

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **How does MCPS measure up to other Maryland school systems?**

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Last week, I discussed MCPS' abysmal 19th place ranking in Maryland in the percentage of seniors successfully passing all four High School Assessment (HSA) tests. This week, I do further comparisons of the 2008 Maryland State Assessments (MSA) test results, again using the standard of comparing MCPS to other county school systems with greater poverty than MCPS as indicated by the percentage of students eligible for the Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) program. I also discuss some school systems with low FARMS in order to compare them with those school systems with high FARMS, a discussion that doesn't flatter MCPS. If I am able to show that higher poverty has a lesser impact on MSA performance in other counties' school systems, this is further evidence of Weast's failure to improve student performance, despite MCPS having received hundreds of millions of extra dollars in the last seven budgets that greatly exceeded the rate of inflation and the increase in the student population.

I previously compared MCPS performance on the Math and Reading MSAs in my 7/24/08 column. Readers may recall these excerpts: "How does MCPS rate among the 24 public school systems in Maryland on the MSAs? MCPS ranked 11th for the 2008 MSAs in Math for the average of Math 3 through Math 8 test results. It ranked 12th for Math 3, 18th for Math 4, 7th for Math 5, 11th for Math 6, 9th for Math 7, 9th for Math 8. Compared to the top ranked county at each grade level, Montgomery County was behind by 6.7 percentage points for Math 3, 4.5 points for Math 4, 4.1 points for Math 5, 7.3 points for Math 6, 11.6 points for Math 7, 6.2 points for Math 8. Worcester County is ranked #1 in the state for Math.

"MCPS ranked 6th for the 2008 MSA Assessments in Reading for the average of Reading 3 through Reading 8 test results. However, the county ranked 11th for Reading 3, 11th for Reading 4, 7th for Reading 5, 6th for Reading 6, 7th for Reading 7, 5th for Reading 8. MCPS was only able to achieve its overall 6th place ranking because the many other school systems that performed better only did so in one grade. Compared to the top ranked county at each grade level, Montgomery County was behind by 6 percentage points for Reading 3, 2.2 points for Reading 4, 2.6 points for Reading 5, 4.4 points for Reading 6, 5.6 points for Reading 7, 3.8 points for Reading 8. Carroll County is ranked #1 in the state for Reading."

There are seven Maryland school systems with a higher FARMS rates than MCPS which also have higher HSA pass rates. Of these seven, the Worcester County and Washington County school systems averaged higher scores than MCPS in the 2008 Math MSAs while Worcester County also scored higher for the 2008 Reading MSAs. Specifically, of the six tests for Grades 3 - 8, Worcester County outscored MCPS for all six Math MSAs and four of the Reading MSAs. Washington County outscored MCPS in five of the Math MSAs. Additionally, higher FARMS rate Caroline County outscored MCPS in two of the Math MSAs and higher FARMS rate Allegany County and Baltimore County school systems each managed to outscore MCPS in one Math MSA.

So, which school system in the state is the best, based on these standardized tests? Carroll County Public Schools, with the lowest FARMS rate in the state - 9.6% - is also top-ranked in percentage of seniors passing the HSA tests. Worcester County Public Schools was top-ranked in the state for the average of the 2008 Math MSAs, including being top-ranked for four specific grades. Carroll County came in second and was also top-ranked for one specific grade. Carroll County came in first in the state for the average of the 2008 Reading MSAs, and was top-ranked for three specific grades. While Worcester County was ranked fourth for the Reading MSAs, it still managed to be top-ranked for two specific grades.

Some may wonder where Howard County Public Schools stands. Although it has the second lowest FARMS rate in the state, 10.2%, it came in fifth for seniors completing HSAs, third for the average of Math MSAs and second for the average of Reading MSAs. It was top-ranked for one specific grade for the Math MSA and one specific grade for the Reading MSA. Its competition appears to be Calvert County Public Schools, based on an almost identical FARMS rate of 10.3%. Calvert County was second for seniors completing HSAs, fourth for the average of Math MSAs and third for the average of Reading MSAs. Calvert County was also top-ranked for one specific grade for the Math MSA and tied Carroll County for being top-ranked for another specific Math MSA grade. It also tied Howard County for being top-ranked in one specific grade for the Reading MSA and further tied Howard County in other grades such that Howard just edged out Calvert County to gain second place by the narrowest of margins for the Reading MSAs.

Based on its performance on the HSAs and MSAs, Carroll County Public Schools is the best school system in Maryland. However, factoring in the challenges of poverty, Worcester County Public Schools is also the best in Maryland. Howard County and Calvert County both put in respectable performances as runners-up, but Washington County is also a runner-up for its performance, despite having a FARMS rate 2 ½ times that of the other two.

You can see that MCPS doesn't measure up in Maryland because it has little to do with this week's column - except as a distant also-ran - as I tried to numerically determine which school systems are the best in the state based on the HSAs and MSAs. It is important to understand these numbers in order to better resist Weast's campaign of manipulation and misrepresentation of MCPS performance. In such tough economic times, we may even be able to get the BOE and the County Council to also resist Weast when he asks for money for his next budget.

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [waynemgoldstein@hotmail.com](mailto:waynemgoldstein@hotmail.com)*