



Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD

TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*
DATE: August 26, 2008
SUBJECT: Standard Setting Overview

PURPOSE:

To provide State Board members with an overview of the standard setting process used in Maryland for nearly two decades for determining the performance standards associated with tests in the State's assessment program. The standard setting process used by Maryland follows nationally accepted protocols and fulfills the federal requirements for all State assessment and school accountability systems under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. The standards established by Maryland are subsequently submitted to USDE for federal Peer Review.

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 assessments 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.

Maryland conducted standard setting processes during the Summer of 2008 on new modified high school assessments introduced in Spring 2008, on the new alternative science assessments, and on revised performance standards for existing alternative assessments in reading and mathematics. Both sets of assessments are associated with No Child Left Behind requirements and are designed for students with special needs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Maryland, like most states, uses a carefully managed standard setting process that incorporates prescribed procedure. Though there are some variations in the standard setting procedures, they can be described generically. Any nuances made necessary because of the nature of any particular assessments or how the process unfolds will be described in detail during the report to the Board.



The process used in Maryland has resulted in a long history of successful standard setting. The methodology has a wide national acceptance that has been approved and validated by Maryland's National Psychometric Council as well as by national peer reviewers for the United States Department of Education (USDE). It is a careful and well-planned process involving content experts as well as stakeholders from within the education community and external to the education community. The process for each standard setting is conducted by a contractor according to MSDE specifications that is reviewed and approved by the National Psychometric Council prior to implementation and validated after implementation. The contractor working with MSDE this summer is Pearson. Ultimately, all state procedures for standard setting and results are subjected to scrutiny by the United States Department of Education. If procedures do not meet federal requirements, a state's accountability system could be disapproved.

Standard Setting Overview. The standard setting process involves five steps, each involving a different group of experts and stakeholders. Each group makes recommendations which are relayed to the next group. All groups clearly understand that they are making recommendations that will finally be acted upon by the Maryland State Board of Education.

Content reviewers. The first step involves the input of content experts specific to the grade levels assessed representing many areas of the State. These are groups of teachers and some local central office staff with expertise in the content area and a strong familiarity with the Voluntary State Curriculum, as well as the specific students assessed by the test. They receive training on the standard setting process, and then begin activities to familiarize themselves with the specific content and grade level assessment with which they are working, samples of student responses, the proficiency level descriptors for student performance and other information germane to their task. Once they are thoroughly prepared, they begin the Bookmarking Standard Setting Procedure.

This procedure is used throughout the nation in establishing standards in other state level and commercially produced assessment programs. The procedure requires the experts to work individually and then in discussion groups to come to an agreement on the lowest performance that can be defined as *proficient*, and then the lowest performance that can be considered *advanced*. They complete two rounds of standard setting decisions and discussions, and then individually determine their own final recommendation. The median of the groups' final recommendations becomes the cut score (standard) that is forwarded to the next group.

Psychometric Review. The integrity with which the process is conducted is of paramount importance. The next step is a thorough review by Maryland's National Psychometric Council, an independent nationally recognized panel of testing experts, of the process followed. Their job is to determine that the standard setting process was a valid one. They also provide guidance that assists in the next steps of the process to ensure that any adjustments made by future groups to the content team recommendations are appropriate. Maryland's National Psychometric Council guards carefully the quality of the process by assuring that all steps of the process are properly done. However, it is not the role of the council to change the recommendations for standards, but rather to assure the integrity of the process.

Review and Articulation. The review and articulation panel is broadly representative of school system leaders, educators, and stakeholders (including parents and other advocates, and business representatives). Their charge is to make a recommendation to the State Superintendent of Schools based on their review of the recommendations of the content groups and the Psychometric Council. They look at the consistency of the recommendations within a content area, across grade levels and across content areas.

State Superintendent's Review. MSDE staff meets with the State Superintendent of Schools to assist her in a review of the recommendations of the content teams, the Psychometric Council, and the review and articulation panel. The State Superintendent examines the recommendations within the context of other state assessments and national assessments. The recommendations of the State Superintendent of Schools for standards reflect the composite of information accumulated during the entire process of study and deliberations.

Summary. The standard setting procedure used in Maryland is one used in many other states to establish performance standards for assessments. It engages local school system educators who work with the children whose work is assessed with these tests. The process assures that the standards are meaningful and helps the State achieve its goal of supporting the work of teachers and principals with their students. 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 students in all school systems.

ACTION:

For information only; no action required.