



# A Decade of Reform: A Decade of Progress

**O**n December 1, 1999, State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick released the last report card of the century — one that marked, as well, a full decade of school reform in Maryland.

Following a year in which all but two of the state's school districts improved their Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) scores, the state's 1999 composite score remained relatively flat, dipping .3 percentage points from last year's high of 44.1%. Nine systems, however, continued to improve this year, and the decade's trend line shows significant progress from 1993, when just 31.7% of students performed satisfactorily.

Baltimore City, the state's lowest-performing district, celebrated its third consecutive year of progress, with 17% of students now at satisfactory. And Woodson Middle School in Somerset County became the first reconstitution-eligible school to be released from state oversight after posting an overall score (45.3%) that topped the state composite. Over the past two years, two-thirds of the state's 97 reconstitution-eligible schools have improved on MSPAP, though none has matched Woodson's achievement.

Kent County, Maryland's smallest school district, earned 1999's highest aggregate score. With 60% of students now at satisfactory, Kent gained 5.3 percentage points on last year's composite, and 27.4 points since 1993. Following Kent are seven other counties that topped the 50% mark and are, therefore, within striking distance of the 70% state standard: Howard (59.3), Harford (56.3), Carroll (55.4), Montgomery

(54.8), Calvert (52.5), Frederick (52.4), and Washington (51.0).

Anne Arundel County's Bodkin Elementary earned the state's top composite. The Pasadena school saw its overall score jump 25 points this year, topping out at 82.5 percent. It's a dramatic gain — one Principal Rocco Ferretti attributes to a schoolwide emphasis on writing and to years of hard work.

"As I've maintained since this program began, we're not celebrating numbers today," said Dr. Grasmick, "we're celebrating what the numbers mean. They mean that teachers and students are beating the odds; that ambitious standards are nonetheless attainable; that children cannot be counted out because they are poor or disabled or new to this country; and that better, more focused instruction pays off, regardless of your enrollment profile."

*"In the race to improve our schools, there is no finish line," said Dr. Grasmick. "It's not today's results that count; it's what you learn from today so you can do better tomorrow."*



While MSPAP results were first released in 1993, the state's reform agenda was actually launched in 1989, following publication of a paper calling for a comprehensive program of accountability — including an annual report to the public documenting the effectiveness of the state's schools. The MSPAP tests, considered among the nation's most difficult, are given annually to students in grades 3, 5, and 8, and measure students' proficiency in reading,

writing, language usage, math, science, and social studies.

Performance data generated by the tests are used to pinpoint curricular and instructional problems and develop policy and programs to remedy them. Based on previous data releases, the state has introduced initiatives aimed at improving reading and math instruction, restructuring middle schools, and closing the racial achievement gap.

## SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

# Putting It in Perspective

**T**wo years ago, when the State Board of Education urged MSDE to put in place a comprehensive program of academic intervention for every single student not meeting performance standards, its directive was clear. Go beyond the big numbers. Sharpen the focus from *average* student achievement to *each* student's achievement — because, all too often, the former masks the latter.

It's good counsel we're well-advised to follow today, as we reflect on 1999's *Maryland School Performance Report*. Too often we let the big numbers — the averages, the composites — mask the real story. Despite a slight dip in the state's overall MSPAP score, this year we find the most compelling reasons to celebrate exactly where we've found them since 1993 — in classrooms.

And, once again, we've found them in the classrooms you'd least expect to serve as success stories' backdrop — classrooms where more students than not live in poverty; where you're as likely to hear any of a dozen languages as you are English; where, despite enormous odds, children with special needs triumph alongside their non-disabled peers.

Of course, when you have 1,058 schools participating in MSPAP testing, it's dangerous to offer examples of remarkable achievement for you will, inevitably, omit schools truly deserving of recognition. With that caveat duly noted, I can't help but mention schools like Pimlico Elementary, whose composite MSPAP score — jumping 20 points last year alone — is more than 3½ times its 1993 score. Despite the fact that *nearly all* of its students qualify

for free and reduced-price meals, Pimlico now hovers just 2.3 percentage points below the state composite.

Viers Mill Elementary in Montgomery County contends every day with *two* potentially debilitating factors: high student poverty *and* ESL rates. More than 60% of the school's students receive free and reduced-price meals, and one in five speaks English as a second language. Despite the odds, Viers Mill posted a composite score of 41.6, up nearly 14 percentage points from 1993.

Along with substantial student poverty, Barton Elementary School in Allegany County finds its toughest challenge in the fact that 30% of its students receive special education services. Neither factor stopped Barton's 3rd-graders from achieving the satisfactory standard in writing and the excellent standard in math. With a school composite — 60.9% — well above the state's, Barton decisively proves the maxim guiding MSPAP from the start: *all children can learn*.

While the principals and teachers at these schools clearly deserve the accolades they've gotten this past month, and the many more they're sure to get the remainder of this year, so, too, do the thousands of you who have worked similar miracles in your own classrooms — without, perhaps, comparable acclaim. I thank you, in equal part, for your faith, perseverance, and commitment to the ideals we see bear fruit each year.

Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools

**Inside the Classroom...**

- ✓ School Reform Where it Counts
- ✓ Snapshot of Results
- ✓ Where We Stand

# School Reform Works

## Successful Schools, Successful Students

1999 Maryland School Report Card

*“Each year, Dr. Grasmick examines the state’s test results. Today as never before, a good education is absolutely being created. It is very different from the one we inherited. It offers every child the opportunity to succeed in it.”*

### Mount Royal Elementary-Middle School, Baltimore City

Mount Royal Elementary-Middle is a Title I school serving 867 Baltimore City students, preK-8. Despite the fact that more than 75% of its students receive free or reduced-price meals, the school posted 1999’s highest 5th-grade math score and has gained more than 15 points on its composite since 1993, improving this year to 42.2%.

“What makes Mt. Royal unique is the school’s nucleus of dedicated, highly skilled teachers,” says Principal Mark Frankel. “These teachers are — literally — lined up to get inside the school early each morning, and they’re still here at 6:00 p.m.” Teachers, volunteers, and mentors tutor students before and after school and on Saturdays, and a recreation center, located in the school, provides their extracurricular activities. Several summer programs help students gain academic ground over the long vacation.

Visitors to the school often comment on the school’s caring, yet business-like atmosphere. According to Principal Frankel, this is not a contradiction in terms — school staff is adept at meeting students’ emotional and academic needs. “We are competing very well at both the city and state level,” he says. “What I’d really like to see us do is surpass that and show that we can be nationally competitive. We’re getting there. We’re a really good school, but we want to be a great school.”

### Kent County Public Schools

Kent County’s MSPAP composite climbed another 53 points in 1999, putting even more distance between its past and present. With 60% of students now at satisfactory, Kent leads Maryland’s 24 school systems and is ever closer to meeting the state’s 70% satisfactory standard. Already, the system meets the satisfactory or excellent standard in 3rd-grade reading, math, science, and social studies.

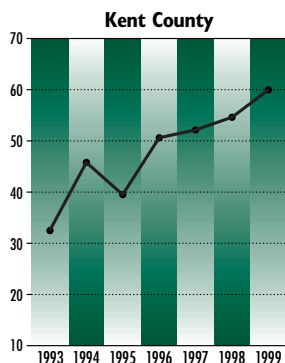
Dr. Costella also credits consistency. “People stayed the course. Worton Elementary School is a good example. They didn’t see the level of achievement they wanted to see. But they knew that what they were doing was instructionally sound, so they just continued to refine their teaching.” Worton, whose scores have nearly doubled over the past four years, now

meets the satisfactory standard in reading and writing, and the excellent standard in math, science, and social studies.

#### The Size Advantage

“I don’t think we’re doing anything differently. We’re small and it’s easy to take a systemwide approach to things,” says Dr. Costella.

“Everyone in the system knows that our prime focus is on improving student achievement, not just on MSPAP, but on SATs, APs, in class work, in every subject our students take. Since we’re small, everyone is asked to wear many hats, so everyone is directly involved in what happens in our



#### Where Success Lies

Kent County Superintendent Lorraine Costella attributes much of the district’s success to its teachers. “We just decided to look at what we felt were sound instructional

strategies, and our teachers continue to evaluate how we can improve student achievement,” she explains. “They analyze a variety of data — from class work and tests to MSPAP scores — to continue to refine their instructional approach. Our teachers’ willingness to critique their work has made all the difference.”

### Charlestown Elementary School, Cecil County

Located in rural Cecil County, Charlestown Elementary is a Title I school serving 250 students, preK-5. Parent Bob Wade describes the small school as a place where “parents are always welcome, and teachers are always available.”

Charlestown has gained 35.5 points on MSPAP since 1993, and this year alone, 5th-grade reading scores jumped more than 20 points. Principal Carolyn Teigland attributes this success to a focus on reading, high-quality staff development, and strong school-parent-community relations.

To strengthen reading skills, the school offers Reading Recovery — an intensive reading intervention program — to struggling readers in grades 1-3. Lagging 4th-graders receive intensive supplemental reading instruction with materials carefully selected for both age- and ability-appropriateness. All Charlestown Elementary students are given more than two hours of language arts instruction daily.

The school has invested Title I funds in two full-time instructional support teachers. These master teachers provide staff development, create instructional materials, help plan lessons, observe teachers and provide them feedback, and complete individual reading inventories for every 1st- and 2nd-grader.

Charlestown Elementary boasts an active PTA, whose primary mission is to increase communication among parents and teachers and to get more parents involved in the school. Charlestown has a school liaison on site 4½ days a week to create and maintain strong home-school relationships.

### Smithsburg Elementary School, Washington County

As more families elect to live in rural areas and commute to the BWI corridor, Smithsburg Elementary in Washington County has experienced an enrollment boom. Principal Bill Fager, a life-long community member and graduate of the Washington County public school system, describes Smithsburg’s staff as the best he’s ever worked with in a career that spans 27 years.

Under Principal Fager’s leadership, the school has met a number of the state’s challenging standards. For five consecutive years, Smithsburg has met the excellent standard in attendance. In 1999, 3rd-graders met the satisfactory standard in science and the excellent standard in language usage. Fifth-graders met the satisfactory standard in math and science.

The school’s instructional program is rooted firmly in best practices and data-based instruction. Each marking period, student progress is assessed, and Principal Fager distributes the data to all teachers — including teachers in non-assessed areas such as physical education, art, and music. Accountability among the staff is explicit, and monthly grade-level meetings allow them to discuss the data and identify strategies for improvement.

“What has made the difference,” says Principal Fager, “is that our teachers are committed, and they understand what they need to teach. They model it, and they follow only the essential curriculum.”

schools; therefore, the goal is always in sight.”

Teacher Ed Silver echoes the benefits of a small system. “Because the school system is small, we don’t have official curriculum specialists. If about 50 teachers are involved in curriculum writing, that’s almost one-third of the system’s total teachers,” he said. “As a result, teachers really have ownership of the curriculum and a sense of responsibility for it.”

#### “Helping Teachers”

Mr. Ed Silver is one of Kent County’s four “helping teachers” — master teachers devoted to helping their colleagues improve instruction. Among a myriad other functions, helping teachers plan instructional activities, provide professional development, and

locate resources. While there is an emphasis on supporting new teachers, helping teachers also work with veteran teachers on implementing new instructional strategies. “A helping teacher is a peer, not an evaluator,” says Mr. Silver. “As a result, we have strong relationships with teachers, which are based on collegial trust and respect.”

#### Performance-Based Instruction

“Our staff has a firm grasp on performance-based education, and they know it’s the right thing to do,” says Dr. Costella. “We can’t teach our students all the facts they’ll need in their college and professional careers. Technology and the volume of information are growing far too fast for that. We can give them a firm foundation in

### Havre de Grace Elementary School, Harford County

Wealth remains one of the greatest predictors of student success. But that hasn’t stopped high-poverty Havre de Grace Elementary — which has Harford County’s second-highest free and reduced-price meals rate (66%) — from gaining more than 30 points on its composite MSPAP score since 1993. And it didn’t stop it from being one of just 10 Harford County schools to win money from the state last year for significant, continuous progress toward state standards.

Principal Ellen Tracy, in her third year at Havre de Grace, attributes the school’s success to a rich program that meets students’ emotional, physical, and academic needs.

- Because the regular kindergarten program is only half-day, the school implemented KEEP — Kindergarten Extended Education Program — to develop the literacy skills of at-risk students.
- For more than five years, 1st- and 2nd-graders have learned to read with ReAch. Used throughout the county, the program is based on proven reading practices and strong parental involvement.
- Now in its third year, the school’s Health Readiness Program provides for an on-site pediatrician and social worker one day a week to serve both insured and uninsured children.

Part of the state’s Blue Ribbon Sister Schools mentoring program, Havre de Grace Elementary was partnered with Blue Ribbon Middlesex Elementary in Baltimore County. For the last three years, the schools have shared best practices, borrowed materials, and communicated regularly.

# Where It Counts:

## Successful School Systems

### School Performance Report

... results as if lives depend on them — and they do.  
... tely indispensable for future success. The world we  
... We owe it to our children to give them every

—Raymond A. “Chip” Mason  
Chairman, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education  
Chairman of the Board & CEO, Legg Mason

### Glen Avenue Elementary School, Wicomico County

Wicomico County’s Glen Avenue Elementary, located in eastern Salisbury City, serves a diverse population of students in pre-k, kindergarten, and grades 2-5. First-graders attend the Chipman First Grade Center. Since MSPAP testing began, the school’s composite score has increased significantly — from 16.5% in 1993 to 63.4% in 1999. This year, 5th-graders met the state’s satisfactory standard in math and the excellent standard in science.

With about 40% of students living across town from the school, it’s often difficult for parents to attend events and for students to stay after school. So the school has adopted a comprehensive outreach plan to accommodate this unique challenge. Before the school year begins, school staff travel across town to meet parents and students. School meetings are sometimes held in west Salisbury so that more parents can attend, and two nights a week the school provides students a snack and transportation so that they can work in the computer lab. The school also makes every effort to provide parents and students transportation to special events such as dances, fairs, and picnics.

Glen Avenue uses MSPAP data to drive instructional changes and to measure how well it serves every student subpopulation. In 1998, Wicomico County Public Schools recognized Glen Avenue for significant gains in minority student achievement.

basic skills, then encourage and support them as they tackle higher-level skills.”

Mr. Silver has watched teachers grow increasingly proficient at performance-based instruction — not because they think it will help students score higher on MSPAP, but because they believe it makes learning more motivating and more authentic for their students. As Mr. Silver puts it, “Performance-based instruction is not about completing tasks in isolation. It’s something you model as part of the curriculum and good instruction. Our teachers don’t stop normal activities to haul in an artificial task. It’s never been about preparing for a test.”

### More Opportunities to Learn

Every school in Kent County offers after-school and summer learning programs to students free of charge or for a nominal fee. Students at risk of academic failure are generally invited to attend after-school programs, which serve as intervention pieces.

Summer programs are different and vary from school to school. Each school plans activities around a theme that will build students’ enthusiasm for learning. For example, Rock Hall Elementary’s summer program traditionally focuses on the arts, while other schools may plan activities around the Chesapeake Bay, historical events, or outer space. Not surprisingly,

participation is high for these voluntary programs, and it wouldn’t be unusual for a school to have as many as 50% of its students attend the three- to four-week program.

Despite the dearth of resources accompanying a small system — the county has eight schools, total — Kent has made major progress. The enthusiasm among the system’s educators, from the teachers up to the superintendent, is overwhelming. “The expectation in every classroom is that this is a goal that can be reached, and we convey this to the kids,” says Mr. Silver. “Success breeds success.” Clearly, this is a school system to watch as we move into a new decade of school reform and accountability. 🌱

### Sara M. Roach Elementary, Baltimore City

Sara M. Roach Elementary, a Title I school serving about 400 southwest Baltimore students, saw its composite MSPAP score rise more than 24 points this year alone. Considering the many hurdles they must clear, Principal Ann Moore and staff work hard to provide students the supports they need for success.

#### ● Integrated Language Arts Project

This is the school’s fourth year implementing the state-sponsored training program, which focuses on using performance-based tasks and focus lessons to help teachers meet students’ diverse learning needs. For the first time this year, 4th-grade teachers joined their 3rd- and 5th-grade colleagues in the training program.

#### ● Best Practices Schoolwide

Every day, students encounter performance-based tasks that emphasize critical thinking and the application of knowledge and skills. Students support their work with facts and examples and reflect upon their learning in journals and logs.

#### ● Read, Read, Read

Students enjoy several opportunities to read at Sara M. Roach. Every day, in every classroom, students select their own material and read silently for 15-20 minutes. And every Thursday, at 2:00 p.m., a student announces the weekly “Read-In.” Using theme-based materials, students read silently for 15 minutes. The current Read-In theme — animals — complements the school’s partnership with an outdoor education center. The value of reading is underscored through homework assignments and through silent reading periods following breakfast once a week.

### James McHenry Elementary School, Prince George’s County

This year, James McHenry Elementary more than doubled its 3rd-grade reading and 5th-grade math scores. But this school is no flash-in-the-pan; its trend line from 1993 (11.8% composite) to 1999 (31.8% composite) shows nothing but steady progress.

Through its School Planning and Management Team, which meets twice monthly to set goals and measure progress, the school has built a solid academic program. James McHenry’s Title I status allows it to fund several valuable positions, such as a full-time parent coordinator; a crisis care/intervention assistant who maintains a “cool down” classroom for students having difficulty working in a regular classroom environment; and a Reading Recovery teacher to provide one-on-one and small-group work with at-risk readers.

James McHenry is in its second year of the Blue Ribbon Sister Schools program. Teachers at James McHenry and Blue Ribbon partner Mayo Elementary in Anne Arundel County occasionally plan parallel lessons; for example, the schools’ 5th-graders read novels concurrently and then talked to each other about their reading over e-mail. The two schools also communicate regularly to share which strategies work — and which don’t.

Community involvement is equally important. The school was “adopted” by Ebenezer United Methodist Church in Lanham. Church volunteers provide teacher assistance during special activities, collect school supplies and clothing for students, assist in the library, and donate money for new library books.

### Washington County Public Schools

Washington County’s composite MSPAP score has climbed more than 19 points — from 31.9% in 1993 to 51.0% in 1999. It’s a steady gain Washington County Deputy Superintendent Theresa Flak attributes to “the industriousness of our teachers, principals, and supervisors working in tandem to implement our county-wide reading initiative.”

Dr. Flak is intimately involved with this initiative, which was launched at the elementary level last year. Every elementary school in the system now

has its own reading teacher who provides professional development for teachers and administers reading assessments to all K-3 students each quarter and to 4th- and 5th-graders twice a year. The assessments provide individual reading

scores as well as a picture of students’ reading progress relative to a series of established benchmarks.

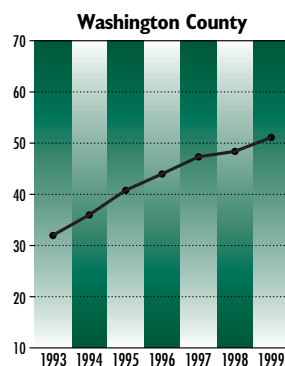
Washington County’s focus on reading is already bearing fruit. In 1999, 5th-grade reading scores rose 6.2 points over 1998 and 3rd-grade scores rose 2.3 points. So the

district expanded the reading initiative this year to include all middle schools. A literacy specialist, now located in every middle school, meets with each interdisciplinary team to make sure all teachers understand the reading and writing strategies to

be emphasized and to assist them in incorporating the strategies into different subjects. Middle school schedules also were realigned to allow for a 90-minute block of language arts that includes explicit reading instruction.

“[Having] teachers, principals, and supervisors align daily instruction with our Essential Curriculum and quarterly assessments has made a significant difference in student performance,” says Dr. Flak. “Many more schools have been able to achieve satisfactory standards in a number of data-based areas ... and we hope we’ll be able to sustain this progress in the coming years.”

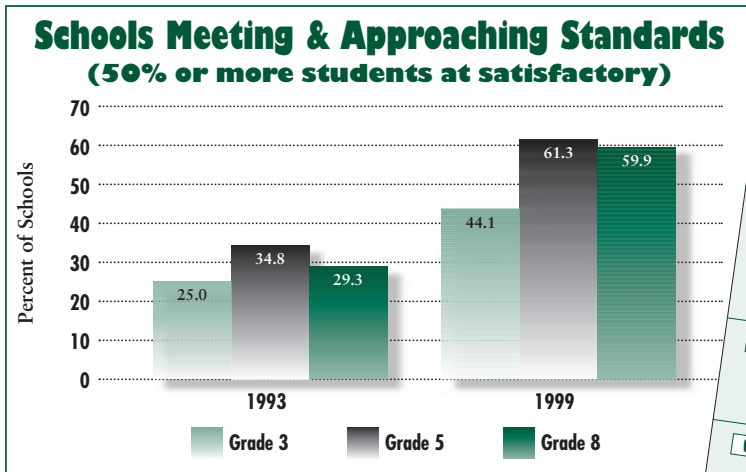
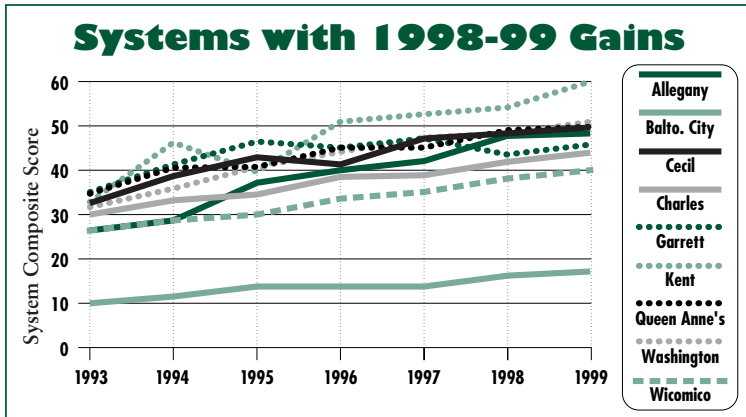
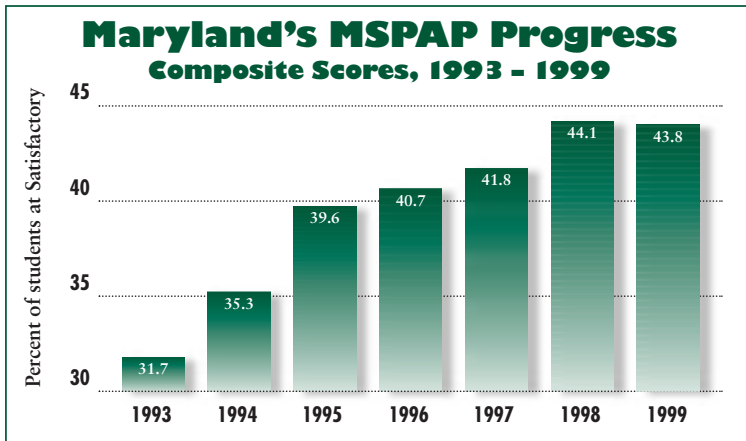
Looking ahead to the imminent high school assessments, Dr. Flak plans to extend the reading program into high schools next year. 🌱



# The Rest of the Story

● For more information on these and other schools making the grade in Maryland, visit MSDE's home page at [www.msde.state.md.us](http://www.msde.state.md.us), and download a full copy of *School Reform Where It Counts* in Adobe Acrobat.

● For all 1999 state-, system-, and school-level MSPAP data — including composites, trends, and disaggregated results — visit our data site at [www.msp.msde.state.md.us](http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us).



### WHERE WE STAND

#### MSPAP Composite Scores by School System: 1993-1999

School System	1993	1999	Gain
Allegany	26.5	48.1	21.6
Anne Arundel	36.6	46.6	10.0
Baltimore City	10.4	17.0	6.6
Baltimore Co.	34.9	49.0	14.1
Calvert	34.6	52.5	17.9
Caroline	25.1	42.4	17.3
Carroll	42.0	55.4	13.4
Cecil	32.4	49.7	17.3
Charles	30.1	43.6	13.5
Dorchester	21.0	37.2	16.2
Frederick	44.5	52.4	7.9
Garrett	35.6	45.4	9.8
Harford	38.4	56.3	17.9
Howard	48.7	59.3	10.6
Kent	32.6	60.0	27.4
Montgomery	46.4	54.8	8.4
Prince George's	21.5	31.1	9.6
Queen Anne's	34.4	49.7	15.3
St. Mary's	27.7	47.8	20.1
Somerset	25.3	31.2	5.9
Talbot	28.4	40.7	12.3
Washington	31.9	51.0	19.1
Wicomico	26.3	40.2	13.9
Worcester	25.3	45.6	20.3

### SNAPSHOT... The 1999 Report Card ... at a glance

- Maryland has gained 12.1 percentage points on MSPAP since 1993. 43.8% of students now score at or above satisfactory vs. 31.7% six years ago.
- 77 schools now have 70% or more students at satisfactory — 7 times the number of schools in 1993.
- With at least 50% of students at satisfactory, eight systems — one more than last year — are approaching the state standard: Calvert, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Kent, Montgomery, and Washington counties.
- 20 of the state's 24 school systems have 40% or more students at satisfactory. In 1993, there were only four.
- Highest 3rd-grade composite: Kent County (75.6). Highest 5th-grade composite: Howard County (61.7). Highest 8th-grade composite: Harford County (57.8).

## Maryland Classroom

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