Statement of Jack Jennings In Presenting

The Academic Intervention Report, Every Child Achieving,

To the Maryland State Board of Education

President Sondheim, Vice-president Andrews, and other board members, thank you for inviting me again to present the findings of the Academic Intervention Steering Committee to you. In June, I discussed our preliminary findings and recommendations. Since then, we have submitted a final report to the state Superintendent of Schools, and she has adopted it with one clarification and has sent it on to you for your consideration. This is the final report I will discuss this morning. I would also like to thank Superintendent Grasmick for her gracious introduction of me this morning.

All of us who served on the Academic Intervention Committee volunteered our time, without compensation, because we believed that this is a very important issue for the state of Maryland: how will we move from school-based accountability to student-based accountability? To be more precise: how will the state move from a system of accountability based on academic progress as measured by school-level test scores to a system which also demands accountability from students by having them pass a series of tests in order to gain a high school diploma--and in the process be fair to both these students and their teachers? If Maryland finds the way to move successfully to individual student accountability and deals with all the attendant problems, the state will be a model to other states which are also grappling with this issue.
Our Committee met for a year and a half, and today we are pleased to join Superintendent Grasmick in presenting to you our final report. Our Committee is diverse with principals, district superintendents, child care specialists, parents, students, teachers, and others. We also benefitted from the involvement of experts from the state department of education, who not only contributed their own knowledge but also presented the findings from focus groups and other meetings they sponsored.

Guiding Principles

When our Committee first met, we soon came to three conclusions that would guide our work over the next year and a half. First, we agreed that there was no simple action to take if we want to help students to pass a high school exit exam. There is no one thing we can do, rather we have to think about changing the whole system of education.

Second, we agreed that we did not want a remedial solution. We did not want to be labeling students as in need of being remediated, rather we wanted a strategy that would talk about prevention of problems before they became serious.

Third, we agreed that the state certainly has the responsibility to ask for accountability through a state test and through other means, but many decisions in education are made in the classroom by an individual teacher or are made by a school principal or a district superintendent. Thus, we wanted to respect local decision-making in education in whatever we recommended.

As we went about our work, we were guided by those three principles-- comprehensive and not simplistic change, preventive and not remedial action, and respect for decisions made close to the students while acknowledging ultimate state responsibility.

Our Committee created subgroups of our members to look at the conditions of classrooms
and schools, the preparation of children for school, the preparation of teachers, interventions needed to help students falling behind, and the costs of any recommendations. We met once a month and sometimes more than that. Bob Rice, Sue Travetto, Dick Steinke and others from the state department of education were very helpful in keeping us on task, and in asking us to document with research any recommendations we wanted to make.

**Academic Intervention**

After much discussion, we finally came to agree on recommendations for change in three major areas if students are to be ready to pass examinations to earn a high school diploma. The first major area we labeled academic intervention. In this area, we set out a simple three-step process.

First, local school districts have to establish academic content and student performance standards for grade clusters kindergarten to 3, 4 and 5, 6 to 8, and 9 to 12. It is not fair to students or teachers to hold them accountable for something unless you tell them what it is you expect them to know and to teach. Moreover, the state should help local school districts if those districts want that assistance to define what students should know so that they are held accountable for learning that content and so that teachers will know what they should teach.

Second, schools should develop and use multiple assessments to determine and monitor individual student progress toward meeting student performance standards and to provide information to fashion instructional strategies to help students to learn. Again, the state should be prepared to aid local school districts if they request assistance in developing these assessments. We do not believe that most decisions in education should be made based on the results from one test, rather multiple measures must be used to determine whether a student has mastered the
subject-matter as he or she goes through the school year.

The third element of academic intervention is that once a student is identified as not having mastered the academic content, then there should be an intervention to help that student. These interventions should be early and they should be often. They should not be at the end of a grade, rather they should be early as problems are detected and they should be continuous throughout the year.

Originally, our Committee had recommended that there should be checkpoints at the end of grades 3, 5, and 7 to assure that students are indeed mastering the content, and if they are not, then there would have to be mandatory interventions for such students. We also recommended originally that at the end of 8th grade the students who did not show sufficient mastery of the subject-matter would have to enroll in summer school. But, in our subsequent conversations we became concerned that some teachers and administrators would not act early enough, that they might be tempted to delay assessments until the end of grades 3, 5, 7 and 8. Therefore, we changed our recommendation to require that assessments occur no later than the end of each grade.

Superintendent Grasmick has adopted that latter recommendation and is passing it on as part of the final report, but she has also built on it by incorporating our earlier recommendation that there be mandatory summer school for those students not reaching proficiency levels in reading and/or mathematics by the end of 8th grade. If a student shows proficiency after taking summer school courses, then he or she will move on to 9th grade. If a student does not show that proficiency, then that student will have an individually designed assistance program until he or she shows that proficiency. No student will be allowed to enroll in 9th grade courses (which are
subject to testing for graduation) until proficiency in reading and mathematics has been achieved.

These recommendations are to make it real to students that there are consequences for not learning. It is perfectly reasonable to talk about holding schools accountable and holding teachers accountable, but at some point we also have to hold students accountable. These recommendations say to a student that by the end of 8th grade you will have to go to summer school if you do not know what your local school system says that you need to know.

**Educator Readiness**

The second major area where we call for change deals with teacher preparation. It is not fair to students to hold them accountable for learning certain academic content if their teachers are not prepared to teach that content. It is also not fair to teachers to hold them accountable if they have not had the opportunity to be adequately trained. So, we have a series of recommendations in the area of educator capacity.

First, we recommend that teachers have expertise in being able to assess students and being able to prescribe the right type of intervention for each individual student. The state should work with local school systems to design professional development so that teachers can be helped along to understand what they should do to look at students individually, help them to understand what their problems are, and prescribe what they need to move along.

We also recommend that the state has an obligation to tell high schools how well students are doing on the state tests. This was in response to a concern of principals and teachers that they would not know early enough how well students are doing on those state tests, so they could fashion individual intervention programs for students who are not doing well.

Another recommendation is that within 3 years all professional development that is funded
by the state will have to reflect what we know makes for good training—organization around collaborative problem-solving, involvement of teachers in active learning, and the on-going nature of professional development.

A second group of recommendations in the area of educator preparation deals with new teachers and teachers getting certification. In order to assure that teachers have content expertise to deliver the curriculum, all new elementary teachers should enter the profession with strong content knowledge in the core subject areas, and all new secondary teachers should have a major in a content area that they will teach. In addition, by 2002, all provisionally certified teachers must receive appropriate certification within two years.

Our last set of recommendations dealing with educator capacity concerns school administrators. We propose that these administrators also be brought into the loop so that they understand that the emphasis has to be on raising student achievement.

There should be professional development for principals and other administrators so that they understand how you assess students, how you help them with interventions, and how you continuously try to move students along so that they master the subject matter.

Next, we propose that school systems identify prospective candidates for principalships and provide assistance to those needing it. We also propose that the state mount an aggressive recruitment campaign seeking new principals because of the impending shortage of such administrators.

Student Readiness

Our third, and last, major area involves student readiness for school. The recent research on the brain emphasizes again how important it is to work with young children so that they will be
able to take full advantage of schooling. But, we also know that this area of child care and preschool is very complex, with many different state agencies providing funding, many different local providers, many funding streams from various levels of government, and many sets of regulations. Somebody though has to start a movement in this area to bring things together in order to focus on student readiness for school, not just child care.

We recommend that if early childhood and preschool programs offer professional development, this training ought to be open to everybody, early childhood providers as well as early education providers. School systems should develop models demonstrating the best practices of early care and education programs in promoting school readiness. The state should develop consistent standards for early care and education programs and a funding mechanism providing financial incentives to achieve these standards. Parental knowledge and involvement in their children’s education must also be enhanced.

**Financial Costs**

The financial costs of these proposals, especially about academic interventions, are not easy to determine because we are not recommending a single state-wide intervention, such as smaller class sizes or an extended school day. Rather, we are saying that teachers and principals must make individual decisions about particular students. Some students may needed extra assistance provided by extending the school day, some may need additional aid during the school day, and some others may have to go to summer school.

In general, though, we would expect the following process to be followed in financing these recommendations. First, school districts and the state should review how they are spending current funding in order to use it more effectively for these purposes. Second, the state should
review regulations to determine if any can be changed in order to free up funds. Third, $49 million should be included in the Governor’s budget and in the budget approved by the Legislature to pay for the mandatory summer school and other immediate costs involved in these proposals. Fourth, as schools and districts implement the concepts contained in this report, we recommend that the state provide adequate funding to enable all students to meet the content and performance standards.

Conclusion

Those are the recommendations of the Intervention Committee, with the clarification about summer school made by Superintendent Grasmick. To summarize, we are not recommending one simple academic intervention, rather we are asking for changes throughout the school system so that children are followed individually and are given help as they move along through the grades. Second, we are asking that teachers be better prepared to teach their subject matter and that classroom teachers be assisted in identifying and aiding children who need extra assistance to succeed. Lastly, we are recommending that all children be prepared for school before they enter the doors of the school buildings.

Thank you for your attention, and we hope that the Board will adopt these recommendations as official state policy and that the Governor and Legislature will provide the funds needed to implement them. If these actions are taken, we are convinced that every child will then have a much better chance to succeed by mastering what they need to know.