

See below for a new report on schools in Maryland undergoing restructuring from the Center on Education Policy. The embargoed report, *Building on State Reform: Maryland School Restructuring*, is available by contacting Albert Lang.



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## **Maryland Schools Facing No Child Left Behind's Toughest Sanctions Forgo More Dramatic Steps in Favor of "Turnaround Specialists"**

### **Report Finds that Restructuring Efforts are Similar to State's General Improvement Strategies**

WASHINGTON – September 20, 2006 – While school restructuring – the No Child Left Behind Act's ultimate sanction for persistently low-performing schools – allows for radical interventions such as state takeover and reopening as a charter school, the vast majority of Maryland's schools in restructuring have seized upon a single, less dramatic reform option, according to a report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy.

In school year 2005-06, 73 percent of Maryland's schools in restructuring (46 schools) selected the alternative governance option of employing a full or part time "turnaround specialist" who is expected to work in concert with the principal and school improvement team to impact school achievement. In addition, 10 schools in Baltimore City selected another governance strategy aimed at breaking large urban high schools into smaller learning communities.

And while the report warns that it is too early to determine whether Maryland's restructuring efforts are effective, the broad use of a single reform strategy contrasts with that of schools in restructuring in California, a state studied by CEP, that has seen a much wider array of school improvement options selected for restructuring schools.

The report, *Building on State Reform: Maryland School Restructuring*, summarizes the state's strategy in dealing with 79 mostly urban schools in Maryland – more than half in Baltimore City – that have missed Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward state achievement targets for five or more consecutive years, placing them in restructuring and subjecting them to a variety of major school-wide reform strategies. The report also highlights several schools in restructuring or planning for restructuring in Prince George's County Public Schools, Baltimore County Public Schools, and Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

While most of Maryland's schools in restructuring appear to favor less dramatic steps to change the operations of chronically low-performing schools, state officials indicate that aside from

generating more attention and funding, restructuring efforts under No Child Left Behind are not the “primary agent for change” for Maryland’s struggling schools.

According to the study, state officials report that resources from the state’s School Improvement Grants provide the “transformative power” in improvement efforts, and that NCLB-driven strategies employed by restructuring schools to raise achievement are similar to those employed in all Maryland schools in improvement.

This may be due to the fact that the state has a long history of accountability-driven improvement efforts, having begun calculating AYP based on data collected prior to NCLB to meet the goals of the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994. Because the state began tracking AYP so early, Maryland, along with California and Michigan, is one of the first states to see a significant number of schools enter the planning and implementation stages of restructuring based on their 2004-05 Maryland School Assessment (MSA) test scores.

“Maryland is an interesting example of a state with its own pre-existing school improvement process that had to reconcile that process with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act,” said Jack Jennings, president of CEP.

The report also noted that while schools and school personnel consider the additional resources they receive during planning for or implementing school restructuring important to their improvement efforts, schools lose many of the resources soon after exiting improvement status, potentially creating a revolving door of sorts for struggling schools.

According to the report, only three Maryland school districts had schools in NCLB restructuring planning or implementation in 2005-06, including Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore County Public Schools, and Prince George’s County Public Schools. The Baltimore City Public School District has the largest share of this group, with 51 elementary or middle schools and 14 high schools. Prince George’s County has 13 elementary or middle schools in restructuring planning or implementation, and Baltimore County has one school in restructuring planning. In 2004-05, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools had one school in restructuring planning, but did not have to implement the plan after exiting improvement status the same year.

### **Previously Released Restructuring Reports**

#### **California (Released February 2006)**

*Wrestling the Devil in the Details: An Early Look at Restructuring in California*  
<http://www.cep-dc.org/improvingpublicschools/WrestlingDetails.pdf>

#### **Michigan (Released November 2005)**

*Hope But No Miracle Cures: Michigan’s Early Restructuring Lessons*  
<http://www.cep-dc.org/fededprograms/michiganNov2005/HopebutNoMiracleCure.pdf>

*Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 1995, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.*

The report, along with additional information on CEP, its publications and its work,
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is available on the web at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

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