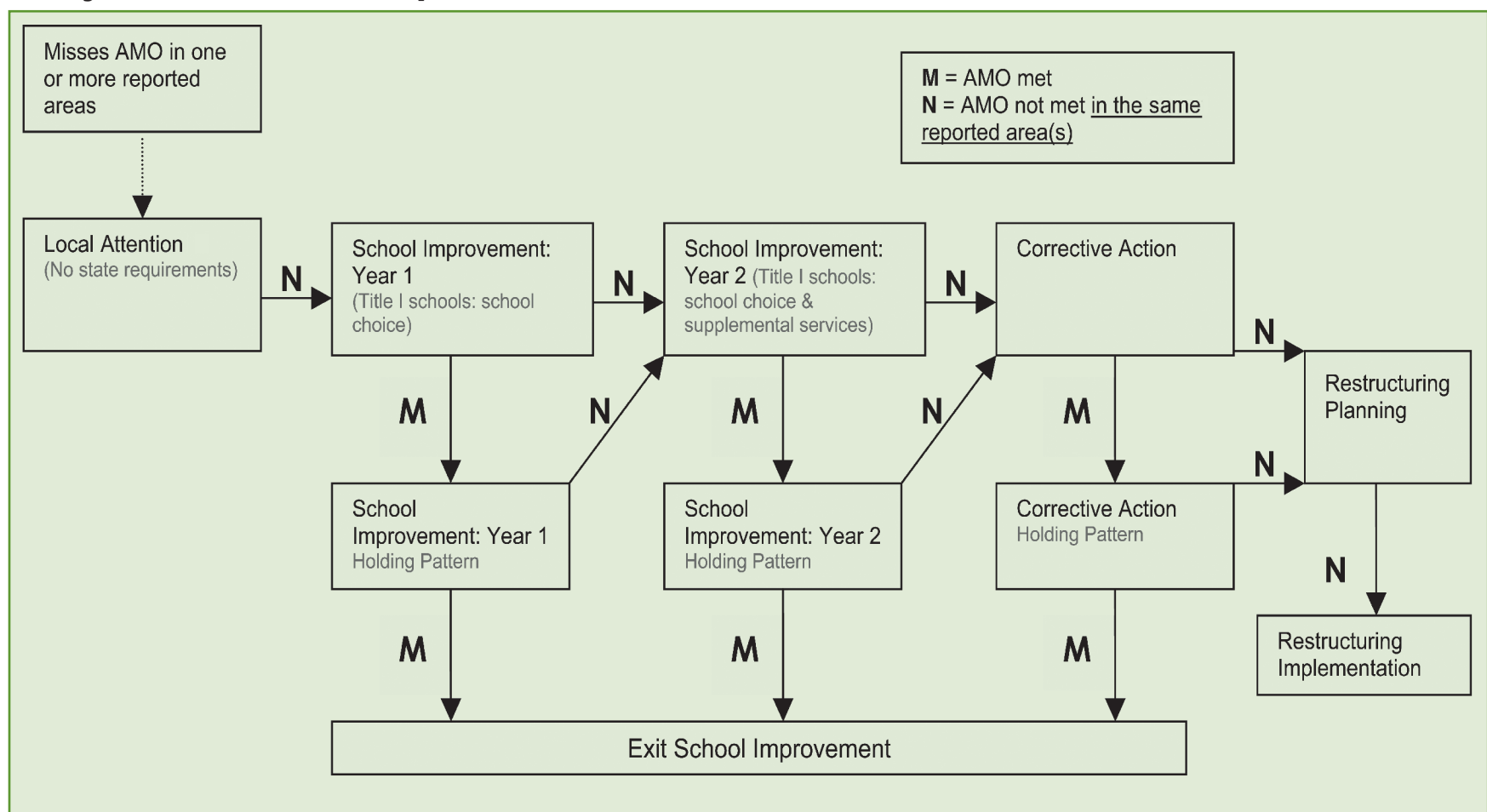
School Improvement: Changes in Identification and Progression

To better identify and correct patterns of persistent failure rather than normal fluctuations in performance, state officials this year changed the way schools enter and proceed through the School Improvement process.

Prior to the change, schools had only to miss the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) in any of 19 categories—reading for All Students and eight student subgroups, math for All Students and eight student subgroups, and either attendance rate for All Students (elementary and middle schools) or graduation rate for All Students (high schools)—to fail the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) test. Schools failing to make AYP became eligible for entering School Improvement or proceeding to the next step in it.

With the change announced in June, schools must miss the AMO for All Students or for any subgroup of students in the same reported area (reading, math, or attendance/graduation rate) for two consecutive years to enter or advance through School Improvement. (See the figure below.) ■

Maryland's School Improvement Process



Educator Expense Deduction Reinstated

Didn't get as much back as you'd hoped on your 2004 taxes? Good news: Teachers may deduct up to \$250 for books and other classroom supplies again this year. The Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004 reinstated the educator expense deduction for 2005. Expenses incurred any time this year may qualify for the deduction.

The deduction is available to both public and private school educators. To be eligible, you must work at least 900 hours during a school year as a teacher, instructor, counselor, principal, or aide.

You may subtract up to \$250 of qualified out-of-pocket expenses when figuring adjusted gross income. Qualified expenses are un-reimbursed expenses you paid or incurred for things like books, supplies, computer equipment (including software and services), and supplementary materials used in the classroom. This deduction is available whether or not you itemize on Schedule A.

To help prevent a missed deduction at tax time, keep records of qualifying expenses in a labeled folder or envelope, noting the date, amount, and purpose of each purchase.

For more information, call the IRS Tele-Tax system at 1.800.829.4477 and select Topic 458. Or go to www.irs.gov and search Tax Topic 458. ■

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Office of Academic Policy

Ronald Peiffer, Deputy State Superintendent
Nan Mulqueen, Editor-in-Chief

Edward L. Root, President, State Board of Education

Nancy S. Grasmick, Secretary-Treasurer of the Board
State Superintendent of Schools

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor

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If you have any questions or comments about this publication, please contact Nan Mulqueen, editor, at 410.767.0475.