

## Cautious Optimism

### Test Score Increases Provide Hope, But Raise Significant Questions

#### Executive Summary

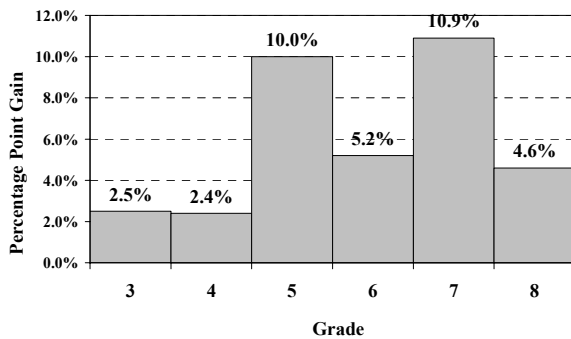
The percentage of students proficient in Maryland School Assessments increased for the 2008 school year, particularly for disadvantaged children, but an expert panel found that changes in the content and length of the tests were at least partially responsible for the increases. Despite the increases, many 8th graders are still not proficient in reading and math, including more than half of low-income students.

Advocates for Children and Youth believes that any decision to modify the rigor of state tests should be made through a transparent process, that any potential impact should be revealed when the results are released, and that the highest possible academic standards should be maintained.

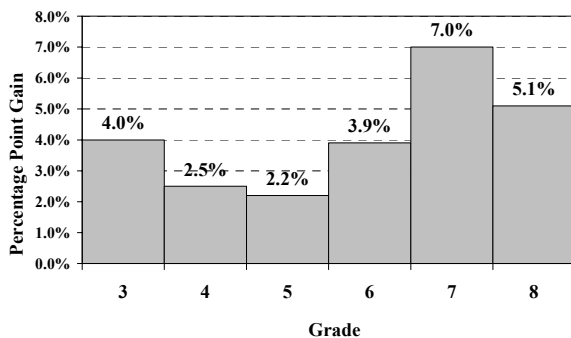
#### The 2008 Results

For the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), every grade level had performance gains from testing year 2007 in both reading and math.

#### 2008 Reading Gains



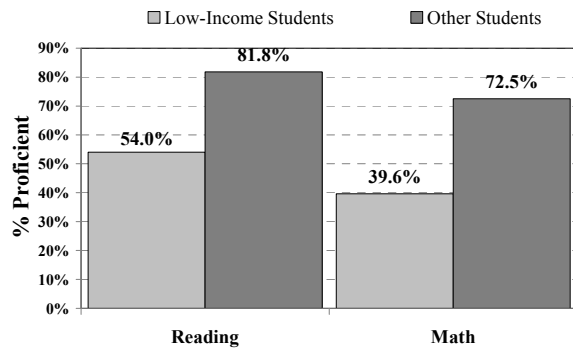
#### 2008 Math Gains



#### Discussion

**8<sup>th</sup> Graders and Continued Disparity:** Eighth graders continue to do poorly, particularly those who are low-income. 54% of low-income 8<sup>th</sup> graders were proficient on the reading MSA in comparison to 81.8% of other students. Low-income students fared worse in math—only 39.6% were proficient compared to 72.5%.

#### Low-Income vs. Other 8th Graders



**Changes to the Test:** The State Superintendent's expert panel determined that changes made in the content and length of the test impacted the results, noting in particular the unusually large increases in 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading. They did not determine the size of the impact.

#### Recommendations

**Transparent Process:** Any significant change to the tests that may impact rigor should be done through a transparent and open process. It does not appear that test changes were made with any public notice or involvement.

**Accuracy of Results:** Purported improvements need to be conveyed clearly. Yet, the potential impact of the test changes was not mentioned when the results were announced.

**Academic Standards:** Maryland's test should remain as rigorous as possible. It appears that the changes made the test easier. Disadvantaged students are hurt in particular by lower academic standards.

