

NEW IDEAS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MARYLAND

Executive Summary

Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown believe that, to fulfill Maryland's potential, we must return to building a world-class public education system that ensures opportunity for all Maryland children.

In 1999, the Maryland General Assembly established the *Commission on Education Finance, Equity, and Excellence* to study the State of Maryland's school financing system. Commonly known as the "Thornton Commission" after its chairman Dr. Alvin Thornton, the commission's recommendations served as a framework for "The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act" enacted by the Maryland General Assembly in 2002. The law addressed the failures of jurisdictions statewide to meet standards for education performance and the disparities in educational quality across jurisdictions that resulted from differences in local funding for public education. The law obligated the state to increase funding for public education to help local school districts provide an adequate education that meets standards.

While Governor Ehrlich refused to sign and ultimately has not fully funded the commission's recommendations, the Thornton effort won widespread support from parents, teachers, and students across the state. Marylanders from urban, rural, and suburban communities from every political persuasion have demonstrated a capacity to reach a broad progressive consensus on issues that address the most important role of State government and that which is most important to Maryland's future: providing a world-class education for our children. To do so, Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown propose:

- ***Making the necessary investments in school construction to enable local jurisdictions' priorities such as reducing class size, breaking up larger schools, and modernizing facilities;***
- ***Recruiting strong principals to serve in Maryland's most challenged schools; and***
- ***Adopting effective school-wide intervention strategies to improve student discipline.***

Maryland can and must do better.

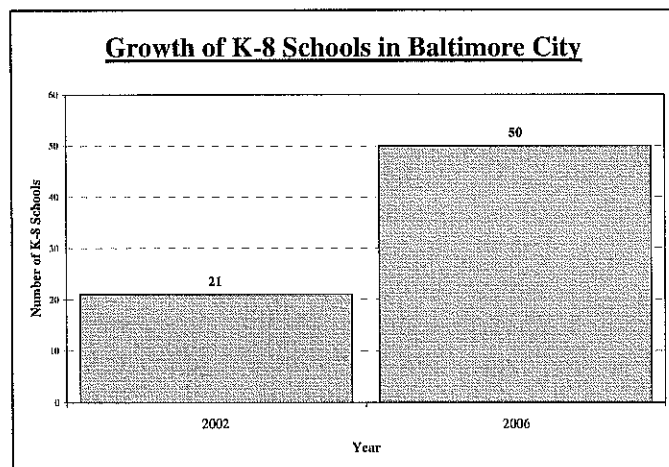
Making Needed and Targeted Investments in Public School Construction

In December 2005, just a day after announcing the official formation of their ticket, Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown declared their commitment to making the necessary investments in public school construction with the release of a comprehensive plan to accept the recommendations of the Kopp Commission, a blue-ribbon task force chaired by State Treasurer Nancy Kopp, that provided an unprecedented statewide assessment of the condition of Maryland's public schools. (See http://omalley.3cdn.net/c4cf0a5a8893282eee_1mm6ivc10.pdf for the full plan.) Since the release of this plan and with the prodding of the Maryland General Assembly, Governor Ehrlich discovered a newfound interest in public school construction and the State's FY2007 budget was the first since the release of the Kopp Commission's recommendations to meet the minimum required threshold of \$250 million. However, Governor Ehrlich's election year conversion cannot mask the fact that his FY2005 and FY2006 budgets fell over \$200 million short of meeting the minimum \$250 million per year threshold.

Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will work with local jurisdictions to leverage investments in public school construction to help accomplish priorities such as relieving overcrowding and providing modern, safe and clean learning environments for our children, and break up Maryland's largest public schools to create smaller more effective learning environments.

Breaking Up Large Schools. Across the nation and in Maryland, the performance of students in middle and high schools has stagnated, in part because the schools have become so large that school leaders cannot manage them effectively. Breaking up large middle and high schools can make the extremely difficult job of school principal more possible. Baltimore City is already a leader in the State on this critical issue. Baltimore City has broken up many of its large middle schools by converting elementary schools to K - 8 schools. Starting next year, Baltimore City will have 50 K - 8 schools, up from 21 in 2002.¹ Baltimore City has already dismantled many of its large high schools by creating new smaller, stand alone high schools and establishing sets of smaller schools within buildings that previously housed one large high school. Many of these smaller high schools have established effective partnerships with supporting organizations.

Governor Ehrlich has severely underfunded school construction needs in Maryland, and he has done nothing to help school districts break up large schools. There are modest one-time costs associated with making elementary schools appropriate for older students, establishing stand-alone smaller schools and converting a large school building into several schools-within-a-school.



¹ Liz Bowie, "School reform set; \$21 million effort targets middle grades in city; broader plan to come," *The Baltimore Sun* (May 5, 2006); www.mdreportcard.org

Strengthening School Leadership

Study after study confirms that strong principals are critical for successful schools and that strong principals are those that have the time and skill to become the instructional leaders of their schools. Yet, our most challenging schools have our least experienced principals who leave as soon as they get a chance. Principals are buried under a mountain of paperwork and details so that they have little time to work directly with teachers on instruction. And they are put in charge of monstrosly large schools that are failing to provide effective, personalized education and lack the resources to help students who are falling behind.

Maryland is facing a crisis. One third of school principals are eligible to retire within a few years.² More than 200 schools are in need of significant improvement, according to state and federal standards. Maryland students from low-income families³ are failing national tests at record rates, with only 12 percent of 8th graders scoring proficient on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, down from 16 percent in 2002.⁴ The majority of school districts in Maryland have these low performing schools and these academically troubled students. Yet Governor Ehrlich has made no serious effort to address this looming problem.

Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown are committed to strengthening school leadership so that good principals come and stay in challenging schools, are able to focus on instruction, oversee reasonably sized schools, and have access to the extra resources at-risk students need to achieve.

Recruiting Strong Principals to Serve in Maryland's Most Challenged Schools. Principals in challenging schools face considerable extra responsibilities, including "high-poverty students, low test scores, high staff turnover, and unusually large number of teachers who are inexperienced."⁵ Yet, these principals receive no extra pay. Openings in high performing schools are the most desirable, and the most experienced principals compete to go to these schools. Thus, the schools in most need of the strongest, most stable leadership instead have the least experienced principals and the highest leadership turnover. This is completely counterintuitive. A business CEO would not send a new manager to a store having serious performance problems; instead, the CEO would send someone with a proven track record at turning around failing stores, a turn around expert.



With a modest investment, Maryland can become a national leader in placing the strongest principals where they are most needed. By offering significant signing bonuses, paid out of over four years, Maryland can recruit and keep principals with the strongest track records at turning

² WBAL.com, "Principals Learn to Work Together For Success" (July 27, 2006).

³ As indicated by eligibility for free/reduced price school lunch.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2005/2006452MD8.pdf>; <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/inain2002/2003521.pdf>

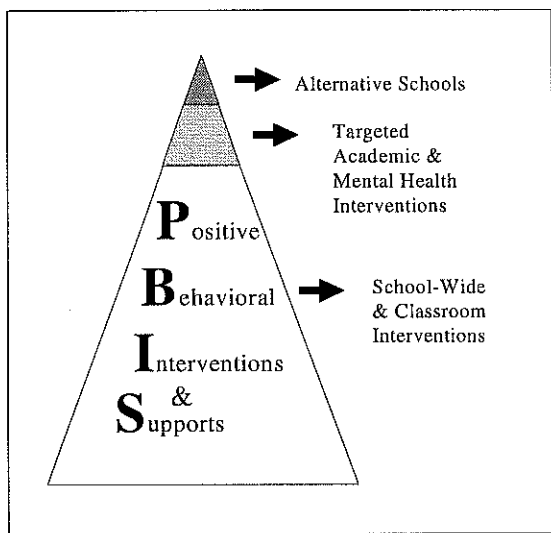
⁵ Larry Lashway, *Finding Leaders for Hard-to-Staff Schools*, ERIC Digest 173 (December 2003).

around lower performing schools. Good principals will flock to Maryland and these incentives will increase Maryland's best principals to consider these challenging assignments.

Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown believe that Turn Around Principals should be recruited for Maryland's lowest performing schools by offering \$200,000 signing bonuses, paid out over four years⁶ representing perhaps the single best investment Maryland can make to ensure that the dollars taxpayers are spending on education are yielding the best results possible.⁷

The Turn Around Principals program will offer the largest signing bonuses in the nation. Half-hearted measures will not work. The research shows that financial incentives can work only if they are large enough to matter, restricted to principals working in challenging schools, target experienced principals, are spread out over four years, and are repaid if the principal fails to stay for the full four years.⁸ Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will work the Maryland General Assembly, the Maryland State Department of Education and Board of Education to develop criteria for the program ensuring these bonuses are only paid to the most qualified and proven principals, do not have unintended consequences for pension costs, and balance the needs of providing the most attractive incentives without risking a disruptive shuffling of Maryland's existing principals. Within these general guidelines, schools districts will have the freedom to choose which schools to participate and which principals to hire.

Improving Student Discipline: Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)



Maryland's schools are facing an epidemic of disruptive behavior by students. One in twelve students are suspended every year, and tens of thousands of students are suspended multiple times in a school year.⁹ Yet, these suspended students return to school even more disruptive. Proven programs exist for significantly reducing student misbehavior.

Bob Ehrlich has let schools avoid the research and continue with ineffective strategies. While the high rate of suspensions remains unabated in rest of Maryland, Baltimore City has seen a 26 percent drop over the past three years.¹⁰

⁶ In 2005, 234 schools in Maryland failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress, one measure of poor performance.

⁷ While there are more than 200 Maryland schools that could be eligible for TAP, it is not envisioned that local systems would have all their eligible schools participate. If 150 TAP principals were hired through the effort, the annualized cost would be \$7.5 million.

⁸ Cynthia Prince, *Higher Pay in Hard-to-Staff Schools: The Case for Financial Incentives*, American Association of School Administrators (June 2002).

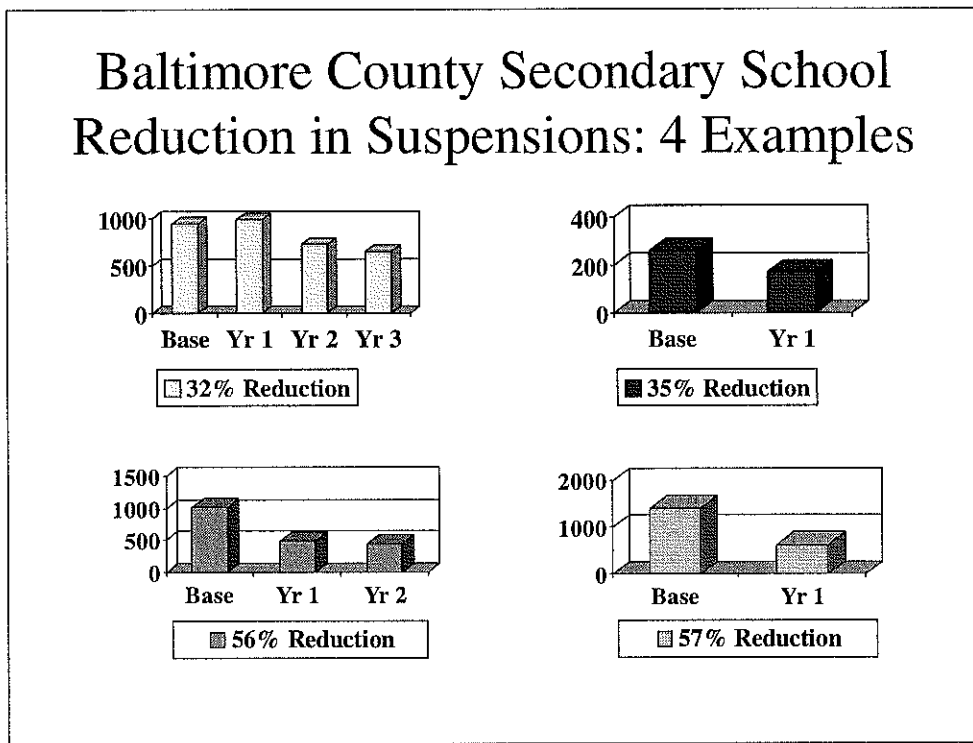
⁹ Maryland State Department of Education, <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/A4F036D6-551E-496A-951B-99B5476A463A/8110/susp05.pdf>; <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/A4F036D6-551E-496A-951B-99B5476A463A/8110/susp05.pdf>

¹⁰ Maryland State Department of Education, <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/6959BE83-6FEA-4D30-A298-2749B7CF54EF/4750/susp03.pdf>;

With more effective gubernatorial leadership, successful strategies to deal with disruptive students can become the norm in Maryland, instead of the exception. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will pursue a research-based three-pronged strategy that will prevent disruptive behavior, treat it as soon as it occurs and provide long-term alternatives for chronically disruptive students. This strategy has proven effective in Baltimore City and across the country.

With proper school-wide and classroom interventions, more than 80 percent of students can learn to behave properly.¹¹ Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports is a proven, proactive approach to discipline which focuses on teaching and supporting positive behavior in the entire student body.

PBIS results in decreased misbehavior, an increase in positive social skills, an increase in the overall academic achievement, and an increase in classroom instruction time. Germantown Elementary in Anne Arundel County, for example, experienced a 75 percent drop in suspensions. Deep Creek Middle School in Baltimore County reduced office referrals by 42 percent in the first year of implementation.¹² Suspensions have dropped dramatically in Baltimore County middle and high schools after implementing PBIS.¹³



<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/A4F036D6-551E-496A-951B-99B5476A463A/8110/susp05.pdf>

¹¹ PBIS Home, <http://www.pbis.org/primaryprevention.htm#PrimaryPrevention>

¹² PBIS Maryland, *Spring Newsletter* (2005)

¹³ Baltimore County Public Schools, "Three-Tiered Model for Prevention and Intervention for Behavioral Difficulties" (March 2006).

Not only is PBIS low cost to implement, it actually *saves* schools money by avoiding the staff time spent handling office referrals and suspensions. A rigorous study found that a school can save \$10,000 annually by its second year of implementation.¹⁴

Schools in Baltimore City and the rest of Maryland are beginning to use the PBIS approach. It is in 20 percent of schools in Maryland, including 30 schools in Baltimore City. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will promote the rapid statewide adoption of PBIS and other equally proven prevention programs.¹⁵ To promote the further use of PBIS statewide, an O'Malley/Brown Administration will increase the Maryland State Department of Education's capacity to offer technical assistance and training to school systems interested in expanding the use of PBIS.

Adopting effective school-wide intervention strategies. PBIS has seven major school-wide components:

1. An agreed upon and common approach to discipline
2. A positive statement of purpose
3. A small number of positively stated expectations for all students and staff
4. Procedures for teaching these expectations to students
5. A continuum of procedures for encouraging displays and maintenance of these expectations
6. A continuum of procedures for discouraging displays of rule-violating behavior
7. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation the effectiveness of the discipline system on a regular and frequent basis.

Enhancing classroom management. PBIS also focuses at the classroom level. Experienced, effective teachers have a multitude of tools to reduce student misbehavior. Unfortunately, many teachers are never helped to develop these skills. Through intensive coaching and professional development, all teachers in Maryland can learn the most effective classroom management strategies, including:

1. Classroom-wide positive expectations taught & encouraged
2. Teaching classroom routines & cues taught & encouraged
3. Ratio of 6-8 positive to 1 negative adult-student interaction
4. Active supervision
5. Redirections for minor, infrequent behavior errors
6. Frequent pre-corrections for chronic errors
7. Effective academic instruction & curriculum.

Utilizing data tracking to rapidly identify students most in need. PBIS makes heavy use of data to track office referrals and suspensions so that schools can quickly identify the types of behaviors that are generating the greatest difficulty and the students who need more intensive treatments.

¹⁴Terrance Scott & Susan Barrett, "Using Staff and Student Time Engaged in Disciplinary Procedures to Evaluate the Impact of School-Wide PBS," *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* (Winter 2004).

¹⁵Lynn Anderson, "Program helps city kids learn to be good sports," *The Baltimore Sun* (May 3, 2006).