

August 22, 2023

On Tuesday, August 22, 2023, Board President Clarence Crawford convened the State Board's monthly meeting and was joined by Vice President Joshua Michael, Shawn Bartley, Chuen-Chin Bianca Chang, Susan Getty, Monica Goldson, Nick Greer, Irma Johnson, Joan Mele-McCarthy, Rachel McCusker, Samir Paul, Warner Sumpter, Holly Wilcox, and student member Abisola Ayoola from Howard County.

[Link to August 22, 2023 meeting agenda, materials, and video.](#)

Public Comments

Public comments were delivered by:

- Sharon Saroff, a special education consultant and advocate, urged the state to identify and encourage adoption of best practices in special education.
- A student representing Maryland Students Against Drugs spoke in favor of educating all students, beginning in middle school, about the use of NARCAN for emergency responses to drug overdoses.
- Cheryl Bost, president of the Maryland State Education Association, offered remarks on the pending state regulations governing educator licensure and teacher preparation programs in Maryland higher education institutions. She requested specific technical changes and clearer alignment with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.
- Dr. Vermelle Greene, former member of the State Board, spoke in opposition to the State Board's adopted framework on health and human sexuality education.
- Laura Stewart, representing Free State PTA, presented the association's recently adopted resolution supporting the use and availability of inclusive books in schools, including school libraries and as instructional materials.
- Valerie Davis, representing the Black coalition for excellence in education, called for an accelerated goal of 10% growth in black student competency in reading and math, the adoption of competency standards in science and technology, and the State Board's support for the transition to full-time local boards of education in light of the scope of their budgets and responsibilities.
- A former Montgomery County student and dual language educator urged the adoption of a curriculum and investments in professional development that foster a culture of biliteracy and dual language learning, one that is inclusive of students who are fluent in Spanish and excluded from Spanish immersion programs.
- A Carroll County parent voiced her objections to recent actions by the Carroll County Superintendent and Board of Education to remove books as instructional materials and from the shelves of school libraries at the request of Moms for Liberty.

At the conclusion of public comments, State Board member Rachel McCusker made a statement in appreciation and support of the work of Maryland’s educators and students at the opening of the 2023-2024 school year. Board President Clarence Crawford noted that members of the Board will be visiting schools as they reopen in the coming weeks.

Consent Agenda

The Board approved the consent agenda including prior meeting minutes, personnel actions, and budget adjustments.

Stakeholder Engagement: Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM)

Superintendent Choudhury introduced Dr. Jeff Lawson, Superintendent of Cecil County Public Schools and President of PSSAM, who described the association’s work on updating its strategic plan to provide more robust services to superintendents, with enhanced focus on advocacy, providing technical assistance on implementing the Blueprint, and continuing to offer the Superintendent’s Academy which is now in its second year.

Dr. Lawson reviewed PSSAM’s legislative priorities including support for legislation to address the implementation and refinement of the Blueprint’s mandated career ladders, and support for the adoption of a neighborhood indicator of poverty method for more targeted school funding. He stressed that PSSAM is fully supportive of the intent of the Blueprint law and educational programs but that no piece of legislation can be perfect in implementing a decade-long set of reforms. In response to a question about local Blueprint implementation, he referred to a recent report by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) that shows that the combined state and local funding in one school system, such as his, may be \$5,000 less on a per pupil basis than in another school system. He also noted that the focus on restricted categorical funding limits available funding for school and system-wide programs to benefit all students. Dr. Lawson called for a review of the Blueprint funding formulas in this context.

Dr. Lawson also shared that Superintendent Choudhury has committed to a standing meeting with the PSSAM executive committee each month and that PSSAM looks forward to this renewed focus on collaboration. He noted PSSAM’s support for Superintendent Choudhury’s “problems of Practice Structure” to identify and prioritize addressing issues such as middle school performance and mathematics performance.

Stakeholder Engagement: Maryland Chamber of Commerce (MDCC) and National Civics Bee Finalists

Whitney Harmel, executive director of the Maryland Chamber Foundation, introduced two students to present their winning Civics Bee essays. She shared that this is the second year of a pilot program launched by the national Chamber and that the program is gaining broad nationwide adoption.

- Tanvi C. lives in Urbana and is an 8th grader from Urbana Middle School in Frederick County. Tanvi’s essay addressed the problem of affordable housing and inequality in educational opportunities, proposing government intervention, helpful programs and

community advocacy for policy changes. Following her presentation, Superintendent Choudhury shared his strong support for alignment of housing policy and education policy.

- Jude R. lives in Timonium and is an 8th grader from Ridgely Middle School in Baltimore County. Jude's essay addresses the issue of physical fighting in schools, and proposes that schools provide students with opportunities to discuss their problems, concerns and well-being anonymously with trained counselors from the school and community. Board President Crawford thanked the Chamber for its leadership and the students for their excellent essays.

Blueprint Implementation Update

Phil Lasser, Executive Director, Office of the State Superintendent, presented on recent legislative recommendations made by the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) in its final comprehensive implementation plan. Mr. Lasser reviewed the status of local and state implementation plans and the Blueprint's five pillars of reforms. He then reviewed the AIB's legislative recommendations contained in the updated state plan.

- The AIB recommends legislation in 2024 to prohibit, until the 2027-2028 school year, MSDE from conditioning Prekindergarten expansion grants on the qualifications of teachers and aides called for in the Blueprint. Mr. Lasser noted that the Blueprint currently requires these standards, therefore requiring a change in law through legislation. Superintendent Choudhury shared that he is concerned by the proposed delay in that it will not resolve the dilemma that by 2027 private providers may not be meeting these standards, resulting in further delay.
- The AIB recommends legislation in 2024 to require MSDE to establish and maintain an educator recruitment, retention, and diversity dashboard on or before 1/1/2025. Another recommendation is to require MSDE in consultation with MHEC to set specific goals on teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention. Superintendent Choudhury shared that he supports this recommendation and that it was unfortunately removed from the teacher shortage legislation before it was enacted in 2023.
- The AIB amended the state implementation plan to require that MSDE's approved curriculum resources be high quality and culturally responsive, and that MSDE should align curriculum standards and teacher training requirements with the science of instruction. Superintendent Choudhury shared that Maryland has historically incentivized the local adoption of curriculum that meets college and career readiness standards, and that the AIB's recommendation is to ensure that all LEAs be required to do so. He distinguished the difference between insisting on the selection of curricula that meet the state standards and local variations in selecting from a variety of resources that have been vetted as meeting these standards.
- The AIB also amended its plan to extend the timeline for MSDE's Special Education Workgroup.

Mr. Lasser then provided an overview and update on the Expert Review Team (ERT) deployment.

ERT Program Overview

- Teams of 6 experts (teachers, school leaders, and other experts) use established protocols to visit schools and review causes of student performance trends, behavioral health services, and Blueprint implementation.
 - The program design, visit protocols, and evaluation rubric were based on best practice research and engagement with stakeholders across Maryland. On-site school visits will occur over two days.
- Expert Review Teams will determine how effectively schools are implementing practices that accelerate learning for all students.
- Schools are chosen based on learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic, overall student proficiency, and achievement gaps between student groups.

2023-2024 School Year ERT Deployment

- On August 10, 2023, the AIB voted to conditionally approve the ERT Deployment Plan submitted on July 1, 2023. MSDE will work with AIB staff to address the remaining questions from the AIB Board.
- MSDE will coordinate with the schools that will receive visits in 2023-2024 and assign all ERT members to schools for fall visits.
- For the 2023-2024 school year, 130 Expert Review Team members from the 140-member Cohort 1 are returning. MSDE will hire approximately 170 new Expert Review Team members for the upcoming school year, for a total of 300 active ERT members on the team.
- ERT school visits will begin in October 2023.

Superintendent Choudhury referred to the complete deployment plan and other materials being provided to the Board and the public. Board President Crawford shared that this status report is the type of monthly update or project management report that the Board will be receiving at each meeting in the future. Board Vice President Michael emphasized the value of focusing on research and evidence-based practices which are being referred to as the science of instruction. He noted that implementing the science of instruction is essential in order to couple meaningful education reforms with the increased funding being provided by the Blueprint.

[Blueprint Implementation Update Presentation](#)

Regulations

The State Board approved the following requested actions on proposed regulations.

[13A.07.08 Incentive Program for Certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards \(Permission to Publish Amendments\)](#)

- Kelly Meadows, Assistant State Superintendent, Educator Certification & Program Approval, presented the proposed regulations including updates as required by the Blueprint. The regulations define the criteria for the selection of public school teachers who are eligible to receive financial aid to pursue National Board Certification based on the policies of the

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and outline the processes associated with the program. Superintendent Choudhury emphasized the alignment of teacher preparation with the science of instruction, particularly in reading and math. Assistant Superintendent Meadows also cross-walked these regulations with the recently published teacher preparation regulations.

Board members asked questions about the costs to teachers for NBC training, and Ms. Meadows outlined the law's assurance that the department is responsible for all costs. Board members also asked about technical assistance for teachers, and Ms. Meadows shared that the regulations govern the financial assistance program, but that there is also a separate and robust technical assistance program. Board Vice President Michaels asked why the regulations appear to be stressing that NBC training reflect the science of reading, and Superintendent Choudhury responded that if NBC is to epitomize high-quality teaching then all NBC certified elementary educators responsible for reading literacy should be provided high-quality, evidence-based training through the NBC program.

2023 State Assessment Results

Superintendent Choudhury introduced the presentation by Chandra Haislet and Matt Duque on the baseline established by student assessment results in the 2022-2023 school year, including results to acknowledge as persistently troubling, and other results to celebrate as gains due to recent initiatives.

Chandra Haislet, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Assessment, Accountability, and Performance Reporting, reviewed the following highlights, noting that English/Language Arts results are the highest since the PARCC assessments were adopted in 2015.

- ELA proficiency rates for grades 3-8 combined and English 10 are the highest since the State transitioned to the PARCC tests in 2015. This trend is consistent across most student groups, including race/ethnicity and gender.
- ELA proficiency in grade 3 increased by 2 percentage points from SY 2021-2022 to 48% in SY 2022-2023, and the grade 3 ELA proficiency rate reached a nine-year high.
- Math proficiency rates for grades 3-8 combined and in Algebra I have improved since SY 2021-2022 but have not yet returned to pre-pandemic performance. This trend is consistent across most student groups, including race/ethnicity and gender.
- Between 16% and 22% of students in ELA and between 11% and 17% of students in math were on the cusp of proficiency, defined as needing, on average, an additional 1-3 correct answers to reach proficiency.
- The percentage of students scoring at the lowest MCAP performance level decreased by 2 to 5 percentage points from SY 2021-2022 to SY 2022-2023 for both ELA and math in grades 3-8 combined, English 10, and Algebra.

Superintendent Choudhury described the demonstrated improvements in teaching and learning in the past two years utilizing high-quality instructional materials and the science of reading, but that the state is far from declaring "mission accomplished." He stressed gains in math proficiency must be accelerated. Board Vice President Michaels noted the persistence of low performance among the cohort of students whose early learning years were during the pandemic. Mr. Choudhury agreed, noting the need to focus first on getting it right the first time for students achieving competency by third grade, but also recognizing the need for interventions in grades 4 and 5 before students move beyond the elementary school level. He stated that when school leaders and

educators care, use high-quality resources, and are adequately funded, then real improvements in student performance are proven to be possible.

Assistant Superintendent Haislet then required math results and disaggregated performance results for all student groups, including race/ethnicity, gender, income, and disability. Board members engaged in a lengthy discussion of the role of the testing format and availability of accommodations to assist English Learners and students with disabilities. Ms. Haislet responded by describing that the accommodations are provided based on local decisions and procedures. Superintendent Choudhury responded by emphasizing that other states are far outperforming Maryland in English Learner performance on state assessments due to a variety of shortcomings including lack of investment in bilingual staff, instructional programs with low expectations and not aligned with the state assessments, and the exclusion of EL students from language immersion programs. Mr. Choudhury also shared his belief that there is lingering confusion among elementary teachers regarding how to teach math since the adoption of the Common Core.

Matt Duque, Director of the Office of Planning and Program Evaluation, reviewed the numbers of students on the cusp of proficiency based on being 10 points or less below the proficiency threshold in reading and math.

Ms. Haislet then reviewed the results of science assessments and the Next Generation Science Standards reflected in the state assessment since 2013. She described NGSS as incorporating a three-dimensional approach to science instruction and assessment, including science and engineering practices, disciplinary core ideas, and crosscutting concepts.

- Statewide, the percentage of students scoring proficient on the grade 5 science test was 34.5% for SY 2022-2023. LEAs vary from a low of 11.7% to a high of 54.1% in proficiency percentage. Twenty-two LEAs improved their performance when comparing SY 2021-2022 to SY 2022-2023.
- Statewide, the percentage of students scoring proficient on the grade 8 science test was 26.4% for SY 2022-2023. LEAs vary from a low of 8.7% to a high of 42.0% in proficiency percentage. Twenty-three LEAs experienced a decrease when comparing SY 2021-2022 to SY 2022-2023 results.

Board member McCusker asked why the grade 8 assessment is inclusive of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade standards. Superintendent Choudhury responded that this assessment policy was adopted before he arrived and is problematic for teachers and students. Board member Greer noted that he is familiar with and supportive of the NGSS assessment and the braided and cumulative approach being discussed, adding that while it is more difficult to teach and test it most accurately reflects how science and scientific reasoning work.

The Board concluded the discussion of assessment results by focusing on the need to be more transparent regarding the performance of all students while continuing to be mindful of student data privacy.

- [Presentation on 2023 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science Results](#)

MSDE Grantmaking Process Updates

Justin Dayhoff, Assistant State Superintendent, Financial Planning, Operations, & Strategy, provided a comprehensive overview of MSDE's grant management process. He described how MSDE is aligning its grant programs to the strategic plan and moving towards an outcome-based

and customer support mindset, in contrast to the prior compliance-focused approach. He noted that MSDE's approach to grant management has historically been largely compliance driven, with various challenges including a lack of streamlined processes, and inconsistencies in Request for Proposals (RFPs) and application requirements. Recently, MSDE has undertaken comprehensive efforts to innovate and improve this approach.

Mr. Dayhoff described distinctions between federal grants, state grants including formula grants, competitive and noncompetitive grants, and restricted and unrestricted grants.

Board member Susan Getty inquired about the problems in the past year with the Maryland Family Network grants, and Mr. Dayhoff responded that communication issues for which he and the department were responsible have been addressed. Superintendent Choudhury responded by emphasizing how important these grants are and what a critical partner MFN is in implementing the Blueprint's expansion of Prekindergarten.

[MSDE's Grantmaking Presentation](#)

College and Career Readiness Standard Setting

Superintendent Choudhury offered concluding remarks to the Board requesting their attention to the need to start now to prepare to adopt College and Career Readiness standards before the end of the year. He advised that doing so no later than the December meeting, and being inclusive of all stakeholders, will involve the Board's attention at each of its meetings in September, October, and December. He also suggested they may want to schedule a special meeting in November, the month the Board historically skips.

Board Opinions

The State Board issued legal opinions for the following cases:

- *I.A. v. Montgomery County Board of Education*, affirming the local board's denial of a student's school reassignment request.
- *F.W. v. Baltimore County Board of Education*, finding that the school system illegally assigned the student to an eLearning program without conducting an individualized determination as to whether the student presents and imminent threat of serious harm, and ordering the school system to provide a report on its hearing and determination by October 15, 2023.
- *Debra Evans v. Prince George's County Board of Education*, dismissing the appeal for lack of ripeness.
- *Thomas Gleason v. St. Mary's County Board of Education*, dismissing the appeal for untimeliness.
- *Zaharah Valentine v. Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners*, dismissing the request for reconsideration for untimeliness.