Key Findings

- During the 2005-06 school year in Maryland, 79 schools, or about 6% of the state’s elementary and secondary schools, were either planning for or implementing school restructuring, the last phase of school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A large majority of these restructuring schools are urban schools, and more than half are in the Baltimore City Public School System.

- There is little variation in district and school approaches to restructuring. In the 2005-06 school year, 73% (46 schools) of the schools in restructuring implementation chose the alternative governance option of employing either a full or part time turnaround specialist. Half of the alternative governance options available in Maryland are not being implemented in any restructuring schools.

- In Maryland, many decisions about how to implement restructuring are made at the local level, but the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has a role in the process because it has somewhat limited the choice of restructuring options and has instituted a procedure for approval of local applications. Most notably, this year the state board of education was unsuccessful in taking away the administration of several schools from the Baltimore City board of education and assigning them to different entities, but the state board did prevail in requiring specific measures to be taken in Baltimore City with regard to several schools in restructuring.

- Although schools in restructuring receive more attention and funding than other schools in improvement, the strategies employed by restructuring schools to raise student achievement appear similar to those employed in all Maryland schools in improvement. These strategies include making grants to districts and schools, aligning curricula with assessments, providing supplemental tutoring during out-of-school time, providing mentoring for teachers and principals, and providing additional staff. Thus, in Maryland, “restructuring” does not look very different from other school improvement.

- According to school-based personnel interviewed for this study, the restructuring process is not a primary agent for change in schools; instead, additional resources, which mainly come through the state-funded School Improvement Grants program, provide the transformative power.

- While school personnel consider additional resources important to their improvement efforts, schools lose many of these resources soon after making adequate yearly progress. The loss of these resources potentially turns restructuring into a revolving door of sorts.

Study Methods

In 2005-06, only three Maryland school districts had schools in the stage of either NCLB restructuring planning or NCLB restructuring implementation: Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore County Public Schools, and Prince George’s County Public Schools. The Baltimore City Public School District has, by far, the greatest number of schools in restructuring in the state (51 elementary or middle schools and 14 high schools). Prince George’s County has 13 elementary or middle schools in restructuring planning or restructuring implementation. Baltimore County, for the first time in 2005-06, had one school in restructuring planning. In 2004-05, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools had one school in restructuring planning. After making AYP in 2004-05, the school exited improvement and did not have to implement the restructuring plan.

The two districts included in this report are Prince George’s County and Anne Arundel County. These two districts provided a variety of contexts and circumstances in which to explore restructuring in Maryland. In Baltimore County, the one restructuring school did agree to participate (Woodlawn Middle School), but the central office of the Baltimore County Public School District did not. Baltimore City is not included as a case study in this report. Because of the controversy surrounding NCLB school restructuring and Baltimore City, we decided to begin our Maryland study in other districts in the state. We will continue to monitor the progress of all restructuring schools in Maryland, and possibly add more in-depth studies of additional districts in the future.

To examine restructuring in Maryland, Brenda Neuman-Sheldon, a consultant to CEP and the author of this report, interviewed state department of education officials and local administrators, as well as principals and teachers in districts with schools in restructuring. In addition, Neuman-Sheldon
Building on State Reform: Maryland School Restructuring

reviewed state, regional, and district documents, such as state restructuring and school improvement policies, state records tracking restructuring implementation, and state report cards. She also conducted three in-depth case studies of NCLB implementation in the Prince George’s County Public Schools, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, and Woodlawn Middle School in Baltimore County. The interviews and document reviews were conducted from August 2005 through April 2006.

Federal Restructuring Mandates

The No Child Left Behind Act, which extends and revises the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was signed by President Bush in January 2002. NCLB requires that all states test virtually all students in grades 3-8, plus one grade in high school, and that all schools and districts meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals, which place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students are academically proficient by 2014. States must also provide consequences for schools and districts not making AYP goals. After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must plan for restructuring. After six consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must implement their plans. In this last consequence for failure to meet AYP, schools and districts must choose from a menu of options designed to completely revamp the school. By federal law, these options include the following:

- Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school
- Reopening the school as a charter school
- Replacing all or most of the school staff relevant to the failure to make AYP
- Turning operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees
- Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform

Perhaps because these options are designed to change schools radically, implementation is complex. All require adjustments to schools’ financial operations, and some may require additional resources, particularly if the school must train staff to work together in new ways. As more public schools face restructuring, it will be important to learn from schools, districts, and states that have experienced these changes.

Some states have had schools enter restructuring sooner than others. This is because some states began calculating AYP based on data collected prior to NCLB to meet the goals of the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994. Some states were also more aggressive than others about creating the testing and accountability systems required by IASA. As a result, some states with relatively new testing and accountability systems, such as Idaho, have no schools in restructuring at this point. Other states, such as California, Maryland, and Michigan, with well-established accountability systems, had schools in restructuring as early as 2003-04.

Overview of Restructuring in Maryland

Schools in Improvement

Maryland’s state accountability system holds all schools (not just Title I schools) accountable, and therefore, under the state accountability system, many non-Title I schools are in improvement in Maryland. Of Maryland’s nearly 1,300 schools, 161 elementary and middle schools and 70 high schools—231 schools altogether—were identified for improvement in 2005-06, based on their 2004-05 test scores. Of these identified schools, 95 were schools that participated in the federal Title I program, which aims to improve education for low-achieving students in low-income areas.

Schools in Restructuring

In the 2005-06 school year, 79 Maryland schools, including 65 elementary and middle schools and 14 high schools, were in either the planning or implementation phase of NCLB restructuring, based on their 2004-05 Maryland School Assessment (MSA) test scores. Forty-nine of these 65 schools were Title I schools. All of these 49 restructuring Title I schools were in or on the fringes of large urban areas. The Baltimore City Public School System accounted for 92% (45 schools) of Maryland’s Title I schools in restructuring.

State Restructuring Strategies

Prior to the introduction of No Child Left Behind, Maryland
was one of only a handful of states to use state supervision and intervention in low-performing schools as part of its school improvement efforts. Beginning in 1993, the Maryland State Board of Education approved reconstitution regulations that held schools accountable for student performance and put in place mechanisms to support low-performing schools.

Under the previous school accountability system, each year schools produced annual school performance reports, or “school report cards,” based upon the state-required, norm-referenced test, the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). Schools and districts were given a score on a State Performance Index (SPI) that indicated whether they met Maryland state performance standards. Local districts and the state used these school report cards to identify schools in need of assistance and schools deserving of positive recognition.

In addition to being placed on local “watch lists,” schools with tests scores significantly below the state level of proficiency became eligible for “reconstitution.” A school's designation as “reconstitution eligible” qualified the school for state assistance in improving instruction, curriculum, administration, management, or any other elements necessary to improve school MSPAP performance.

Reconstitution-eligible schools were required to submit a proposal to the Maryland State Board of Education outlining a plan for improving student performance. Once the plan was approved by the state, it became an action plan for the school that was then monitored by the state by reconstitution monitors. Schools also received direct technical assistance from state “technical assistants.”

With the introduction of No Child Left Behind, Maryland built upon its existing school accountability system and supports to create the current improvement and restructuring strategies. In many ways the system did not change a great deal, as Maryland had already been identifying low-performing schools and intervening to improve performance using federal, state, and local dollars. Even so, the NCLB requirements of measuring school progress based on individual student performance and the demand for disaggregation of data required that the MSPAP be replaced by the Maryland School Assessment, and that the SPI be replaced by the calculation of adequate yearly progress. NCLB requires states to determine AYP based on a set of annual goals for student achievement in reading and math called annual measurable objectives (AMOs). As indicated in the law, Maryland’s AMOs were determined based on a 2002-03 baseline and the 2013-14 goal of 100% proficiency for all students in reading and math.

Because Maryland built its current strategies for improvement upon a pre-existing accountability system, the state had to grandfather in many schools' lack of prior academic progress. As a result, although NCLB is only four years old, a number of Maryland schools are already implementing restructuring plans—a process that theoretically should take six years. According to Ron Peiffer, deputy state superintendent in the office of academic policy, Maryland is “further along than other states because the state already had a system in place to hold schools accountable for student progress.”

Both NCLB and Maryland’s accountability plan require that if a school fails to meet AMOs in the same reported area for five consecutive years, a school enters “restructuring planning.” In restructuring planning, schools must build into their school improvement plan an “alternative governance structure.” After six consecutive years of failing to meet AMO targets, a school is in “restructuring,” whereby it must implement the alternative governance structure plan. The state provides eight alternative governance options to schools:

1. Enter into a contract with an entity such as a private management company to operate the school
2. Reopen the school as a public charter school
3. Replace all or most of the school staff
4. Have the district central office take over the principalship of the school
5. Appoint a school “turnaround specialist” to have limited powers over the school in regards to curriculum, staff development, and decision-making processes
6. Close the school and reopen as a complete school of choice within the local district
7. Use an external reform model
8. Replicate the governance of a charter school using a governing board that has been granted a degree of autonomy from the local district

Options 4 through 8 fall into the federal category of
“undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform.” Restructuring plans developed by schools are reviewed by cross-divisional MSDE teams and approved by the state board.

In 2005, the state board approved two other restructuring options for Baltimore City—Blueprint for High School Reform and Derivative High Schools. Both of these options break large urban high schools into smaller learning communities. In 2006, the state added an alternative governance option: appoint or employ a distinguished principal from another school district. Those schools in restructuring planning during the 2005-06 school year were able to select this option for their restructuring plan. Unlike states such as California, which have in the past allowed districts to simply state that they have chosen their own alternative governance option, Maryland has pre-selected additional alternative governance mechanisms from which districts and schools must choose. Schools and districts do not have the option of developing their own alternative governance plan.

The Maryland options for alternative governance structures parallel federal requirements with the exception of allowing for state control of schools. Maryland does not allow local school districts to turn the operation of a school over to the state. However, in 2006, the state board of education proposed to engage third party contractors to assume governance of four high schools in Baltimore City which have been in restructuring since 1997.

During the 2005-06 school year in Maryland, all of the schools implementing restructuring plans were in three districts (Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, and Baltimore County), and there is little diversity in the alternative governance options implemented by these restructuring schools. Of the eight alternative governance options available, four were not implemented in any schools. The vast majority of schools implementing restructuring plans in 2005-06 (73%) chose to employ a turnaround specialist. The seven schools that have not chosen the turnaround specialist option are all in Baltimore City. Of these six schools, five chose to reconstitute the school staff, one is managed by an external entity, and one has reopened.

### Table 1—Federal and State Restructuring Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Restructuring Options</th>
<th>Maryland Restructuring Options</th>
<th>Number of Schools Using Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enter into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school</td>
<td>Enter into a contract with an entity such as a private management company to operate the school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reopen the school as a charter school</td>
<td>Reopen the school as a public charter school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replace all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP</td>
<td>Replace all or most of the school staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees</td>
<td>Not an option before the spring of 2006. Prior to 2006, the state had decided not to get involved in the running of schools.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertake any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform</td>
<td>Have the district central office take over the principaship of the school</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appoint a school “turnaround specialist” to have limited powers over the school regarding curriculum, staff development, and decision-making processes</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close the school and reopen as a complete school of choice within the local district</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use an external reform model</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replicate the governance of a charter school using a governing board granted a degree of autonomy from the local district</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blueprint for High School Reform and Derivative High Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy and Maryland State Department of Education, Alternative Governance Guidelines.
as a charter school. Table 1 shows different restructuring options and the number of schools using them.

The Turnaround Specialist

Employing a turnaround specialist as an alternative governance option is by far the most popular choice for restructuring schools in Maryland. The turnaround specialist is expected to work in concert with the principal and school improvement team to improve school achievement. Maryland has laid out specific requirements for the qualifications of a turnaround specialist. These include:

- A master’s degree in education or school administration
- A minimum of three documented years as a successful school leader (principal, academic coach, resource teacher, master teacher, etc.)
- Documentation of curriculum and instruction expertise
- Experience designing and implementing school-based professional development for teachers
- Experience with the school improvement planning process
- Experience using data to inform instruction and instructional practices
- Demonstrated knowledge and expertise in an underachieving performance area or subgroup (e.g., reading, math, special education, English language learners, low-income students)
- Evidence of success in improving student achievement at a low-performing school

Maryland does not provide any additional training or certification for turnaround specialists. Schools must submit to the state the qualifications of their turnaround specialist and the expectations for how the turnaround specialist will work with the school, along with their restructuring plan. The turnaround specialists’ specific work duties can vary from district to district and school to school. Schools and districts must use funds from their own budgets (i.e., their school improvement grants) to pay for the services of the turnaround specialist.

New Strategies in 2006

As of the 2004-05 school year, the State of Maryland had not provided restructuring schools with the option of turning over operational control to the state. Although Maryland still does not provide this option as an alternative governance mechanism, in the spring of 2006, the Maryland State Department of Education, under the direction of State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick, became the first state to attempt to take over control of schools, using NCLB as a justification for state intervention (regardless of the restructuring option the districts had chosen).

In the spring of 2006, the Maryland State Department of Education proposed a set of “Systemic Corrective Actions” for the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS). This plan for corrective action included provisions that the state would assume control of four restructuring high schools in the city and that BCPSS would assign a managing company or entity to seven middle schools. According to Ron Peiffer, the state department of education decided to take this action because the Baltimore City Public School System is currently in corrective action under NCLB, and the time had come to address the long-term failure of schools in Baltimore City.

“Since [last year], the restructuring world is dramatically different,” he said. After the state attempted to take action in Baltimore, the Maryland state legislature voted to block the state’s actions in Baltimore City and gave the school system one more year to improve before state intervention could ensue in the 11 identified schools. While the Baltimore City Schools have one more year to improve school performance before the state can assume leadership in Baltimore Schools, BCPSS is still required to comply with the remainder of the state’s corrective action plan. The state’s corrective action plan includes:

Instruction

- Adopt new middle and high school curricula that have been used successfully in another Maryland school system.
- Hire an independent evaluator to monitor the implementation of the master plan.

Low-performing schools management structure

- Hire two full-time school improvement specialists who will report to MSDE and whose written job descriptions will establish that they have the authority to oversee schools in restructuring.
Leadership

- Evaluate and, as necessary, replace the school system’s area academic officers.
- The area academic officers will work with MSDE to customize leadership training for the schools.

School Safety

- Develop training for school staffs on improving school safety. The training must be developed in partnership with Sheppard Pratt Health Systems, Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, or a comparable entity.
- Identify students with chronic, severe, and escalating misbehavior, and put in place a case management system for them.

High School Graduation and Student Support

- Develop student support plans at a minimum for all high school students for whom passing the high school assessments is a graduation requirement and who have failed or are at risk of failing a high school assessment.

State Funding for School Improvement and Restructuring

According to Teresa Knott, the supervising coordinator for school performance at MSDE, Maryland made state school improvement grants totaling $14,279,600 to the 256 schools identified as needing improvement as well as to schools that exited improvement in the prior year throughout the state. Maryland school improvement grants are funded through the Maryland General Assembly. From these grants, $600,000 ($30,000 per school district) was designated for central office support to schools and grant administration. An additional $19,900 was spent by one school district on other administrative expenses. The remaining dollars were allocated directly to the schools on a formula basis. The formula took into account the level of school improvement needed, a base appropriation, and a per pupil appropriation. Additionally, $6,496,209 in federal Title I school improvement funds was awarded to nine school districts to support school improvement activities in 95 schools.

School improvement grant applications are considered separately from school restructuring plans. There is no funding specifically set aside for restructuring schools; however, a school’s restructuring status is considered in the calculation of the state school improvement grants. For fiscal year 2006, state school improvement allocations were based on two criteria: 1) the school’s level of improvement, and 2) the school’s enrollment figures. Schools in Year 1 received a base of $20,000; in Year 2, $40,000; in corrective action, $30,000; in restructuring planning, $30,000; and in restructuring implementation, $30,000.

Schools are required to align the expenditure of their state school improvement funds with school district master plans, school district guidelines for school improvement, and their individual school improvement plan.1 When applying for state school improvement grants, schools and school districts must submit a budget with a brief description of each proposed expenditure and identify the goals and objectives in the school improvement or restructuring plan for each expenditure. Allowable and non-allowable expenditures are shown in table 2. Throughout the year, Maryland State Department of Education staff members monitor grant expenditures, and grant recipients are required to submit mid- and end-of-year program reports.

State Guidance for Restructuring

Beginning in August 2005, a team of MSDE specialists began providing technical assistance to each of the three school districts with schools in restructuring planning during the 2005-06 school year: Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, and Baltimore County. The MSDE specialists made introductory visits to explain the state’s role in providing technical assistance and to discuss processes for the submission of alternative governance plans to MSDE. Restructuring plans for the 2005-06 school year were submitted to MSDE at the end of January 2005 and reviewed by a team of internal MSDE-trained specialists.

1 All school districts in Maryland are required to have a master plan that has been approved by the state. All schools are required to have an approved school improvement plan as well. When submitting a Maryland School Improvement Grant application, the school principal, district fiscal officer, district administrator who supervises the principal, and district CEO must all sign a document that states that the proposed school improvement budget expenditures align with the district master plan as well as the school improvement plan.
Table 2—State School Improvement Grant Budget Application, Allowable and Non-Allowable Expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allowable Expenditures</th>
<th>Non-Allowable Expenditures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staffing</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Highly qualified staff</td>
<td>Ongoing general operating expenses or existing deficits</td>
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<tr>
<td>FICA and unemployment</td>
<td>Capital costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance monitor</td>
<td>Telephone charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement personnel</td>
<td>International travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td>Internet connection fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction-related computer software</td>
<td>Local lodging for staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculators</td>
<td>Meeting facility rental fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVs/VCRs/DVDs</td>
<td>Beautification items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/Security</td>
<td>Facilities renovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Materials</strong></td>
<td>Items that supplant local system responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>Computer labs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade books and magazines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manipulatives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stipends</td>
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<td>Substitutes</td>
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<td>Refreshments</td>
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<td>Conference attendance expenses</td>
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<td>Conference registration fees</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extended Day Programs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stipends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer instructional programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>FICA and unemployment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interventions</strong></td>
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<td>Salaries</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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<td>Incentives</td>
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<td>Summer instructional programs</td>
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<td>FICA and unemployment</td>
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<td><strong>Co-curricular Programs</strong></td>
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<td>Peer mediation</td>
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<td>Parent activities</td>
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<td>Student behavior programs</td>
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<td>Assemblies/educational field trips</td>
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<td>Student workshops</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultants</strong></td>
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<td>Fees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodging</td>
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<td><strong>Administrative Expenses</strong></td>
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<td>Materials and supplies</td>
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<td>Surveys</td>
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<td>School improvement or restructuring plan development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salaries/stipends</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FICA and unemployment</td>
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</table>

Source: Maryland State Department of Education, State School Improvement Grant Application.
Although MSDE provided some technical assistance, prior to the 2005-06 school year Maryland had developed few materials or resources specifically designed to guide school districts or schools through restructuring planning or implementation. MSDE did have two resources available that were intended to aid all schools in improvement.

The Maryland State Department of Education produces a Web site called “School Improvement in Maryland,” (www.mdk12.org/index.html), which is designed to help schools improve student performance through the school improvement planning process. This site provides information about standards, assessments, and AYP. It also includes information about the school improvement process, how assessment data are analyzed and used, and how Maryland content standards are taught and assessed. The school improvement Web site is not targeted specifically toward schools in restructuring, or even schools identified for improvement. Rather, the site is designed to help all Maryland schools understand and meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind through continuous school improvement processes.

The Maryland State Department of Education has also developed a workbook for school districts and schools called the “Local Education Agency and School Improvement Checklist.” The workbook outlines the requirements for schools and districts at each phase of school improvement. The workbook also provides a series of guiding questions designed to help local districts develop skills while completing the checklist. These questions fall into the categories of curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, parent and community involvement, policy, and budget.

In 2005, representatives from the three school districts worked collaboratively with MSDE staff over a period of several months to develop appropriate guidelines, questions, and a rubric for the review of alternative governance plans. Within the document, school and district staff are asked to provide a rationale for the alternative governance option selected for each school, the manner in which the alternative governance option will be monitored, and the fiduciary implications of the alternative governance option selected. Additionally, if a school is planning to replace staff or employ a turnaround specialist, district staff must detail the logistics of these plans.

Once the document is submitted to the state, it is evaluated by a team of cross-divisional specialists based upon the developed rubric. Each question in the document is assigned a maximum point value. Any alternative governance plan can be awarded a maximum of 100 points. A plan must be awarded at least 70 points to be approved; if one is awarded at least 50 points, it can be approved once the school and district provide clarification. Plans awarded fewer than 50 points are rejected. Approved plans are presented to the state board of education for their approval.

A Closer Look at Restructuring in Two Maryland Districts and One School

The following case studies provide detailed findings and observations about restructuring in Maryland at the district and school level.

**Prince George’s County Public Schools**

Located along the eastern boundary of Washington, D.C., Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) is the second largest school system in the state of Maryland, serving more than 134,000 students in 202 schools. PGCPS serves a predominantly African-American population (74%). Almost half of the PGCPS students receive free or reduced-price meals (43%).

As a district, the Prince George’s County Public Schools failed to make AYP in 2004-05 for the third year, and has been identified as in improvement. Overall, students made the AYP targets for both reading and math; however, overall attendance rates and the performance of several subgroups kept the district from making AYP targets. In reading, Latino students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners fell short of AYP targets. In math, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners failed to make AYP targets.

Seventy PGCPS schools are designated as Title I schools (34% of the total number of schools in the district). Sixty-seven of the Title I schools are elementary schools and three are middle schools. Sixty-three schools are implementing Title I schoolwide programs, while seven schools are implementing targeted assistance programs. Twenty-eight
PGCPS Title I schools are in various stages of improvement. Eleven are in Year 1, ten are in Year 2, three are in corrective action, one is in restructuring planning, and three are in restructuring implementation.

**PGCPS Schools In Restructuring**

In PGCPS, 16 schools are either in restructuring planning or restructuring implementation; these schools must fulfill state requirements shown in table 3. As reported above, only four of these schools are Title I schools. Of these schools, one, John Eager Howard Elementary, failed to meet AYP targets for all students and all subgroups in both reading and math. Nicholas Orem Middle School missed AYP targets for all students, and for African-American, Latino, and low-income students in reading, as well as for students with disabilities, and English language learners in both reading and math. Bladensburg Elementary did not make AYP targets for students with disabilities in both reading and math, and Overlook Elementary missed AYP targets only because of the performance of students with disabilities in math.

**District Strategies and Supports for Schools in Improvement**

Both district and regional personnel pointed out that all schools identified as needing improvement, from Year 1 to restructuring, receive the same services and supports. However, schools that have been in the school improvement process the longest (those in corrective action or restructuring) receive more intense attention by the school district.

There are several major initiatives in PGCPS aimed at improving student achievement in schools that are identified as needing improvement. First, the district implemented curriculum frameworks that are aligned with the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). These curriculum frameworks are for all district schools, not just those in need of improvement. Second, the district has focused on extended learning opportunities for students. Schools identified as needing improvement are allocated district school improvement funds to provide after-school and/or Saturday learning opportunities for students. Third, the district has instituted quarterly benchmarking assessments aligned to the

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<th>Table 3—State Requirements for Restructuring Planning and Restructuring</th>
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<td><strong>School Improvement Stage</strong></td>
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Source: Maryland State Department of Education, LEA and School Improvement Check List.
Maryland School Assessment. These benchmark assessments are intended to be used diagnostically by schools to target students in need of greater assistance.

Fourth, as part of its response to No Child Left Behind, PGCPS created the Department of School Improvement and Accountability (DSIA). This department is primarily responsible for coordinating the school improvement process for the district and assisting schools with their individual school improvement planning processes. According to Debra Mahone, director of the department, the goals of her office are to “monitor whether requirements are being met, and facilitate any changes or training that schools or people may need in all areas. We monitor and report compliance, and do some consultations.”

DSIA employs a staff of “instructional specialists” who are assigned strategically to schools that are in various stages of improvement. The instructional specialists focus on math and reading content in schools, modeling best practices for teachers.

The schools that have been in the improvement process the longest are assigned a school improvement specialist or school improvement resource teacher. The school improvement resource teacher provides instructional support, setting up training and professional development sessions for teachers, assessing achievement data, analyzing budgets to make sure that they are aligned with SIP priorities, gauging student progress on the district quarterly assessments, and assisting with developing the school improvement plan. The school improvement resource teacher supports the implementation of school improvement plans, but is not responsible for monitoring for compliance with the plans.

Most school staff noted that the school improvement resource teacher has been a positive addition to the school. Rhonda Pitts, principal at Bladensburg Elementary School, commented that the school improvement resource teacher assigned to her school has been very helpful. Pitts explained, “She helps with the [school improvement process]. She also comes in and looks at instruction in classrooms and has workshops based on what she sees.”

The Turnaround Specialist

In PGCPS, all of the schools in restructuring have chosen the option of identifying a turnaround specialist as the alternative governance structure. The amount of time that turnaround specialists spend at schools and the kinds of services they provide appear to vary. It is also unclear to what extent turnaround specialists affect restructuring schools. The principals at all three schools participating in this study noted that the district made the decision to use turnaround specialists, and they were given no other options.

In the 2005-06 school year, PGCPS designated district employees to be the turnaround specialists assigned to restructuring schools. PGCPS is divided into five regional administrative areas, each headed by a regional assistant superintendent. The regional director serves as the turnaround specialist for all of the schools in a region. All of the regional directors meet the state qualification requirements to serve as turnaround specialists. Mahone explained that it was a district decision to oversee the position of turnaround specialist.

According to Mahone, “The turnaround specialist has the evaluative authority to police the implementation of the [school improvement] plans and the NCLB requirements. The [turnaround specialist] is responsible for appropriately prioritizing and partnering with the principal to help with decisions related to student progress.” Furthermore, Mahone said that there is a district expectation that the turnaround specialist should spend two to three days a week working with assigned principals and the school improvement teams.

While there is a district expectation for the amount of time turnaround specialists will spend in schools, the actual amount of time each specialist spends in each school varies. In addition to serving as turnaround specialists in restructuring schools, regional directors are also responsible for working with all schools in improvement within their region. For example, Dr. Karen Kunkel, director of Region I, noted that she is working with 23 schools in various stages of improvement in addition to the restructuring school in her region. Kunkel said that she is focusing her attention on the three schools that have been in the school improvement process the longest in her region (one of which is the restructuring school). For these three schools, Kunkel provides the following services: setting up staff development; consulting directly with principals on budgets; monitoring student achievement data; evaluating school strengths and weaknesses; and monitoring teachers’ use of the district curriculum framework. Kunkel noted that she is stretched...
thin and doesn’t always have the time to spend at her restructuring school. “[I have] about a day and a half a week to spend in my restructuring school,” she said. “It’s supposed to be two days, but with three schools, that’s the issue.”

John Brooks, director of Region IV, made a similar comment, noting that he is responsible for working with half of the schools in his region, including the two schools in restructuring. Brooks said that he spends a half day at each of his restructuring schools two to three days a week, assisting principals with issues related to budgets, staffing, day-to-day operations, instructional implementation, and staff development.

The time the turnaround specialist actually spends at the restructured school varied greatly among the three schools studied. One principal described the assistance received as very accessible and supportive, with frequent meetings and conversations. Another principal said that the turnaround specialist comes in once a month or on an as-needed basis. A third principal indicated that the school staff does not see the turnaround specialist very often, but that it was not a problem because the school does not need much assistance.

The fact that there was variation in the extent of contact between the turnaround specialist and the schools she or he is responsible for does not seem to affect principals’ attitudes about the specialist. All three PGCPS principals participating in this study expressed satisfaction with the level of support provided by their turnaround specialist.

School Strategies for Improvement

The school staff and administrators interviewed for this study all listed a range of activities in which their schools are engaging as part of their efforts to improve. Principals and teachers rarely mentioned the turnaround specialist when they were asked about strategies to improve student performance, or about the school restructuring process.

Staff and administrators listed nearly identical strategies for improving student performance, including the following:

Out-of-school tutorials. In all three schools participating in this study, there are programs set up before school, after school, and even on Saturdays to provide additional learning opportunities for low-performing students in reading and math. In many cases the principals have allocated school improvement funds to pay for this supplemental instructional time.

Focusing on test preparation through daily instruction. Teachers and principals all mentioned that their schools have focused heavily on preparing students for the MSAs by incorporating the format of test questions into regular classroom assignments. Two types of test items—in particular, brief constructed responses (BCR) and extended constructed responses (ECR), or what used to be known as short answer and essay questions—have become an instructional focus across the curriculum in the schools participating in this study. As one teacher commented, “Now we have more BCRs hanging in the hallway. BCRs are the epitome of classroom instruction. It's the benchmark that is used to measure our instruction.”

Increasing instructional time in reading and math. In all three schools, teachers and principals mentioned that they have increased the amount of time students spend on reading and math. For example, at G. Gardner Shugart Middle School, low-performing students do not attend creative arts classes so they can get additional time with their content area teachers. Similarly, at Bladensburg Elementary, the principal noted: “The county has an amount of time [we’re] supposed to spend [on reading and math]. We extended the time considerably, and keep on raising the time each year...Sometimes we’ll move social studies or science out of the picture to work on reading or math, if that’s where we’re not strong.”

Using assessment data diagnostically. All three schools use the quarterly assessments instituted by PGCPS to determine how and where to focus instruction, in addition to using them for developing the school improvement plan. Teachers and principals alike mentioned the increased use of data to drive instructional planning since the advent of NCLB. Whether in committees like the school instructional management team or instructional council, or in needs assessments for staff development, the staff and administration in three schools in this study all use assessment data throughout the year to help meet the goal of improving student performance.

Focusing on marginal students. The schools participating in this study all mentioned that they pay special attention to, and provide additional resources for, those students who are “on the bubble” of proficiency on benchmark assessments. Principals and teachers all noted the expediency of working
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With these students, as they are the ones most likely to improve enough to increase the percentage of students that achieve scores of at least proficient on the MSA. As one principal explained, “It becomes a numbers, percentage game. You’re shooting for a target number, and then there are some kids that aren’t going to meet that qualification, so you focus on the kids that can pass the test. It’s an all or nothing type of thing.”

Other strategies. The schools in this study use a number of additional strategies to improve student achievement, including increased staff development opportunities, differentiated instruction, reallocated resources to increase staffing, special ed inclusion co-teaching models, alignment of school instruction with the Maryland VSC, and explicit test preparation.

Early Results

The reviews for restructuring in PGCPS vary. On one hand, the district sees improved test scores in restructuring schools as proof that restructuring efforts are having a positive impact. On the other hand, principals and teachers attribute their successes to school-based strategies rather than the restructuring process.

According to Mahone, PGCPS has had some success with their restructuring efforts. She cited the fact that in the past year one school, Doswell Brooks Elementary, qualified to exit improvement, one currently restructuring school made AYP, and another school is “very close to making AYP.” Mahone added that the district’s restructuring efforts are “having a very positive impact on what a school is doing, and placing the focus on instruction.”

The three PGCPS schools in restructuring in this study have had varying amounts of success in improving student performance on the MSA. Stephen Decatur Middle School made all AYP targets on the 2004-05 MSA and is eligible to leave improvement next year if students meet all AYP targets again on the 2005-06 MSA.

Bladensburg Elementary School missed its 2004-05 AYP targets due to the performance of the special education subgroup in both reading and math. However, the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the MSA has steadily risen over the past three years, with the exception of grade 3 math, which dipped slightly in 2004-05.

G. Gardner Shugart Middle School missed only one subgroup AYP target on the 2003-04 MSA (special education in reading). However, in 2004-05 the school missed a number of AYP targets, including all students, African-American students, low-income students, and students with disabilities in reading and math, and Latino students in reading.

In most cases, school personnel attribute their achievement to their own efforts, instead of the restructuring plans. At Bladensburg Elementary, the teachers and principal argue that their own data analysis and improved instruction are the driving forces for the school’s improvement. Principal Rhonda Pitts elaborated, “I don’t focus on the restructuring plan. I focus on what the school needs to do. If I don’t move to what the kids need, then I’m not going to move the school. [The restructuring plan is] probably there for the state, but not for me. There are parts in it that are valid. It’s a plan of support and action.”

In spite of the success Stephen Decatur Middle School has experienced on the MSA, Principal Rudolph Saunders was slightly less positive about the impact of NCLB and restructuring on his school. He commented that NCLB and restructuring force schools to meet unrealistic expectations:

We’ve gotten so focused on meeting AYP and meeting demands that things fall by the wayside with whole-child growth. We have kids that come to us behind, and we force them into a rigorous program. You’re going so much and the intensity is there, but are they getting anything out of it? We’re all supposed to end up at the same point. You lose the ability to make good decisions for kids, because you have this uniform goal. Teachers can’t make the decisions that are best for the kids.

Another interesting point made by the principals was that as they are more successful in meeting AYP targets, they lose a number of the resources, such as money and additional staffing that enabled them to increase student achievement. The principals at both Stephen Decatur and G. Gardner Shugart Middle Schools noted that as their test scores have risen, they have received less support, which in turn may have a negative impact on their school. Curtis Small, principal of G. Gardner Shugart, said, “The first and second
year [we were in restructuring], it was like I had all kinds of resources. Then, when I made AYP, the resources decreased. I had a second vice principal, but then it was gone...”

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Anne Arundel County contains urban, rural, and suburban areas. The northern tip of the county adjoins the southernmost edge of Baltimore City, and the eastern edge of the county lies along the Chesapeake Bay. Anne Arundel County is home both to the Maryland State capital of Annapolis and the state’s major airport.

The Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) serve 75,000 students in 116 schools. The vast majority of students enrolled in AACPS are white (70%). Twenty-two percent of AACPS students are African-American. About 21% of AACPS students are low income.

The Anne Arundel County Public Schools experienced sporadic success meeting their AYP targets between the 2002-03 and 2005-06 school years. In 2002-03, AACPS failed to meet AYP targets in reading for both students with disabilities and English language learners. The district made AYP in 2003-04, but missed it in 2004-05 because of the performance of the special education subgroup in both reading and math.

Overall, there are six AACPS schools identified as needing improvement. Five schools are in Year 1 and one school is in Year 2. Four of the AACPS schools in Year 1 of improvement made all AYP targets in 2004-05 and may be eligible to exit school improvement next year.

Nineteen AACPS schools are designated as Title I schools (16%). Currently, none of the AACP Title I schools has been identified as needing improvement. In the 2005-06 school year, three AACPS Title I schools exited improvement. One of these, Van Bokkelen Elementary School, is included in this study. Van Bokkelen Elementary initially did not make AYP in 2004-05, but the district appealed the state’s designation. The appeal succeeded, so the school was allowed to exit improvement.

AACPS Schools in Restructuring

In 2005-06, AACPS did not have any schools in restructuring or restructuring planning. Van Bokkelen Elementary School had been in restructuring planning in 2004-05, but after making AYP did not have to implement its restructuring plan.

Van Bokkelen Elementary School serves a vastly different population than the district as a whole. Unlike the district, which is mostly white, with a relatively small percentage of low-income students, Van Bokkelen serves a population that is 88% African-American. Approximately 80% of the school’s students are low income. Van Bokkelen is one of 19 Title I schools in the district and serves the greatest percentage of low-income students in the district.

Prior to the advent of NCLB, Van Bokkelen was identified as a “reconstitution eligible” school under Maryland’s old accountability system. According to Rose Tasker, who was principal at Van Bokkelen until 2005, AACPS had no model for supporting the school. She was assigned a “school improvement director,” and Van Bokkelen, as well as all other schools designated as reconstitution eligible, was provided with additional staff development. In her first five years at the school, student achievement rose steadily.

For the next two years, student achievement declined at Van Bokkelen, which, according to Tasker, was because the school’s instructional programs were not effective. It was at this point that NCLB was enacted, and the new AACPS superintendent came on board. Tasker said that the implementation of new curricula (Open Court and Saxon Math) were the driving forces behind the Van Bokkelen Elementary School improvements in student achievement over the next three years.

While Van Bokkelen test scores began to rise, the school did not make enough progress to avoid being identified as needing improvement under NCLB. In 2002-03, Van Bokkelen missed one subgroup AYP target (low-income students in math) by only .10 point, and the school entered restructuring planning. The next year, because the school made all of its AYP targets, Van Bokkelen remained in the restructuring planning phase of improvement.

The Van Bokkelen Elementary School restructuring plan included the alternative governance option of replacing all or most of the school staff. According to Tasker, the decision of the alternative governance option was made at the district level, with some of her input, and then the school improvement team helped put the plan together. It is unclear why the school and district chose the option of replacing
staff, but Tasker’s imminent departure from the school was the likely impetus. Tasker had already informed the district and staff that she was retiring after the 2004-05 school year. Tasker said it was difficult to choose the option of reconstituting her staff, but she felt that it was the right thing to do.

In the 2004-05 school year, Van Bokkelen did not initially make AYP, failing to meet the targets for the special education subgroup in both reading and math. According to Cathy Herbert, director of AACPS elementary schools, when the MSA scores were released she went directly to Van Bokkelen Elementary School herself and looked through all of the documentation on the school’s students with disabilities and the special education team. They found three students who she felt were mislabeled, and the school appealed the AYP ruling. One student who was not special education had been coded as special education. Two other students qualified to take the modified MSA (designed for students in special education for three consecutive years with documented evidence of research-based interventions). However, at the time of the 2005 administration of the MSA, the modified MSA was not available. Thus, students eligible to take the modified MSA were supposed to be given a proficient score. Based on the mislabeling of these three students, Van Bokkelen Elementary School’s appeal was approved. Furthermore, because the school made all AYP targets for two consecutive years, the school left improvement.

District Strategies and Supports for Schools in Improvement

At the same time that NCLB was enacted, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools hired a new superintendent, Dr. Eric Smith. Since the introduction of both Smith and NCLB, AACPS has instituted a wide range of changes in an effort to improve student academic performance throughout the district, including single textbook adoption for all schools, pacing guides aligning the textbooks to the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum, quarterly benchmark assessments, and ongoing student achievement data analysis.

In addition to the strategies for improving achievement in all schools, AACPS provides some additional support to those schools that have been identified for improvement. These supports include:

- A district-hired consultant to work with all of the schools in need of assistance on their school improvement plans
- Additional staffing in lower-performing schools to keep class sizes low. In Van Bokkelen Elementary, the lowest performing school in the district, additional staff were hired so that the district was able to keep the teacher-to-student ratio at about 1:15
- The introduction of supplemental reading programs
- Direct support from district personnel on an as-needed basis

Herbert stated that AACPS will provide schools with whatever assistance and resources they need to raise student achievement, and that because the district has relatively few schools identified for improvement, she can provide individual assistance to schools. “We have a commitment to provide those schools with whatever they need,” she said. “The district will do whatever it needs to do on a needs basis, case by case. If we had more schools, we might have a more formal process and way of approaching improvement, but since we’ve had small numbers, we’ve been able to tailor our response.”

Resources for Restructuring Schools

Van Bokkelen Elementary School received a variety of resources to aid in its restructuring planning. School and district personnel cited Title I, state school improvement grants, and district school improvement grants as sources of financial income during the time that Van Bokkelen was identified for improvement and was in restructuring planning. Tasker commented, “I had a lot of resources…I got money from MSDE, money from different grants. I had money from everybody. I got to the point where I didn’t want more money. I wanted programs.” Tasker further commented that her district supervisor at the time would not allow her to purchase any additional programs or curricula.

Since Van Bokkelen Elementary School is the only AACPS school to ever be in restructuring planning, it is unclear if the district has (or will) target resources specifically to restructuring schools. As Herbert noted, the fact that the district has so few schools to work with allows AACPS to give individual assistance to all schools in improvement. Thus the support provided to Van Bokkelen may not be all that
different from that given to the other schools that were identified for improvement.

School Strategies for Improvement

During Tasker’s tenure at Van Bokkelen, she implemented a number of strategies to increase student achievement.

Monitoring student performance. Tasker stated that she used the district’s quarterly benchmark assessments to keep track of every student’s progress in the school, and made that a driving force for instructional decision making. “I had a board with every student and class on it, and it was color coded,” she said. “I could look at the board and see how everyone was doing. When I had my leadership team, we used the board; when met with the grade groups, we used the board.”

Focusing on marginal students. Tasker used her monitoring of student performance to place students into one of four categories (green, blue, yellow, and red). Tasker said the students on the margins of proficiency according to the benchmarks received the most attention and assistance in preparing for the MSA, and the students in the “red” received intervention via a supplemental reading program. One teacher elaborated, “Right before MSA, we cram as much as we can into those ‘bubble kids.’ We don’t focus as much on the kids that aren’t on the bubble. We don’t help them move forward. I just feel like we leave the kids behind in the process of not leaving them behind. If you’re not where you need to be, then you’re never going to be where you need to be.”

Training staff on the VSC. Teachers at Van Bokkelen received a great deal of training on the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum. “The teachers had to learn the VSC and internalize it,” Tasker said. “And then we would look at the curriculum and know what holes needed to be filled. We looked at the pacing guides and the curriculum and figured out what we needed to make sure was taught.”

Addressing discipline issues. According to both Herbert and Tasker, one of the greatest hurdles facing Van Bokkelen was student behavior. Ms. Tasker said that she allocated some of her additional resources to hiring staff to monitor student behavior and deal with disciplining students. Both Herbert and Tasker said that Van Bokkelen Elementary School would not have been able to improve their student performance without the improved school discipline.

Test preparation. Ms. Tasker, as well as teachers at Van Bokkelen Elementary, commented on the vast amounts of preparation for the MSA that happen throughout the year, especially from January until testing. Staff noted that the 60 school days prior to testing “feel like” a constant, ongoing test prep session. In particular, Ms. Tasker and the teachers mentioned how faculty worked with students to understand how to respond to different kinds of test items, like BCRs, ECRs, and selected response.

Test celebration. Ms. Tasker stated that she made MSA testing a schoolwide event that all teachers and students needed to be prepared and excited for. She explained:

I helped my staff to understand that MSA was not just for the testing grades, it was a school project, and that we were all on a team. Everyone took ownership. We had a parent-student seminar, we had a pep rally, and the lower grades would do posters and things to encourage upper grade students. The teachers did different things—[made] thinking caps [for students], allowed students to chew gum, have water bottles. They encouraged them to eat breakfast and told parents to give kids a good night’s sleep.

The 2005-06 school year marked two important transitions for Van Bokkelen. It was the first year the school was not identified for improvement, and a new principal, Andrea Rose, came on board. While most of the improvement strategies that were put in place under Rose Tasker’s tenure remained, some additional strategies came into play as well.

Extended-day programs. At Van Bokkelen, there are after-school programs providing learning opportunities in both reading and math, a Saturday program in collaboration with a nearby army base, and a number of teachers who stay after school to work one-on-one with students in need.

Additional staffing. According to both teachers and the principal at Van Bokkelen, a number of additional staff members provide instructional support to classroom teachers. For example, there are currently five reading resource teachers that float throughout the building. Andrea Rose also said that she provides instructional support when necessary, and all administrators work in classrooms.
Furthermore, Ms. Rose reallocated resources so that she could hire additional teaching assistants.

**Smaller class sizes.** Van Bokkelen has been able to maintain its small class sizes. The largest classroom in the school has 17 students, and most have 14 to 15.

**Test practice.** Ms. Rose commented that she continues to explicitly prepare students for the MSA, including focusing on test-taking strategies and answering BCRs. She said, “We do test practice materials to make sure students are fluent readers. We give them test-taking strategies. We work with them on how to take a test, how to respond in a timely fashion, how to read the test.”

While test preparation is an accepted practice at Van Bokkelen, it is important to note that several teachers expressed concern over the amount of time spent on test preparation. One teacher explained:

*Every year, right after winter break, we hammer into the curriculum, doing all sorts of test prep. It’s such a stressful time. I don’t feel we prepare them, I feel we get them ready, and there’s a difference. We’re not giving them the skills all year long. January to March we’re crunching. You’re reminded of it every day. Test-taking strategies are pounded for those 54 days.*

**Money.** Teachers mentioned that they receive additional resources around the time that MSAs are administered. One teacher said, “We get a lot of money around MSA time. Whatever we need around then, we can get.” Another teacher commented, “The money is being pumped in to help you better. I have people pouring in offering to help in the classroom...There are loads of resources available to me.”

On the other hand, Tasker believes that it was not the restructuring planning that helped Van Bokkelen improve, but her leadership of the school. Tasker did point out that NCLB has played an important and positive role in the district, even though it was not as helpful to her. “I had the vision and I knew what needed to be done to help the children, and I was doing it,” she said. “Schools that were performing well needed to go higher, and NCLB opened up a lot of eyes,” she continued. “And that has a lot to do with closing the achievement gap in Anne Arundel County.”

The teachers at Van Bokkelen take a slightly different view and point to all of the resources Van Bokkelen has received as a driving force for its improvement. As one teacher said, “What I see is a lot of interventions in place, smaller classrooms, relationships being established with the families, more children being targeted to raise the achievement levels. And the students can articulate at a better level. At some points, many students are getting their needs met.” While the additional resources Van Bokkelen Elementary School has received are directly related to the school’s status as a restructuring school, the teachers do not see restructuring as the change agent.

As in Prince George’s County, the staff at Van Bokkelen elementary noted that with academic success comes a loss of resources. Now that Van Bokkelen is no longer identified as needing improvement, the school is not eligible for state school improvement funds. And while currently the district is maintaining a high level of support for the school, it is unclear for how long. One teacher pointed out, “It’s almost more beneficial for us to not make AYP. Our money just got yanked from us, and then what are you left with? We flourished with all this extra money and resources, and now we’re going to go back to where we were.”

**Early Results**

Because Van Bokkelen made all AYP targets for two consecutive years, the school left improvement status. Herbert believes that although Van Bokkelen never had to implement its restructuring plan, the planning for restructuring helped the school to improve. “We did try parts of the restructuring plan, even though we didn’t have to restructure,” she explained. “And as we built the restructuring plan, we really identified the pieces that were important, and began with those right away.”

**Woodlawn Middle School (Baltimore County)**

Woodlawn Middle School is located in southwest Baltimore County, less than a mile and a half from the border of Baltimore City. At the school, 772 children are enrolled in grades 6-8. The population served by Woodlawn Middle School is similar to that of most Baltimore City schools. Ninety-five percent of the students at this Title I school are African-American, and approximately 68% of the students are low income.
Woodlawn Middle School failed to make AYP in both 2002-03 and 2004-05. The school met all AYP targets in 2003-04, but because a school must make AYP targets for two consecutive years to leave improvement, in 2005-06 Woodlawn Middle School entered the restructuring planning phase of school improvement. In 2004-05, overall, students met the AYP targets for reading but not math. In reading, African-American students, low-income students, and students with disabilities fell short of AYP targets. In math, African-American students and students with disabilities also failed to meet AYP targets.

At the time the interviews were conducted for this study, school and district staff were still formulating their school improvement plan, choosing the alternative governance option as a part of their restructuring plan. Since then, MSDE has reported that Woodlawn Middle School will be replacing all or most of the school staff when the school implements its restructuring plan for the 2006-07 school year.

Since Woodlawn Middle School is just beginning restructuring planning, there is little to report about the school's strategies for improvement, the resources it has received, or the results of the restructuring efforts. Even at this early stage it is interesting to note the similarities in strategies for improvement and the resources in play between Woodlawn Middle School and the other schools profiled in this study. The following section provides a brief overview.

**District and School Strategies and Supports for Schools in Improvement**

Since Woodlawn Middle School is in restructuring planning and has only just begun creating its restructuring plan, it is difficult to determine to what extent the school is receiving additional resources to support its restructuring efforts. Principal Brian Scriven outlined a number of the resources the school currently receives, all aimed at improving student academic achievement.

**Master educator.** The district assigned a “master educator” (a former principal) to work as a consultant in Woodlawn Middle School. According to Scriven, the principal has the discretion to use the master educator in any way that he sees fit. Currently the master educator looks at school achievement data, works with teachers and department heads, and helps implement the focus plan and school improvement plan.

**Financial support.** Woodlawn Middle School received school improvement grants. Scriven said that he has used these extra resources to hire extra teachers, such as reading and math resource teachers. He has also used the funds to run extended day and Saturday programs in reading, math, and special education. One teacher noted that, “[NCLB] has afforded this school a lot of financial resources, and the purchase of instructional materials. We’ve been allotted additional funding for additional staff.”

**Focus plans.** The area superintendent for Woodlawn Middle School has introduced “focus plans” to the school. The focus plan identifies a school’s most deficient academic area, and includes a plan for addressing the deficiency as well as a tool for monitoring progress. According to Mr. Scriven, the focus plan requires that he and his staff review data on a regular basis.

The teachers at Woodlawn Middle School expressed frustration with the amount of data they are expected to collect and analyze. One teacher described it as a “tremendous focus on the daily gathering of data, analyzing it, and providing interventions.” The biggest point of contention is that the teachers and resource specialists are expected to develop the instruments for collecting daily data to report on how teachers and students are performing. One teacher said, “There’s a trickle-down effect from the superintendent on down to keep collecting data.”

**Assessments.** Baltimore County administers quarterly benchmark exams and three MSA simulations throughout the year. In addition, Woodlawn Middle School administers three in-house diagnostic assessments, as well as daily assessments that are part of the focus plan. These assessments provide schools and teachers with volumes of data on student progress as well as preparation for the MSA. As Principal Scriven described it, “We’re not leaving anything to chance. With all of the testing, we’ll have a good indication of where we’re going to be before we’ll be hit with the MSAs. There’s nothing to chance any longer.”

**Staff development.** The district provides personnel to conduct on-site staff development, provide instructional feedback, develop instructional strategies (flexible grouping, differentiated instruction, etc.), and facilitate professional learning communities.
**Additional administrators.** In 2005-06, Woodlawn Middle School was assigned an additional assistant principal. Now the school has four assistant principals, one for each grade and one assigned to students with disabilities.

**Extended day.** According to the principal, Woodlawn Middle School has instituted extended-day programs in reading and math to help prepare students for the MSA.

**Increased focus** on reading and math. The district has implemented supplemental reading and math programs. According to Mr. Scriven, the 60 most deficient students in reading and math at each grade level receive a “double dose” of instruction. The school also places an emphasis on teaching reading across the curriculum.

**Curriculum alignment.** According to Mr. Scriven, this year the district has done a better job of making sure that the district curricula are aligned with the VSC. The teachers at the school noted, however, that the curriculum is still not aligned.

**Conclusion**

The state of Maryland has developed a comprehensive accountability system that parallels NCLB. Maryland holds all schools to the same standards (and penalties), regardless of their Title I status. As such, many non-Title I schools are in various stages of improvement throughout the state. All schools are eligible for state school improvement grants, and all schools receive technical assistance from the state and their local district based upon their improvement status. However, only Title I schools are required to offer choice or supplemental services as a provision of improvement and receive federal Title I, Part A funds, as well as Title I federal school improvement grants.

While Maryland has taken an active role in holding all schools accountable, the majority of the decision making and implementation of improvement strategies is delegated to districts and schools. The state does provide some resources and assistance to guide school districts in their efforts, and reviews all restructuring plans, but MSDE has mostly deferred to local agencies and officials to make restructuring decisions. As of the 2005-06 school year, the state had begun to develop more specific guidance for the development of alternative governance plans and more detailed reviewing processes for restructuring plans, but it appears as though the locus of decision-making control will remain with schools and districts.

Interestingly, although the state has basically decentralized the decision making for restructuring, the restructuring and improvement strategies in place in the districts and schools in this study look remarkably similar. Even in the absence of explicit directives, restructuring schools in Maryland have all gravitated towards similar courses of action, with the vast majority of Maryland restructuring schools implementing the same alternative governance option—a turnaround specialist.

Although restructuring is supposed to fundamentally change low-performing schools, the restructuring schools in this study do not appear to be operating much differently than schools in any other phase of NCLB improvement. District officials outlined the same available resources and strategies for raising student achievement in schools identified for improvement as in schools in the restructuring phase. While schools in later stages of improvement may receive more attention or larger state school improvement grants, the actual impact of being in restructuring does not appear to be much of a factor to schools.

In addition, according to school representatives interviewed for this report, restructuring school governance is only one of many factors that affect student MSA performance. The most direct effect on student achievement, according to those interviewed, seems to come from instruction, data analyses, test practice, and supplemental tutoring and instruction. These changes are often made possible because of the larger state school improvement grants available in restructuring.

Last, but not least, Maryland’s school improvement system, much like the federal law, seems to be set up in a way that discourages the “sustainability of progress.” Schools are given the extra resources to help them make AYP and leave improvement, but they lose these resources once they are successful. As a result, they may be more likely to fall into a pattern of jumping above and below the line of needing improvement.

**Postscript**

As we went to press, the Maryland State Department of Education had just released the 2006 MSA scores for all
Maryland Schools. According to the MSDE School Report Card Web site, which reports NCLB progress, the schools profiled in this report made the following progress:

Prince George’s County Public Schools:

- Stephen Decatur Middle School’s low-income students and students with disabilities did not make AYP in either math or reading. This school remains in restructuring implementation.

- G. Garder Shugart Middle School’s African-American, low income, and special education students, and the student body as a whole, did not make AYP in either math or reading. This school remains in restructuring implementation.

- Bladensburg Elementary School made AYP in all areas. If the school makes AYP in all areas next year, the school will exit school improvement.

Baltimore County Public Schools:

- Woodlawn Middle School made AYP in all areas, and thus remains in the restructuring planning phase of school improvement. If the school makes AYP in all areas in 2007, the school will leave improvement.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools:

- Van Bokkelen Elementary School made AYP in all areas, and remained out of school improvement.
Credits

This report was written by Brenda Neuman-Sheldon, consultant to the Center on Education Policy, with assistance from Jack Jennings, CEP’s President, and Diane Stark Rentner, CEP’s Director of National Programs. Rebecca Barns edited the report.

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