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**Two Key Challenges for Maryland's Next School Superintendent***Achievement Gaps & Facilities Repair***Executive Summary**

Maryland is at a critical juncture as it chooses a new State Superintendent of Schools. Although Maryland should celebrate its ranking as the best public school system in the country, this is not a time for complacency. Solving the lingering achievement gap between Caucasian and minority students and repairing and rebuilding dilapidated school facilities will require an innovative leader with bold ideas. Maryland's next superintendent must understand and appreciate the complexities of each of Maryland's twenty-four local districts and be willing to create a vision and implement a strategic plan that improves education for all children in Maryland.

**Priority One: Closing the Achievement Gap**

In 2011, Maryland proudly reported significant gains in national standardized testing, beating their peers in nearly every other state. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which tests Reading and Math for fourth and eighth graders, Maryland public students performed better than the national average. However, not all of our children have cause for celebration.<sup>1</sup>

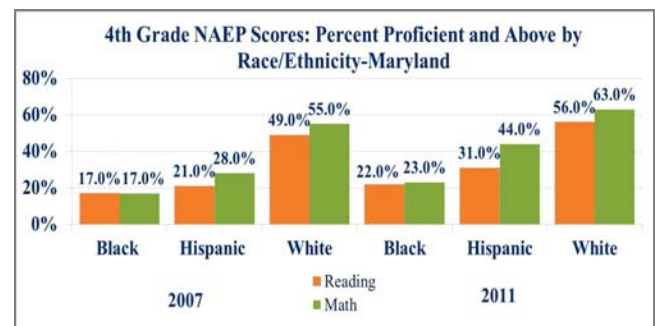
Success notwithstanding, the long-standing achievement gap between Caucasian and minority students remains troublesome.<sup>2</sup> Recent results on state and national tests indicate that great disparities remain in the quality of education provided across the State and among the various counties. Some jurisdictions are failing to achieve an 80% graduation rate, while other students graduate lacking the proper foundation needed for them to succeed at a two or four year college.

While in some districts Maryland students celebrate high scores and achievements on standardized tests, currently only 25% of minority eighth graders achieve Proficient and Above on National Reading

and Math tests.<sup>3</sup> And for youth who are suspended, expelled, or drop out of school, studies show they are more likely to end up in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Recently released NAEP scores show that among Maryland fourth graders, African-American students scored significantly lower than Caucasian students. Less than one quarter of African-American fourth graders scored Proficient and Above on the reading portion of the NAEP, in sharp contrast to more than half of Caucasian students who scored Proficient and Above. Although this is a 5% increase from 2007, Caucasian students demonstrated an even greater increase going up 7% in four years.<sup>4</sup>

Disparities in fourth grade math were even more pronounced. In 2011, only 23% of African-American fourth graders scored Proficient and Above in math, in comparison to 63% of the Caucasian students - - a 40% gap.<sup>5</sup>



Maryland eighth graders fared no better. In 2011, less than one quarter of African-American students scored Proficient and Above in reading, as contrasted with over half of Caucasian students. In math, less than one fifth of African-American eighth grade students scored Proficient and Above in math, as contrasted with over half of Caucasian students.

<sup>3</sup> Based on 2011 NAEP Proficient and Above test scores for Black and Hispanic 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

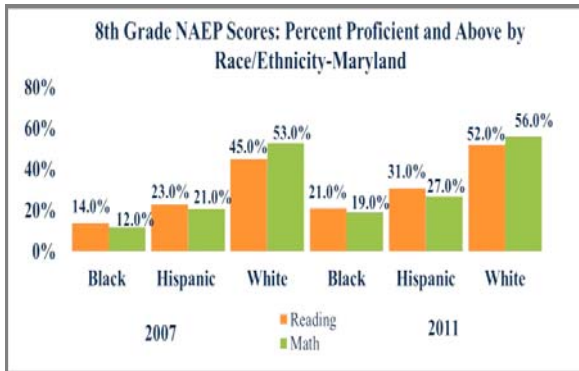
<sup>4</sup> Hispanic students demonstrated a similar achievement gap, with less than one third scoring Proficient and Advanced in 2011. They narrowed the gap a little, however, by improving 10% over four years.

<sup>5</sup> Hispanic students also trailed their Caucasian classmates by 19%.

<sup>1</sup> Liz Bowie, "Maryland Students Make Gains on National Test," The Baltimore Sun, Nov. 1, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

Although Maryland's minority students continue to improve on National tests, Caucasian students are showing greater improvement, and thereby widening the achievement gap.



Recent results from the Maryland State Assessments (MSAs) similarly corroborated the existence of an achievement gap. In math, there was a difference of 32 percentage points of African-American fourth and eighth graders scoring Advanced Proficient on the MSA, as compared to Caucasian students. In reading, there was a difference of 26 percentage points between fourth grade African-American and Caucasian students scoring Advanced Proficient on the MSA, and a difference of 31 percentage points between eighth grade African-American and Caucasian students scoring Advanced Proficient on the MSA.

***Priority Two: School Facilities in Grave Disrepair***

Despite strides made in past years in classroom funding too many of our schools remain in grave disrepair. Although this problem is not unique to Maryland, too many of Maryland's schools lack gymnasiums, auditoriums, science labs, and libraries; and are simply unsafe and not conducive to learning. Many students attend schools that lack proper heat and air conditioning, with broken windows, leaded pipes, and leaky roofs. Schools are often shut down for numerous days due to heating and cooling systems not working. This past year, in some classrooms the heat index rose to over 100 degrees.<sup>6</sup> Overcrowding in classrooms is a common

<sup>6</sup> Laurie Taylor-Mitchell and Lois Hybl, "Too Hot to Learn: The Crumbling School Infrastructure in Baltimore City and County," The Baltimore Sun, Jul. 19, 2011, and Liz Bowie, "School Systems Around State Need to Address Improvements to Buildings," The Baltimore Sun, Aug 22, 2011.

problem that plagues many counties. In overcrowded schools, students must attend classes in trailers. Sometimes entire grades attend class in trailers.<sup>7</sup>

Crumbling, unsafe school buildings have a significant effect on our children's education. When children are forced to attend schools in poor quality buildings, students' academic performance suffers. Schools have a harder time recruiting and retaining teachers; absenteeism and dropout rates go up; and the health and safety of faculty, staff and students is compromised. Studies demonstrate a direct link between academic performance and the quality of school buildings.<sup>8</sup> Academic performance can be affected by the quality or lack of air conditioning, heating, lighting, and noise distraction, with students in poor buildings performing worse.

Daniel G. Lever, Director of the State's Public School Construction Program estimated that it would cost approximately \$6 billion in upgrades to bring Maryland schools to bare minimum standards.<sup>9</sup> It has been estimated that Baltimore City needs approximately \$2.8 million to modernize its schools.<sup>10</sup> In 2010, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland issued a report, which rated 70% of Baltimore City's 162 public schools in "poor" condition, deeming them unhealthy, unsafe, inadequate, and deficient. Baltimore County, plagued with overcrowding in many of its schools, estimates that it will need \$2.2 billion to modernize its school buildings. Anne Arundel County estimates it will need \$1.9 billion; Howard County estimates \$500 million.<sup>11</sup> Recently, the Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools requested "\$278.8 million to fund construction and other infrastructure projects to

<sup>7</sup> Liz Bowie, "School Systems Around State Need to Address Improvements to Buildings," The Baltimore Sun, Aug 22, 2011.

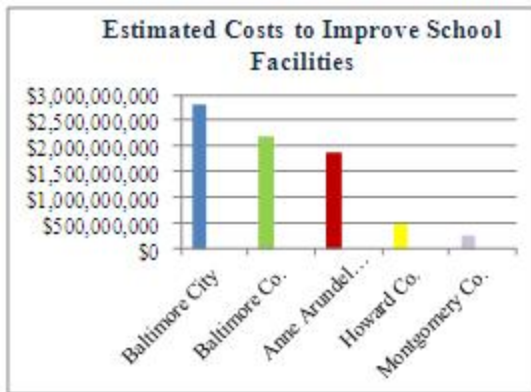
<sup>8</sup> In a study by Dr. Glen Earthman, students in poor buildings scored between five and ten percentile rank points lower on average than students in functional buildings, after controlling for socioeconomic status. Prof. Emeritus Glen Earthman, "Prioritization of 31 Criteria for School Building Adequacy," American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland, Jan. 5, 2004, at p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> "Finding Solutions to Maryland's \$6 Billion School Facilities Challenge," Gazette.Net, Aug. 26, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Liz Bowie, "School Systems Around State Need to Address Improvements to Buildings," The Baltimore Sun, Aug 22, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Liz Bowie, "School Systems Around State Need to Address Improvements to Buildings," The Baltimore Sun, Aug 22, 2011.

serve the school system’s 146,000 students” for fiscal year 2013.<sup>12</sup> What has become increasingly apparent is that school buildings all across Maryland need to be fixed.



The newly appointed Superintendent must come up with creative and innovative solutions to finance school construction. Progress is already being made on local levels. Organizations such as Transform Baltimore are spearheading this effort, to which dozens of organizations such as Advocates for Children and Youth and the ACLU of Maryland have pledged their support<sup>13</sup>.

**Next Steps**

Maryland’s school system is currently undergoing great change. The State has recently adopted the Common Core State Standards, which define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers, so that they will graduate from high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. As a recipient of Race to the Top funding, Maryland has pledged its commitment to statewide reform that will provide greater accountability and assure that our graduates are college- and career- ready. The next Superintendent of Schools must be able to hit the ground running in order to maintain and build upon current strides. Maryland’s education community offers a wealth of resources to the new leader and remains committed to working with the Board and our next Superintendent of Schools to eliminate the achievement gap once and for all and to bring Maryland’s school buildings to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Ujifusa, “Montgomery’s Big Fight Over school Construction Dollars,” Gazette.Net, Nov. 16, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.transformbaltimore.org/>