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TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*
DATE: August 26, 2008
SUBJECT: Standard Setting for Alternative Maryland School Assessments

PURPOSE:

To request State Board approval for recommended standards for the Alt-MSA assessments, which are administered annually in Maryland as part of requirements specified in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. The Alt-MSA is an alternative assessment used for students with significant cognitive disabilities, approximately one percent of students.

BACKGROUND:

The standard setting process used by Maryland fulfills the federal requirements for all assessments and school accountability systems under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. The assessments have been administered since 2003, but the current review of the standards and assessments have resulted in newly recommended standards. The standards must be ready for federal Peer Review by early fall 2008.

The states are mandated to report student performance on state assessments classified by three performance levels – basic, proficient, and advanced. Revisiting the student performance levels for Maryland’s Alt-MSA assessments is necessary to assuring the currency and accuracy of the standards for our assessment program, and assures our ability to maintain compliance with federal and state laws.

The Alt-MSA assessments were first administered in spring 2003 in most Maryland schools as an individually administered assessment for which teachers are fully trained. The items are designed according to federal guidelines to assure appropriate measurement of the performance for this group of students with severe cognitive disabilities. 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 specific students 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 an alternative assessment such as the Alt-MSA) is appropriate for each student. As assessments are reviewed by MSDE for NCLB, Maryland must submit revised standards to USDE for Peer Review. Both of the assessment programs requiring standard setting this summer are exclusively for students with disabilities.

The standard setting process was completed just prior to the August State Board Meeting during the week of August 18. Though there are some variations in the standard setting procedures for the Alt-MSA assessment, the design generally follows the design used with the Mod-HSA and other Maryland assessment described with the background provided for the Mod-HSA standard setting State Board item.

The revised 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 updates the measure by which the schools and the State will measure the performance of the specific students with disabilities who participate in the assessment.

ACTION:

The Maryland State Board of Education is requested to approve the recommended standards for Alt-MSA assessments as submitted.