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**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education  
**FROM:** Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*  
**DATE:** May 27-28, 2009  
**SUBJECT:** Standard Setting for Mod-MSA, Grades 6-8

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**PURPOSE:**

To request State Board approval for recommended standards for the Mod-MSA assessments for grades 6-8 in reading and mathematics, which were administered in Maryland in spring 2009 for the first time. The assessments are alternative tests administered under the federal No Child Left Behind law, used with approximately two percent of students, who are students with disabilities meeting specific federally prescribed criteria. The standards must be ready to use in calculating 2009 AYP by mid June 2009.

**BACKGROUND:**

Federal requirements stipulate that each state establish performance standards for their assessments to gauge performance of students, schools, school systems and the state. These standards reflect high academic expectations that all students in all subgroups are expected to achieve. The states are mandated to report student performance on state assessments classified by three performance levels – basic, proficient, and advanced. Adopting student performance levels for Maryland’s new Mod-MSA is necessary to continuing our progress in meeting Maryland’s accountability requirements, and the State’s ability to maintain compliance with federal and state laws. The State will also be able to communicate to educators and the public about the performance and progress of all students and schools.

The Mod-MSA assessments were administered in spring 2009 in most Maryland schools as an on-line assessment using a less complex assessment design. The items are designed consistent with federal guidelines to maintain the same grade level content expectations of students. However, test questions are written to reduce distractors that might impede a student’s ability to recognize and select correct responses to demonstrate their knowledge of the content. Federal guidelines anticipate that the eligible students will have met detailed criteria, which include extensive interventions over time and documented difficulty in achieving expectations. Approximately two percent of students nationally, according to federal guidelines, may participate in the assessment and be included each state’s accountability status.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

*No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) requires that all students be assessed using a measure that is appropriate for them. For many years, Maryland has had alternative assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are receiving services in special education. These are students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) developed by a team including teachers, other school staff and the student's parent or guardian. The team determines which assessment (the regular test or one of the alternative assessments) is appropriate for each student. As new options for assessments are added to those required for NCLB, Maryland must develop those assessments to meet the needs of specific students in the special education subgroup. This group representing about 2% of students with IEPs was assessed last year with the Mod-HSAs. Maryland is continuing to phase in assessments for this defined group of students by implementing Mod-MSAs in middle school (Grades 6, 7, and 8) reading and mathematics in 2009. Maryland expects to introduce Mod-MSA assessments for Grades 3, 4 and 5 in 2010.

The standard setting process was completed just prior to the May State Board Meeting during the week of May 18. Maryland, like most states, uses a carefully managed standard setting process that incorporates prescribed procedure that was described in detail to the Board last August. Though there are some variations in the standard setting procedures, pending the assessment design, certain procedures can be described generically. Any nuances made necessary because of the nature of these particular assessments or how the process unfolds will be described in detail during the report to the Board.

Performance standards must be adopted by the State Board of Education at this time so that Maryland can meet the expectations of the school systems and federal law in a timely fashion. The standards recommended are the result of a deliberative and inclusive process and establish the means by which the State will measure the performance of specific students with disabilities in all school systems.

## **ACTION:**

The Maryland State Board of Education is requested to approve the recommended standards for Mod-MSA assessments in grades 6, 7, and 8 in reading and mathematics.