

## St. Mary's trumpets school testing gains

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For a second consecutive year, St. Mary's County Public Schools' (SMCPS) students made significant gains on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA).

The results of the 2007 MSA, released today by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), confirm that SMCPS students are experiencing academic success.

"We are doing some very exciting and focused work in the St. Mary's County Public Schools and this has translated into very positive results for our students," said Dr. Michael J. Martirano, superintendent of schools. "We are addressing our challenges and we are implementing programs to address our concerns and to enhance the learning environment for all children. These test scores are testimony to the hard work on the part of our students, the support of our parents and the outstanding work of our entire staff."

The MSA exams are given to third through eighth grade students in reading and mathematics. The data is used to meet the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. Under NCLB goals, all students must score at proficient levels on state tests by 2014.

The elimination of the achievement gap is one of the major priorities for the school district as outlined in the Superintendent's Fifteen Point Plan of Priorities.

"Although academic gaps remain between our student groups, I am certainly pleased to see that we are making significant progress in our efforts to narrow and ultimately eliminate these gaps. We have put interventions in place to meet the individual instructional and learning needs of students who are not performing to the level of proficiency. When looking at student achievement, no longer is it acceptable to simply look at the aggregate scores and make the judgment that we are successful. Instead, we must look deeply at how all of our students are achieving," said Dr. Martirano.

Overall, we have continued to close the achievement gap between our African American, Special Education, and Economically Disadvantaged student groups with our White student group in both reading and mathematics. In addition to significantly narrowing the achievement gap between these groups and our White student group, we have also experienced double digit gains in several of the tested grade levels for all three of these student groups for the second consecutive year.

"Student improvement on the MSA can be attributed to many efforts in the school system," said Ms. Linda Dudderar, chief academic officer. "None of this would be possible without focus, top notch leaders, and the outstanding highly qualified workforce in our school system. The implementation of the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) with fidelity is proving to be very successful. The utilization of the data warehouse and our quarterly benchmark and formative assessment data are providing immediate instructional feedback for our students, teachers and principals. The renewed focus on targeted professional development is providing the training we need for our teachers and principals to better meet the differing needs of our children. Our cultural proficiency work has allowed us to focus on the achievement gap and on children who need additional support."

"At the middle school level, we have made overall progress in grades six and eight. We have a few challenges in grade seven," stated Dr. Martirano. "Through the work of the Middle School Task Force, I am pleased to say that we have dedicated resources in our operating budget to address these concerns. We are truthfully confronting our challenges to ensure that every child obtains a quality e