

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **City Schools' 2011 MSA Scores Dip in Reading and Math, Highlight Urgency of Next Stages of Reform**

*Despite One-Year Drop, Student Growth since 2007 Strong; Heavy Monitoring Affirms Integrity of Results*

(Baltimore, MD)—For the first time since the launch of the current transformation of Baltimore City Public Schools, the district's Maryland School Assessment (MSA) scores are down for 2011. Scores dipped 3.4 percentage points on the reading MSA and 4.9 percentage points in math.

These district-wide declines, which follow three straight years of across-the-board MSA gains for City Schools, are consistent across grades, student subgroups, proficiency levels and a majority of schools. Calling this drop "unacceptable," district officials say they underscore the urgency of City Schools' reforms to date, and the need for even greater urgency moving forward.

"I am enormously dissatisfied with these results. Any time we fall short of our students' full potential and we take a step back, it is unacceptable," said City Schools CEO Andrés A. Alonso. "This is a call for a redoubling of urgency around what is happening in our classrooms; we cannot take our eye off the ball. We will do a deep dive on this year's data—and do whatever it takes to get our students back on a growth track."

"This is not the news we were hoping for, but we will lose no time in charting a course forward," said Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners Chair Neil E. Duke. "The foundation for reform that we have built in recent years is sound. So is our students' progress during that time. This year is a correction, and we are taking it to heart. A lot has happened in the last year to have a positive impact on teaching and learning throughout the district, and I fully expect that is what we will start to see play out in the months and years ahead."

National education experts, meanwhile, assert that periods of decline are typical for school districts following several years of growth; a recent analysis by the Council of Great City Schools shows that districts with steady gains also go through periods where they don't appear to be making progress on state tests. And when reviewed within the context of growth over time, City Schools' 2011 MSA results affirm that the progress students have made in recent years is solid: 3,641, or 19 percent, more students scored proficient or advanced in reading in 2011 than in 2007, and 4,127—fully 25 percent—more students made the state grade in math. Meanwhile, the number of students scoring basic on the MSA has decreased even more: 4,564, or 30 percent, fewer students scored basic in reading in 2011 than in 2007, and 5,083, or 28 percent, fewer students scored basic in math.

The 2011 results further confirm City Schools' progress in the last four years: they were attained under the strictest testing protocols to date in the district and across the nation. In the last year the district reported cheating in previous years at three schools; in each case there were clear patterns of erasures and answer-changing. City Schools invested heavily in test integrity measures this year to make it virtually impossible to engage in that kind of cheating again.

"We know our 2011 results are beyond doubt," said Dr. Alonso. "This year's results should put to rest any doubts that our kids' progress over the past several years is real."

#### ***City Schools' 2011 MSA Results: A One-Year Decline***

The MSA is administered in reading and math each spring to all Maryland public school students in grades 3-8. City Schools has shown steady gains on the state test over several years, with its most dramatic gains in 2008 and 2009, the

first two years of a district-wide transformation. During that time, schools gained autonomy over resources and became accountable for student achievement; the district office shrank by one-third and assumed a support role to schools; parents and communities became key partners in school decision-making; students began exercising school choice; and teacher and student supports expanded. As these reforms continued, City Schools' 2010 MSA scores reflected the steady pace that comes with growth over time. While the 2011 MSA scores sustain that growth over time, they are down for the first time since the transformation of City Schools began in 2008. And they are down across the board.

The number of City Schools students scoring proficient or advanced on the reading MSA declined, from 24,309 in 2010 to 23,369 in 2011, resulting in 69 percent of students scoring proficient or advanced this year, down from 72.4 percent last year—though up from 56.7 percent in 2007 and from 48.8 percent in 2004. The 2011 dip in math was slightly larger: The number of students scoring proficient or advanced on the math MSA declined from 22,283 in 2010 to 20,750 in 2011, resulting in 61.4 percent of students making the state grade in math, down from 66.3 percent last year—though up from 47.2 percent in 2007 and 42.8 percent in 2004.

The 2011 declines are reflected at the grade level. City Schools' MSA scores for grades 3-8 were down in both subjects this year, with the single exception of grade 7 reading scores, which were up nearly a percentage point over last year. Grades 7 and 8, where City Schools has seen the strongest gains in recent years, had the smallest declines in both reading and math in 2011, suggesting that the growth of recent years in those grades largely held steady. Grades 3 and 5 lost the most ground in reading, and grades 5 and 6 lost the most ground in math, pointing up potential district-wide challenges with the 5<sup>th</sup> grade—and with 5<sup>th</sup>-grade math in particular.

The one-year dip in 2011 scores carried across all student subgroups. Scores among low-income students, identified by eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Meals, were down in reading and math, as were scores for students with disabilities and Limited English Proficiency students. Scores were similarly down across races and ethnicities, except for the two ethnic groups that were newly identified in the district last year: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and Multi-racial. But like this year's grade level declines, the declines among student subgroups are an exception to a trend of significant growth over time.

And this year's MSA declines are reflected across student proficiency levels, with lower numbers of students scoring advanced on the reading and math MSAs, a slightly higher number of students scoring proficient on the reading MSA and a lower number scoring proficient on the math MSA, and higher numbers of students scoring basic overall.

Lastly, the district's drop in 2011 MSA scores is reflected at the school level, with a majority of schools showing declines in both subjects from 2010. Of the 153 schools that administered the MSA in 2011, 41 (27 percent) posted gains in reading and 106 (69 percent) posted declines; 28 (22 percent) posted gains in math and 119 (78 percent) posted declines; and 17 (13 percent) posted gains in both subjects, while 95 (62 percent) posted declines. It is worth noting that the inverse is true over time: Of the 126 schools that administered the MSA in both 2007 and 2011, 88 (70 percent) have 2011 reading scores above 2007 levels, 80 have 2011 math scores above 2007 levels and 76 (60 percent) have 2011 scores in both subjects above 2007 levels.

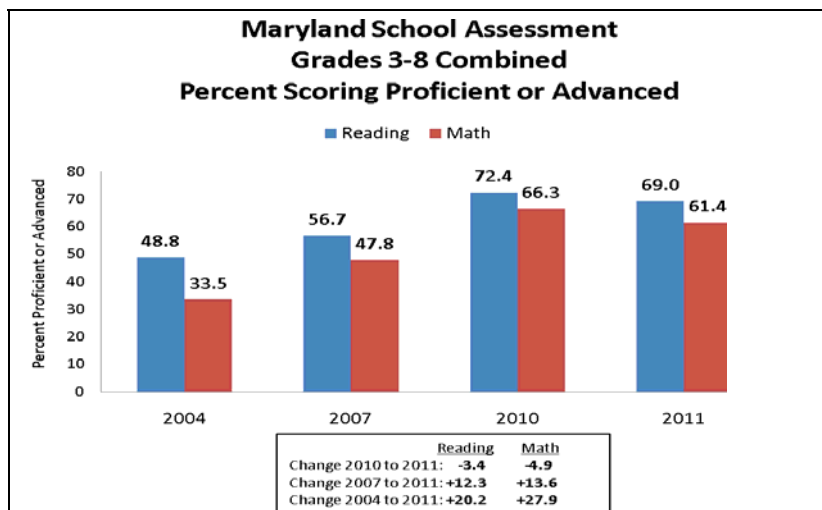
### ***City Schools Results 2007-2011: Growth over Time***

Just as this year's declines were across-the-board and consistent, so, too, has been City Schools' overall growth during the last four years, an equally—if not more—important trend underscored by the 2011 results. City Schools' 2011 MSA results show students achieving at significantly higher levels across the board than in 2007, the year before the overhaul of the district got underway, and since 2004, the first year the MSA was administered.

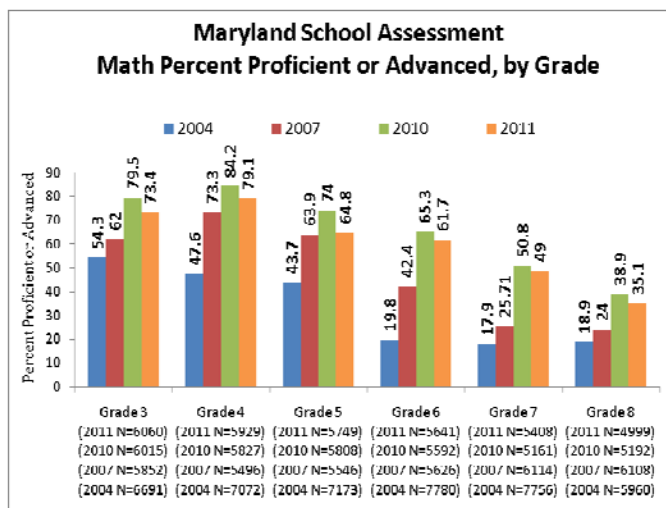
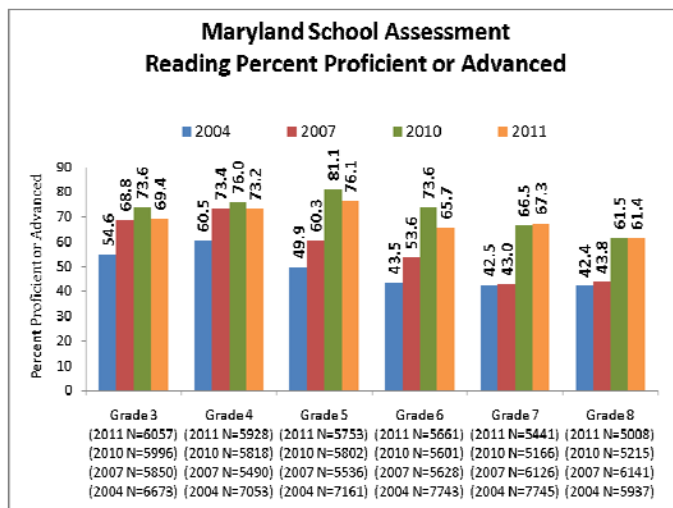
“Baltimore City understands its challenges, but more importantly has in place a strategy designed to bolster the progress that has been made over time,” said State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. “School improvement is best measured over the long haul, and I believe strongly in the long-term vision that Dr. Alonso and his staff have brought to the table.”

In 2011, 18.5 percent more students scored proficient or advanced on the reading MSA than in 2007, 23,369 compared to 19,728; on the math MSA the four-year increase is a full 25 percent, with 20,750 students scoring proficient or

advanced, compared to 16,623 in 2007. These increases make for overall gains of 12.3 percentage points in reading from 2007 to 2011, and 13.6 percentage points in math. Going back to 2004, the growth is even greater, with overall gains of 20.2 percentage points in reading and 27.9 percentage points in math.



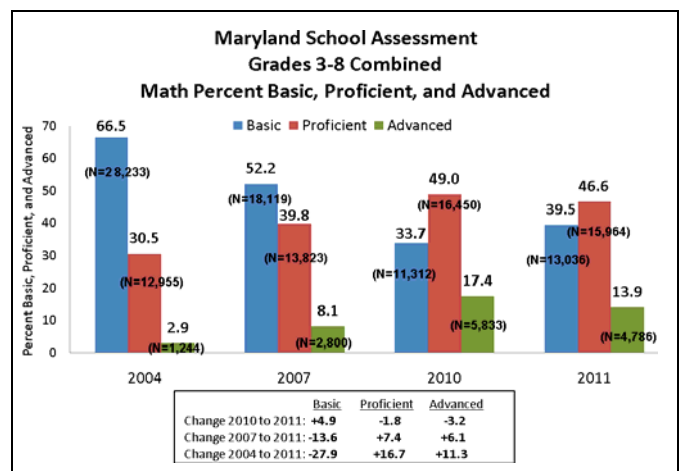
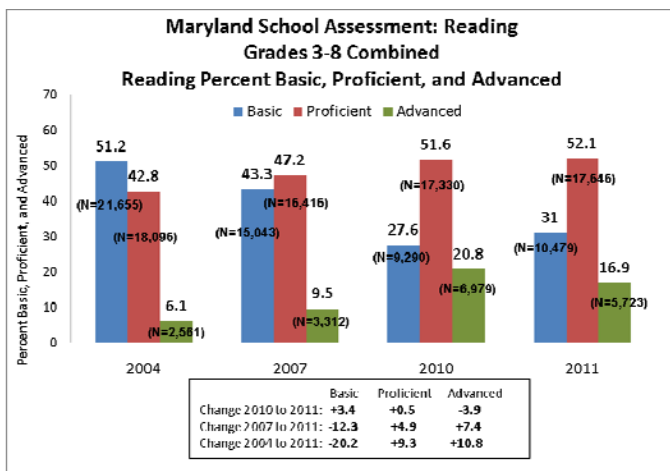
This same growth over time is seen across grades. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the reading 2011 MSA is up over 2007 in every grade, with the sole exception of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, which shows a four-year decline of 0.2 percentage points. Most notable among these increases is growth in the middle grades: The four-year increase in 6<sup>th</sup>-grade reading is 12.1 percentage points, from 53.6 percent to 65.7 percent; in 7<sup>th</sup>-grade reading, it's 24.3 percentage points, from 43 percent to 67.3 percent; and in 8<sup>th</sup>-grade reading it's 17.6 percentage points, from 43.8 percent to 61.4 percent. In math, the four-year trends are similar: There was growth in every grade, with 5<sup>th</sup> grade showing the smallest gain of 0.9 percentage points, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades all showing four-year gains of between 11 and 23 percentage points.



Across student subgroups the four-year growth is also consistent: The number of low-income (FARMS-eligible) students who scored proficient or advanced on the reading MSA was 11.9 percentage points higher in 2011 than in 2007, and 12.9 percentage points higher for math; the number of students with disabilities who scored proficient or advanced on the reading MSA was 10 percentage points higher in 2011 than in 2007, and 13.8 percentage points higher for math; and the number of Limited English Proficient students who scored proficient or advanced on the

reading MSA was 13.8 percentage points higher in 2011 than in 2007, and 24.6 percentage points higher for math. All races and ethnicities also showed growth from 2007 to 2011.

Perhaps most importantly, City Schools has seen significant increases in students achieving at higher levels and decreases in low-scoring students, underscoring the improvement in quality of learning taking place in recent years. In 2007, 43.3 percent of students scored basic on the reading MSA and 52.2 percent scored basic on the math MSA; by 2011, those percentages dropped to 31 percent and 39.5 percent respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, only 9.5 percent of students scored advanced on the reading MSA in 2007, and 8.1 percent scored advanced in math; by 2011, those percentages climbed to 16.9 percent for reading and 13.9 percent for math. For the 2004 to 2011 span, the growth is even more pronounced.



At the school level, these gains are also consistent. Of the 126 schools with MSA results for both 2007 and 2011, 88 (70 percent) show reading gains for the four-year period, 80 (64 percent) show math gains and 76 (60 percent) show gains in both subjects. By comparison, of the same 126 schools, 37 (29 percent) show reading declines from 2007 to 2011, 46 (37 percent) show math declines and 33 (26 percent) show declines in both subjects. Approximately twice as many schools show growth for the last four years, as schools that show declines.

**Steady Growth and the Occasional Dip: A National Trend**

In an analysis of urban school districts that have reported growth in standardized state test scores between 2006 and 2010, the Council of Great City Schools shows that few had across-the-board or consistent growth during that time. Of 69 districts analyzed, 22 experienced overall growth in reading from 2006 to 2010; the number of these that had at least one or more years of decline during that time ranged from 8 (36 percent) in grade 6 to 16 (73 percent) in grade 4, and no district demonstrated growth in all grades for all four years. A review of performance on math tests showed similar results. Of the 69 districts analyzed, 40 showed overall gains in math state test scores from 2006 to 2010; the number of districts with at least one or more years of decline during that time ranged from 20 (50 percent) in grades 6 and 7 to 27 (68 percent) in grade 8. And of the 40 districts, two showed math growth in all grades for all four years.

“When we look at urban districts that show gains over time, it is inevitable that they at some point experience corrections. It is extremely rare to see five years of upward growth along a straight line. In other words, Baltimore with this year’s MSA results is in very good company with other major cities that are producing long-term improvements,” said Council of Great City Schools Executive Director Michael Casserly.

**Getting Students on a Growth Track**

When reviewed at the grade level, City Schools’ 2011 MSA results and MSA growth trends over time show clearly that middle school math is the district’s weakest link. While the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades show the smallest drops in math of

all grades that took the MSA this year, and the largest gains in math over time, middle-grade students continue to achieve at lower levels than elementary-grade students.

According to district officials, numerous initiatives currently underway in the district will have a significant and positive impact on all teaching and learning moving forward. Starting this summer, as part of its implementation of the new labor contracts, City Schools will implement standards and evaluative tools for teachers and principals to measure the effectiveness of instruction and school leadership. The district's new teacher contract has incentives built in for teachers to grow professionally and financially by improving their instructional practice and student outcomes. And learning throughout the district will be enhanced by the district's adoption of content-rich and project-based Common Core State Standards, starting this coming school year.

To strengthen teaching and learning in middle-school math in particular, City Schools is also taking several steps. Starting next week, the district will provide more than 3,000 middle school students with summer learning opportunities to master math skills and to make math connections through project-based learning that includes designing remote control cars; building a soap box car; designing robots to complete a specific task; and using math in fine arts, fitness and sports activities.

Other math improvement strategies City Schools will implement during the coming 2011-12 school year include providing students in grades 5 and 8 with extended learning time throughout the school year so that they are able to focus on improving their math skills; creating new learning opportunities for students that allow them to develop math skills through extracurricular activities such as athletics and the arts; and providing intensive support to schools—and math teachers in particular—whose students are struggling in math.

“We know our middle-grades math students and teachers need a whole lot of additional support, a reality this year's MSA results make undeniably clear. We also know we need to make some immediate changes in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, a critical transition year when it comes to math,” said Dr. Sonja Brookins-Santelises, City Schools Chief Academic Officer. “These initial middle-school and math-specific interventions are a strong first step in that direction. When we start transitioning this coming year to the Common Core Standards and start to guide and support teachers and principals with clear standards and evaluative tools, the leap will be that much greater. We are now positioned in City Schools to see real change at the classroom level.”

“I've said it so many times—the work of transforming City Schools and delivering all 84,000 of our students the excellent education they deserve is long and hard. And let there be no mistake, we are in this business of creating great schools for the long haul. We have laid important groundwork for growth. Our students have shown us what they are capable of. Now we must settle in and be all about what is happening in our classrooms day in and day out,” said Dr. Alonso. “The nature of teaching and learning has to change in our schools, so that our kids are fully challenged, engaged and enriched. It is new work that needs to take us into new places of innovation in every classroom and for every student. And we must engage in this work not with the same urgency of four years ago, but with much, much more. This is a time for all of us to renew and strengthen our commitment to our kids, and to live it with absolute focus and integrity. Collectively, we do that, and we can go nowhere but up. I look forward to the 2012 MSA. The progress over time is undeniable and real, and it will continue. We vouch for that.”