

## Student Assessment in Prince George's County, Maryland

### Background

In January 2002, then President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 – a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. President Bush described NCLB as “the cornerstone” of his Administration.<sup>1</sup> His mission, articulated within days of his taking office, was to strengthen public school education while assuring that the neediest students would not be left behind. This was to be accomplished through increased accountability by state, school district and school; greater choice for parents and students attending low-performing schools; flexibility in the use of federal education funds; and a stronger emphasis on reading earlier in a child's educational program.

NCLB requires states to set challenging goals designed to bring its students to 100% proficiency by 2014. These challenging goals needed to be measurable and applicable to the school as one group and to its subgroups. Schools and learning educational agencies (LEAs) that measured up are rewarded and schools and LEAs that consistently fail to make the mark are subject to corrective action. School performance has become the linchpin for determining accountability at every level and consequently, summative assessment<sup>2</sup> of student learning has become the key to accountability measurement.

### Maryland Public Schools

By many measures, Maryland Public Schools fare rather well in comparison to other schools across the nation. Education Week publishes an annual education report card for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>3</sup> It is a comprehensive assessment of the nation's performance and looks at six areas of policy and performance and its combined assessment ranks Maryland public schools number one. The six areas comprising assessment included:

- **Chance for Success – Maryland received a B+ grade.** This category includes such factors as parental education, family income, student performance, and graduation rates.

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<sup>1</sup> NCLB Overview, Executive Summary, <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html>, downloaded April 26, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Define Summative Assessment

<sup>3</sup> Education Week Press Release, January 11, 2011. [http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/pressrelease\\_details/2011\\_01\\_11](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/pressrelease_details/2011_01_11), downloaded April 28, 2011. Editorial Projects in Education is the nonprofit organization that publishes Education Week. EPE Research Center conducts the analysis of data contained in the annual education report card.

- **K-12 Achievement – Maryland received a B- grade.** This category includes National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores and an analysis of achievement gaps. This grade ranked Maryland third in the nation.
- **Transitions and Alignment – Maryland tied for first in the nation with an A grade.** This category includes early childhood education, college readiness policies, and workforce policies.
- **School Finance – Maryland received a B+ grade.** This category is based on school funding and equity in finance.
- **Standards, Assessments, and Accountability (2010 data) – Maryland received a B+ grade.** Maryland has a long history of high standards and detailed statewide accountability programs.
- **The Teaching Profession (2010 data) – Maryland ranked fifth in the nation with a B grade.** Maryland continues to improve the quality of its education workforce.

With other notable organizations, Maryland fares less well. The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is a nonprofit organization, founded by Marian Wright Edelman, based in Washington, DC. It advocates for children, especially poor and minority children. The CDF also annually assesses each state’s public education performance.

It remarked that the United States was 21<sup>st</sup> among 25 developed countries on overall educational achievement because minority children and poor children are falling behind in school. These children are at high risk of entering the “cradle to prison pipeline.”<sup>4</sup> The CDF State of America’s Children 2010 Report considers the following educational indices:

- The percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> graders reading and doing math below grade level;
- The percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reading and doing math below grade level
- The percentage of students who complete high school with a regular diploma within four years;
- Per pupil expenditures;
- The ratio of prisoner expenditure to student expenditure;
- The suspension rates;
- The drop-out rates;
- An over representation of minorities labeled “mentally retarded” or “emotionally disturbed.”

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<sup>4</sup> Children’s Defense Fund, State of America’s Children 2010, Washington, DC, January 2011.

The CDF State of America's Children report is alarming in that it reports America's schools are resegregating. More than 60 % of our children are performing below grade level in reading and math, and that there are some 2000 schools that have been identified "drop-out factories" across our country. In these schools less than 60 % of the students are expected to graduate in four years. The report further suggests that minority students perform badly – 85% of Black and 84% of Hispanic read below grade level. 85% of Black and 79% of Hispanic perform below grade level in math.

In spite of these national trends identified in the 2010 report, the CDF ranked Maryland 11<sup>th</sup> with respect to per pupil expenditure (\$10,909). It's students read and perform better mathematically. The CDF did find that Maryland is less sensitive to its children living in poverty. It ranked Maryland 43<sup>rd</sup> among states for its infant mortality rate and percentage of babies born at low birth weight. Maryland is also one of those states where the ratio of prisoner expenditure/student expenditure is high at three to one.

### **Prince George's County Schools**

Prince George's County Maryland's 485 squares miles border the District of Columbia and are home to more than 835,000 people. It is a county that is predominantly African-American (65.6%) and touted to be the most affluent county in the United States with such a large minority population. As of 2008, the Census Bureau estimates the median household income to be \$71,696.<sup>5</sup>

Prince George's County public school system services 127,039 students – 91,671 are African American; 24,949 are Hispanic; 5,898 are White; 3,995 are Asian/Pacific Islander; and 526 are Native Americans.<sup>6</sup> The school year measures 175 days, 6.1 hours per day. The student to teacher ratio, including instructional and professional staff, is 13 to 1. The county's per pupil expenditure is \$13,246.<sup>7</sup> Still, despite the resources available, the school system has failed to meet AYP (adequate yearly progress) goals repeatedly. The school system is "in improvement" with many of the schools slated for intensive intervention to include restructuring.

Schools in Maryland meet AYP goals by

- Meeting Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) on student reading and student math assessments;
- Student participation in both assessments of 95%; and
- School attendance rate of 94%.

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<sup>5</sup> Prince George's County QuickFacts from the U.S. Census Bureau, downloaded May 1, 2011, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24033.htm>

<sup>6</sup> 2010 Maryland Report Card, Demographics, Prince George's County, downloaded April 29, 2011.

<http://msp.msde.state.md.us/Demographics.aspx?K=16AAAA&WDATA=Local+School+System>

<sup>7</sup> i.d. See Other Supporting Facts; Wealth, Expenditures, Staffing, Length of Year.

The data collected substantiates that the students attend school regularly (94% attendance rate) and at least 95% of the student body sits for the assessments in reading and math. The data also substantiates that the student performance on the state assessments, in Prince George's County, is consistently failing to meet AMO.

Under NCLB, the AMO's change yearly to encourage students to make significant strides over time towards 100% proficiency. For Marylanders, the averages are displayed in the chart below<sup>8</sup>.

AMO'S for a school with grades 3, 4, and 5		
Year	Reading 3, 4, and 5 AMO	Math 3, 4, and 5 AMO
2007	67.2	63.9
2008	71.8	69.1
2009	76.5	74.2
2010	81.2	79.4
2011	85.9	84.5
2012	90.6	89.7
2013	95.3	94.8
2014	100.00	100.00

AMO'S for a school with grades 6,7, and 8		
Year	Reading 6, 7, and 8 AMO	Math 6, 7, and 8 AMO
2007	66.3	50.0
2008	71.1	57.2
2009	75.9	64.3
2010	80.8	71.4
2011	85.6	78.6
2012	90.4	85.7
2013	95.2	92.9
2014	100.00	100.00

The 2010 Maryland Report Card lists 62 schools in Prince George's County needing improvement. Approximately 28% of the County's schools have failed to make AYP, not because of participation in the assessments or school attendance in general, but because of performance on the summative assessments visited upon the students.

In 2008, Maryland received approval from the US Department of Education (USDE) to implement a Differentiated Accountability pilot proposal to distinguish between schools that need substantial help and those close to meeting achievement goals. There are two stages to improvement: developing and priority. Schools are admitted to

<sup>8</sup> What are Maryland's AYP targets for Elementary Schools? What are Maryland's AYP targets for Middle Schools? <http://www.mdk12.org/assessments/ayp>, downloaded March 10, 2011.

developing stage after two successive failures to meet AMO. After early interventions have been implemented and four years on the developing stage, schools move to priority stage where more intensive interventions and/or restructuring are considered. There are two pathways under both development stages: Comprehensive Needs, where the failure to meet AMO is a characteristic of the whole school or three or more subgroups of the school. (Maryland’s subgroups include race [five categories: Am. Indian/AK Native, African American, Asian/Pac. Islander, White, Hispanic), an income index [free and reduced meals], an index for special education needs and gender.) The second pathway is Focused Needs where failure to meet AMO is a characteristic of 1 or 2 of the subgroups.

In 2007, when Maryland first submitted their plan to USDE for consideration, there were 233 schools in Improvement distributed accordingly<sup>9</sup>:

Stages	Comprehensive Needs Pathway (147)	Focus Needs Pathway (86)
Developing Stage (127)	51	76
Priority Stage (106)	96	10

In 2010, the distribution of schools in Improvement Status in Maryland altered. There are a total of 209 schools in the Improvement Plan.

Stages	Comprehensive Needs Pathway (180)	Comprehensive Needs Pathway Prince George’s County (56)	Focus Needs Pathway (29)	Focus Needs Pathway (6)
Developing Stage (111)	86	22	25	3
Priority Stage (98)	94	34	4	3

The picture in Prince George’s County shows 62 schools in improvement status. 25% of Maryland’s schools that are in Developing Stage/Comprehensive Needs are Prince George’s County schools. 36% of Maryland’s Priority Stage/Comprehensive Schools are Prince George’s County schools<sup>10</sup>. Upon comparing the locations of the

<sup>9</sup> Maryland Proposal for Differentiated Accountability Pilot, Executive Summary, May 2, 2008, Revised May 30, 2008 and June 27, 2008. Updated February 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Data culled from 2010 Maryland Report Card, Adequate Yearly Progress, <http://msp.msde.state.md.us/SchoolsforImprovement.aspx>, downloaded March 10, 2011.

schools using batchgeo.com, a free mapping service, there appears to be a concentration of schools, in the Comprehensive Needs Developing Stage, inside the beltway<sup>11</sup>. (Route 495 makes a circuitous route around Washington, DC and is regularly referred to as the “beltway.”)

The schools included in the Comprehensive Needs – Developing category are:

School Name	Zip Code	Median Household Income <sup>12</sup>
A. Roger Heights Elementary	20710	\$35,112
B. Templeton Elementary	20737	\$46,427
C. District Heights Elementary	20747	\$47,633
D. Francis Scott Key Elementary	20747	\$47,633
E. Overlook Elementary	20748	\$51,578
F. William Beanes Elementary	20746	\$43,566
G. Panorama Elementary	20748	\$51,578
H. Suitland Elementary	20746	\$43,566
I. Imagine – Lincoln Public Charter	20748	\$51,578
J. Benjamin Tasker Middle School	20715	\$76,206
K. Flintstone Elementary	20745	\$42,247
L. Barnaby Manor Elementary	20745	\$42,247
M. Potomac High	20745	\$42,247
N. Indian Queen Elementary	20744	\$74,933
O. High Bridge Elementary	20720	\$83,728
P. Melwood Elementary	20772	\$73,612
Q. James Madison Middle	20772	\$73,612
R. Thomas S. Stone Elementary	20712	\$35,889
S. Carole Highlands Elementary	20912	\$44,572
T. Rosa L. Parks Elementary	20782	\$43,783
U. Carmody Hills Elementary	20743	\$44,197
V. Springhill Lake Elementary	20770	\$46,200

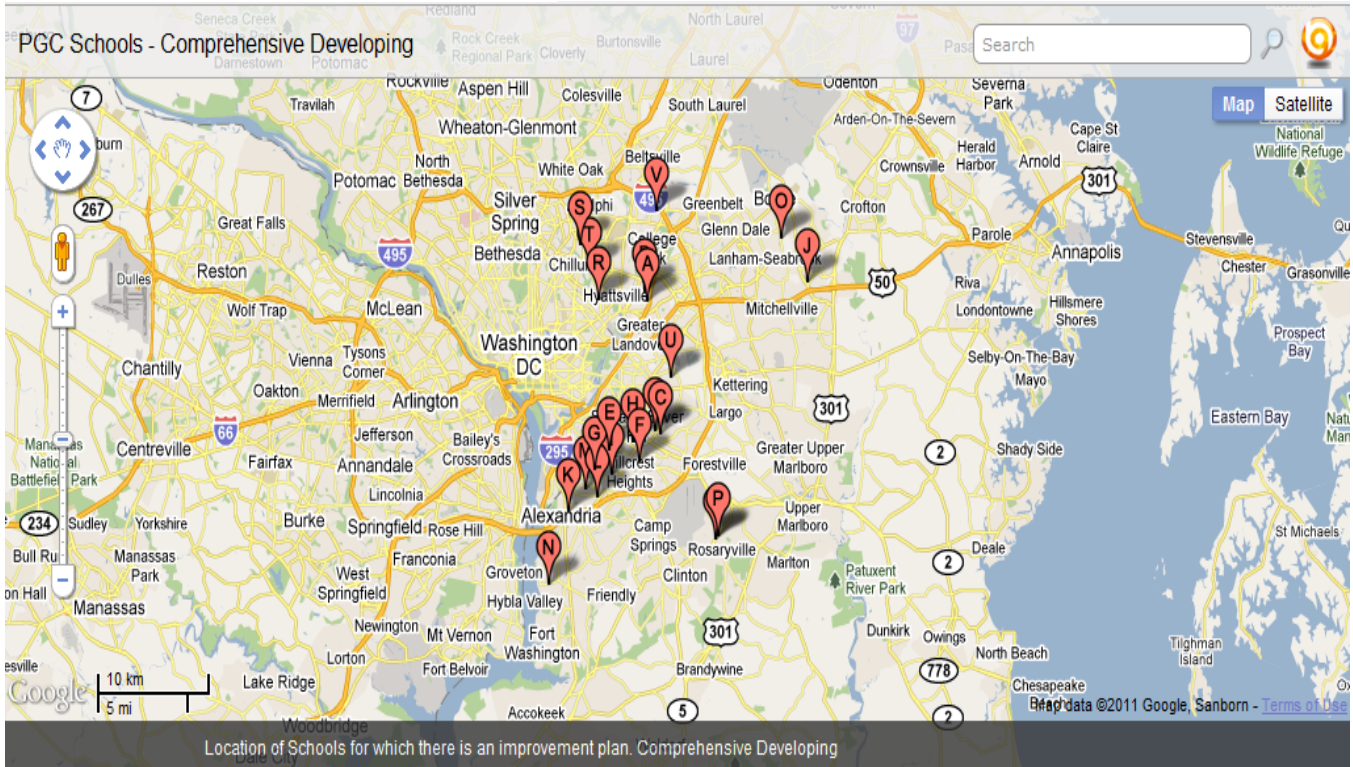
See Chart 1 below.

<sup>11</sup> Map, created March 20, 2011, using Comprehensive Needs - Developing Stage Schools list developed by the State of Maryland for Prince George’s County, can be found at <http://batchgeo.com/map/08a353de0581fcf258cb30ca2a623a04>.

<sup>12</sup> US Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 2000 Census.

<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFFacts>, downloaded April 28, 2011.

Chart 1 – PGC Schools  
Comprehensive Needs Developing



The 34 schools identified as Priority Stage – Comprehensive Needs also seem to be clustered inside the beltway. (See Chart 2- Comprehensive Needs – Priority.) Those schools are:

School Name	Zip Code	Median Household Income
1. High Point High	20705	\$60,149
2. James H. Harrison Elementary	20708	\$52,129
3. Bladensburg High	20710	\$35,112
4. Hillcrest Heights Elementary	20748	\$51,578
5. Benjamin Stoddert Middle	20748	\$51,578
6. Thurgood Marshall Middle School	20748	\$51,578
7. Arrowhead Elementary	20772	\$73,612
8. Thomas Claggett Elementary	20747	\$47,633
9. Drew Freeman Middle	20746	\$43,566
10. Clinton Grove Elementary	20735	\$71,317
11. Isaac J. Gourdine Middle	20744	\$74,933
12. Stephen Decatur Middle	20735	\$71,317
13. Dwight D. Eisenhower Middle	20708	\$52,129
14. Gwynn Park Middle	20613	\$62,842
15. Oxon Hill Elementary	20745	\$42,247

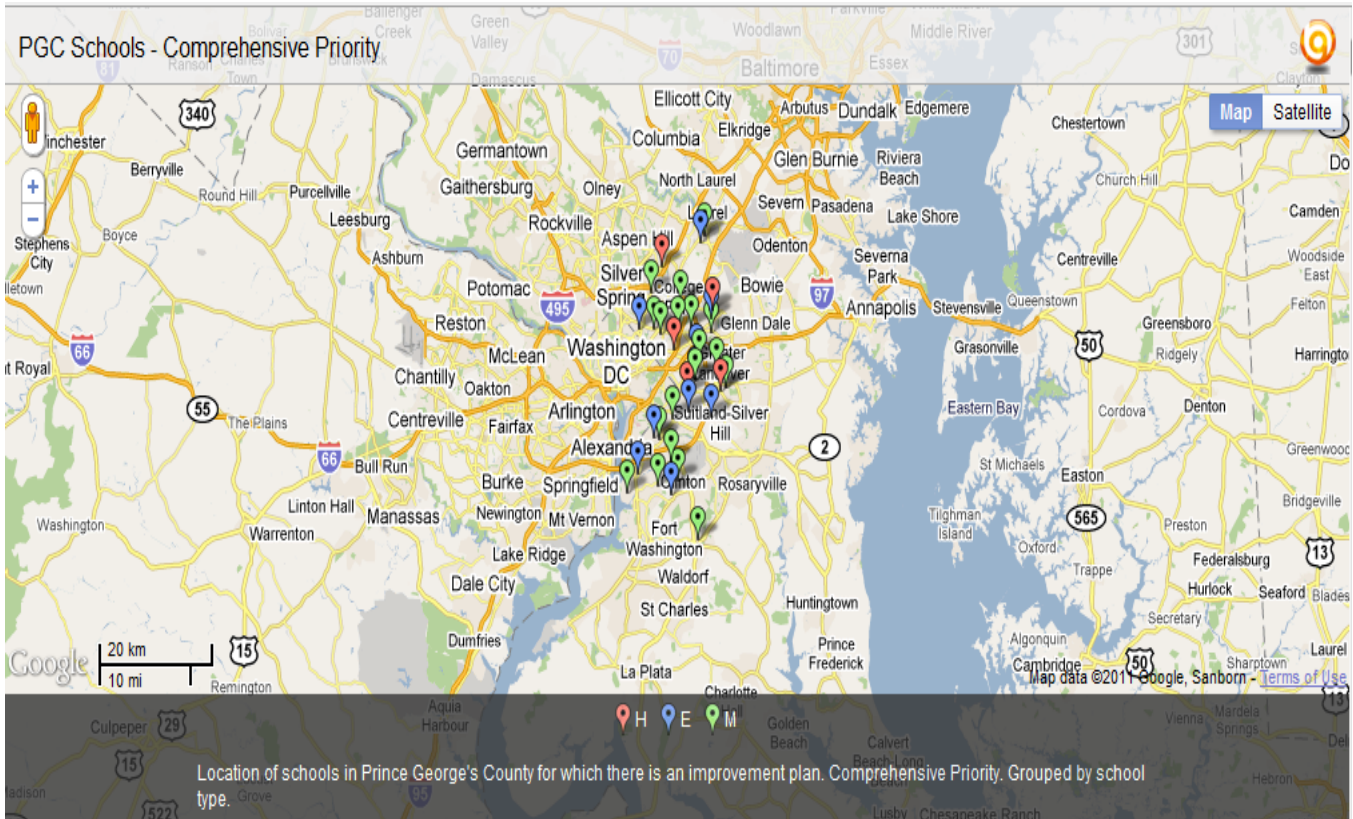
16. Oxon Hill Middle	20744	\$47,633
17. Largo High	20774	\$70,019
18. G. James Gholson Middle	20785	\$43,108
19. Kettering Middle	20774	\$70,019
20. Kenmoor Middle	20785	\$43,108
21. Judge Sylvania W. Woods Sr. Elementary	20706	\$58,528
22. Cora L. Rice Elementary	20785	\$43,108
23. Ernest Everett Just Middle	20721	\$94,851
24. Duval High	20706	\$58,528
25. Gaywood Elementary	20706	\$58,528
26. Hyattsville Middle	20781	\$45,883
27. Ridgecrest Elementary	20783	\$43,345
28. Nicholas Orem Middle	20782	\$43,783
29. Central High	20743	\$44,197
30. William Wirt Middle	20737	\$46,427
31. Thomas Johnson Middle	20706	\$58,528
32. Charles Carroll Middle	20784	\$49,834
33. Buck Lodge Middle	20783	\$43,345
34. Greenbelt Middle	20770	\$46,200

There are six additional schools on the Improvement List for Prince George' County. They are:

School Name	Zip Code	Median Household Income
Focus Developing		
1. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle	20705	\$60,149
2. Suitland High	20747	\$47,633
3. Samuel Ogle Middle	20715	\$76,206
Focus Priority		
1. Crossland High	20748	\$51,578
2. Northwestern High	20782	\$43,783
3. Robert R. Gray Elementary	20743	\$44,197



Chart 2 – PGC Schools  
Comprehensive Needs -- Priority



It would appear that the schools in Prince George’s County compare more closely to the picture that Children’s Defense Fund of American schools in general than the first place, elite school system with which Education Week has credited Maryland. Indeed, more than half of Prince George’s County high schools are found among the 2000 drop-out factories identified through a process created by researchers at John Hopkins University. Based on past performance, fifteen high schools graduated 60% or less of its student body in a four-year period.

The following table was culled from a directory maintained by the Alliance for Excellent Education.<sup>13</sup> The Alliance maintains that these drop-out factories, which represent only 13 percent of the nation’s high schools, produces 51% of the nation’s drop-outs most of whom are minorities – Native American, African American and Hispanic.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.all4ed.org/about\\_the\\_crisis/schools/dropout](http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/dropout)

Zip	High School	Congressional District	3-Year Average	2008	2007	2006
20613	GWYNN PARK HIGH	5	70%	64%	71%	73%
20705	HIGH POINT HIGH	5	53%	49%	48%	61%
20706	DUVAL HIGH	5	63%	45%	68%	75%
20707	LAUREL HIGH	5	57%	53%	55%	62%
20710	ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL	4	103%	N/A	N/A	N/A
20710	BLADENSBURG HIGH	4	52%	44%	53%	58%
20715	BOWIE HIGH	5	82%	86%	78%	81%
20721	TALL OAKS VOCATIONAL	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20735	SURRATTSVILLE HIGH	5	58%	48%	60%	64%
20737	PARKDALE HIGH	5	60%	61%	58%	60%
20743	CENTRAL HIGH	4	56%	60%	48%	59%
20743	FAIRMONT HEIGHTS HIGH	4	49%	35%	49%	64%
20744	FRIENDLY HIGH	5	76%	67%	75%	84%
20745	POTOMAC HIGH	4	62%	52%	74%	61%
20745	OXON HILL HIGH	4	57%	50%	57%	63%
20747	SUITLAND HIGH	4	63%	62%	61%	67%
20747	FORESTVILLE HIGH	4	46%	42%	54%	41%
20748	CROSSLAND HIGH	4	58%	44%	54%	75%
20770	ELEANOR ROOSEVELT HIGH	5	84%	79%	84%	88%
20772	FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH	5	58%	38%	72%	65%
20772	CROOM VOCATIONAL	5	91%	111%	N/A	N/A
20774	LARGO HIGH SCHOOL	4	66%	54%	77%	66%
20774	CHARLES HERBERT FLOWERS HIGH SCHOOL	4	65%	61%	74%	61%
20782	NORTHWESTERN HIGH	4	56%	51%	59%	58%

The current system of public education and/or assessment in Maryland is failing large numbers of students, identified as the majority-minority, in Prince George's County. Maryland boldly proclaims that higher student achievement is reflected in the summary assessments, i.e., the standardized assessments that all Maryland students, in a public school setting, take annually. Maryland talks about all the students who excel under NCLB; very few are talking about the students who do not excel and leave school with a certificate of attendance or drop out with little or no notice.

## The Majority-Minority Test Score Gap

Let's change perspective and take another look at performance. How have the diverse cultures performed in comparison since the inception of NCLB? A trend analysis of student performance, at the proficiency level and above, for White, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/AK Native, African American and Hispanic shows a pronounced majority/minority test gap. The trend analysis looks at data culled from 2003 assessments through 2010 for all grades 3 through 8.<sup>14</sup> See Charts 3-14 below.

We are left with a picture of student underachievement that raises the spectre of racial inferiority and conflicting theories of social justice and government excess and enablement never quite reconciled.

In 1998, the Brookings Institution Press released *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips. The first chapter laid out the purpose of the treatise and a challenge for educators and researchers. Burning observation: "the typical American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests."<sup>15</sup> The challenge to educators and researchers: Find out why.

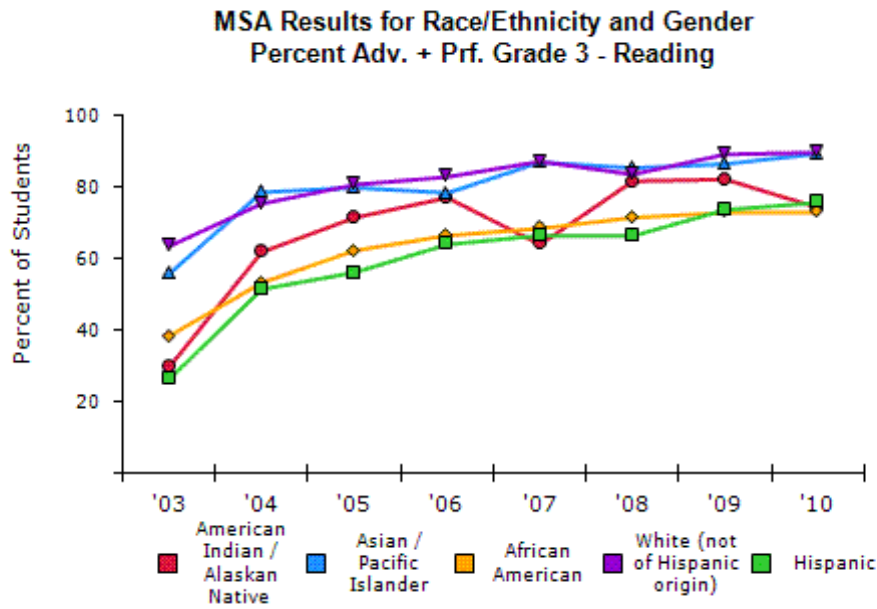
Reducing the black-white test gap would help to erase any disparity in pay between black and white. Data was coming in that substantiated a modest earnings increase for Black men from 1964 to 1993 with the greatest increase coming for Black men who test above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Blacks testing in this range earned 96% of the white average. Reducing the black-white test gap would also reduce racial disparity in educational attainment and support the phase out of racial preference in admission criteria.

The treatise revisits the traditional explanations for the test score gap: the culture of poverty, the scarcity of two-parent black families and genes. The researchers argue the speciousness of the explanations and noted that the test score gap existed when comparing the children of affluent black families with the children from affluent white families; that the education level, test scores and family background of the mother was a better predictor of the child's test scores and that science had not identified a gene that would explain the gap.

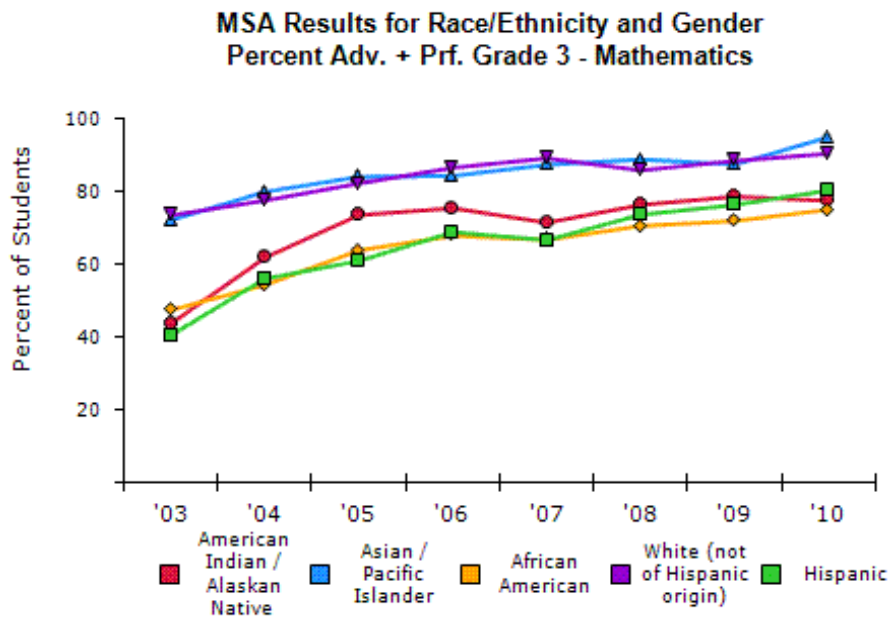
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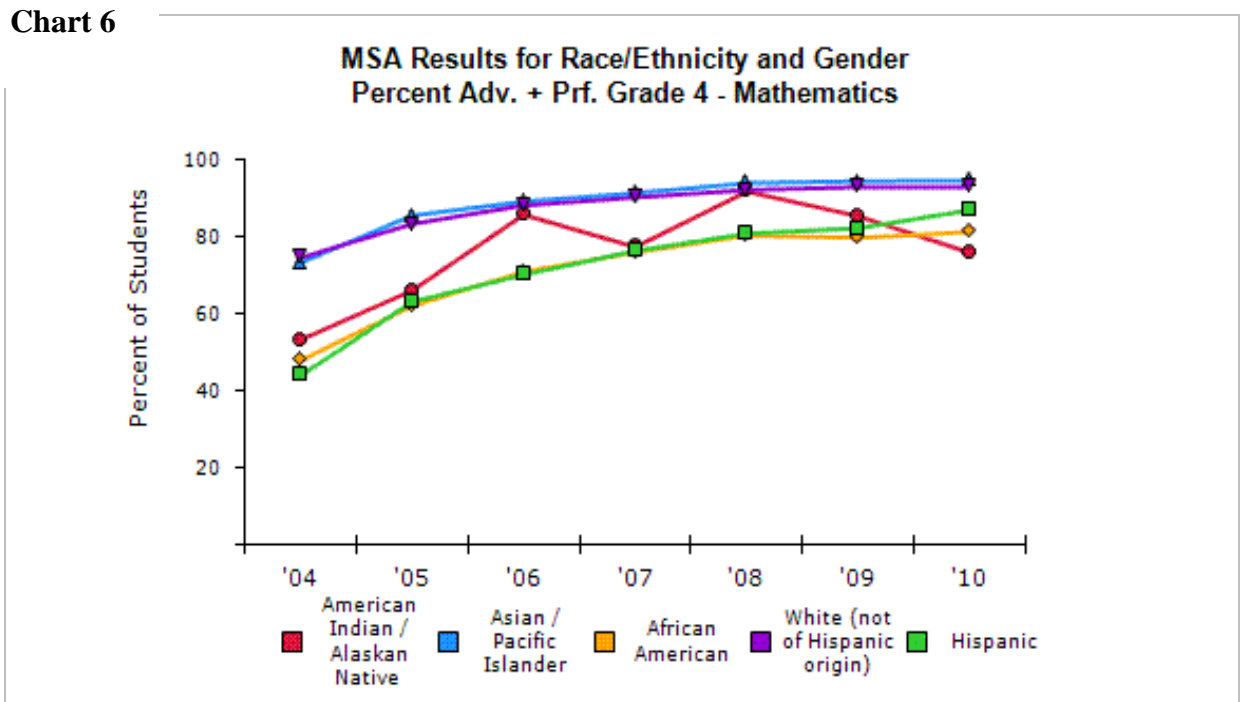
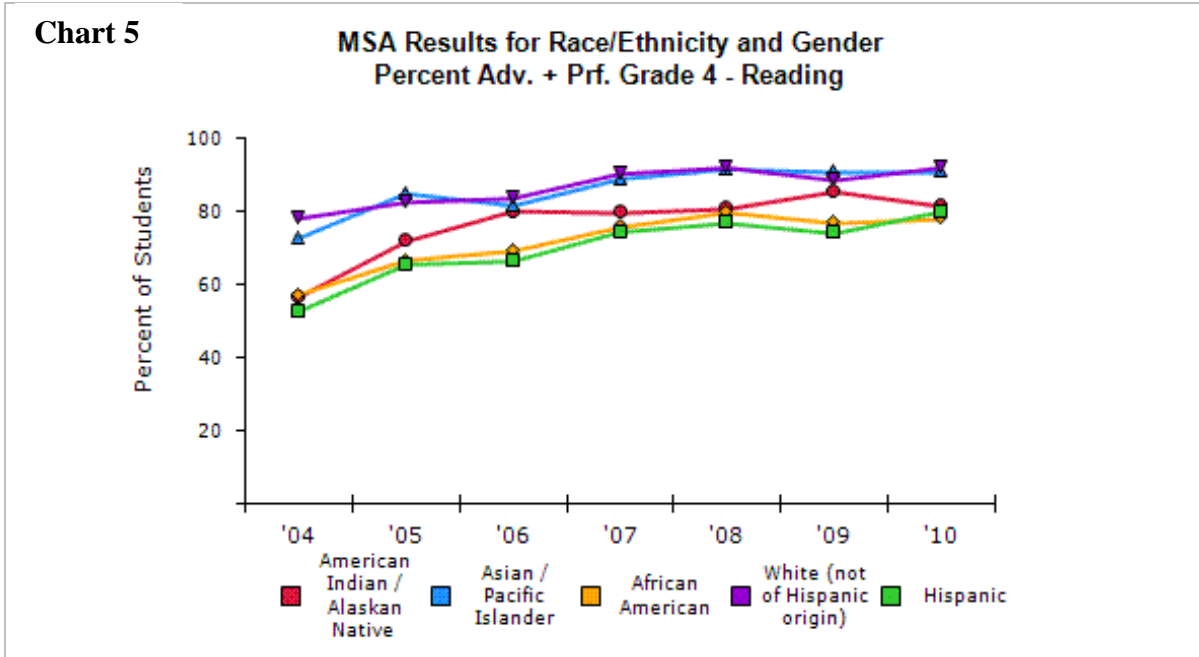
<sup>14</sup> 2010 Maryland Report Card, <http://mdreportcard.org/statDisplay.aspx?PV=2:3:16:AAAA:2:N:6:1:1:2:1:1:1:1:3>, downloaded April 28, 2011.

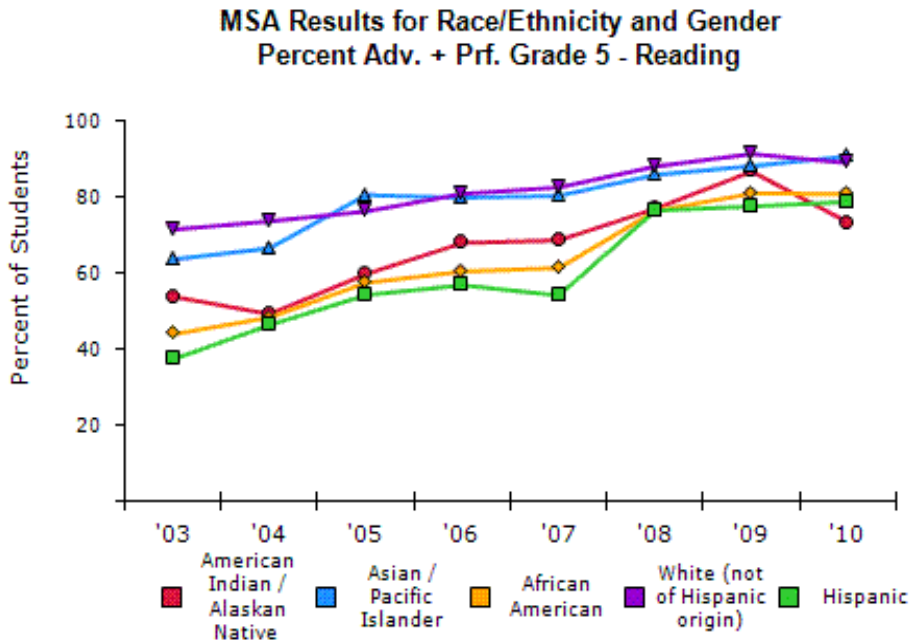
<sup>15</sup> Published in the New York Times Review



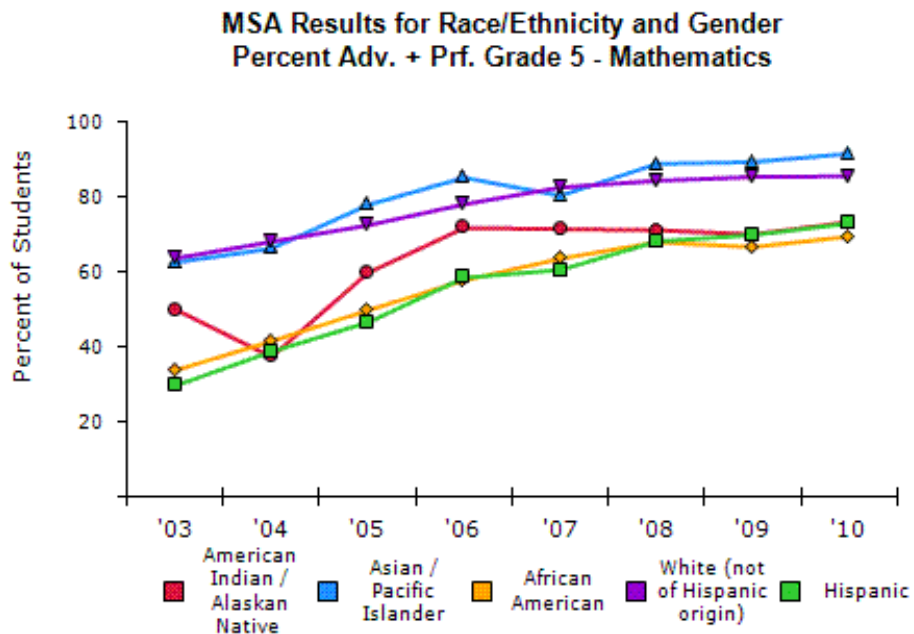
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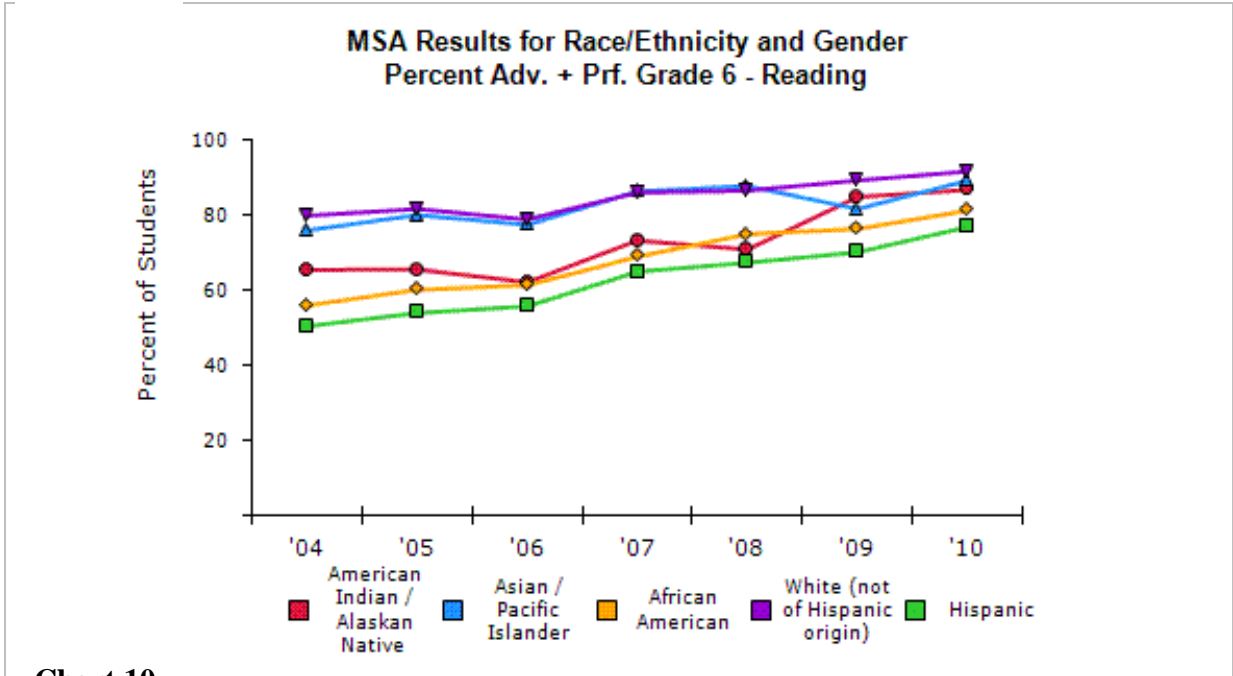




**Chart 8**



**Chart 9**



**Chart 10**

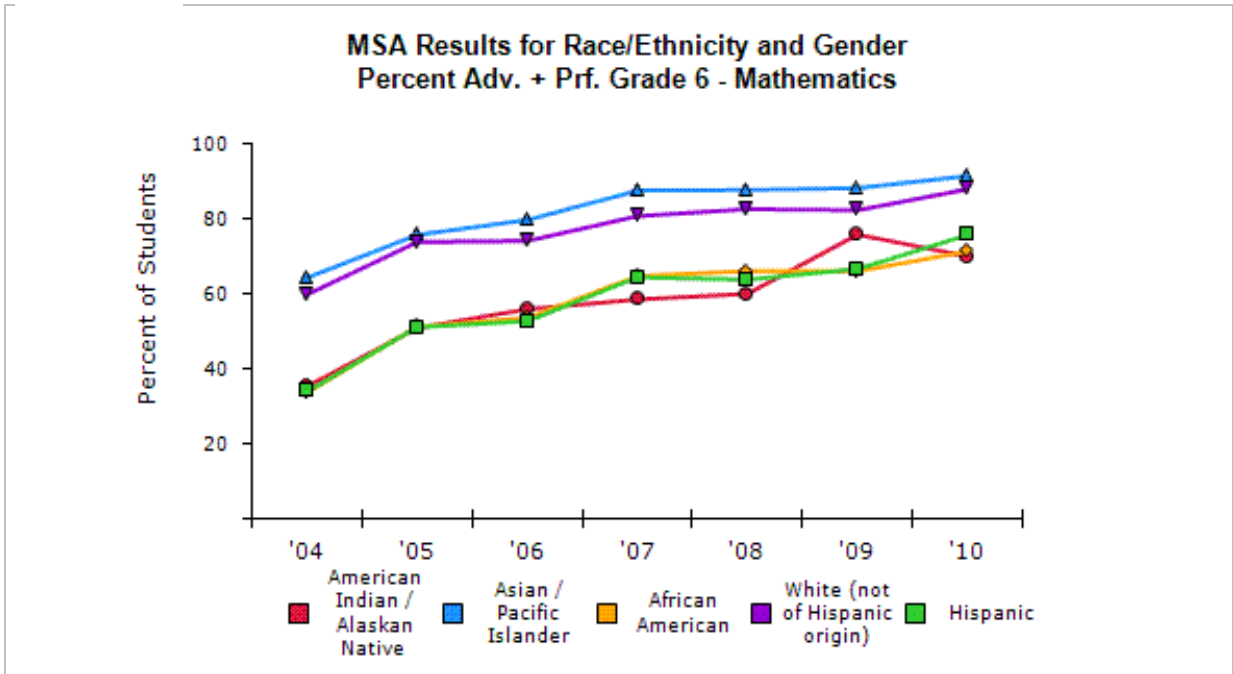


Chart 11

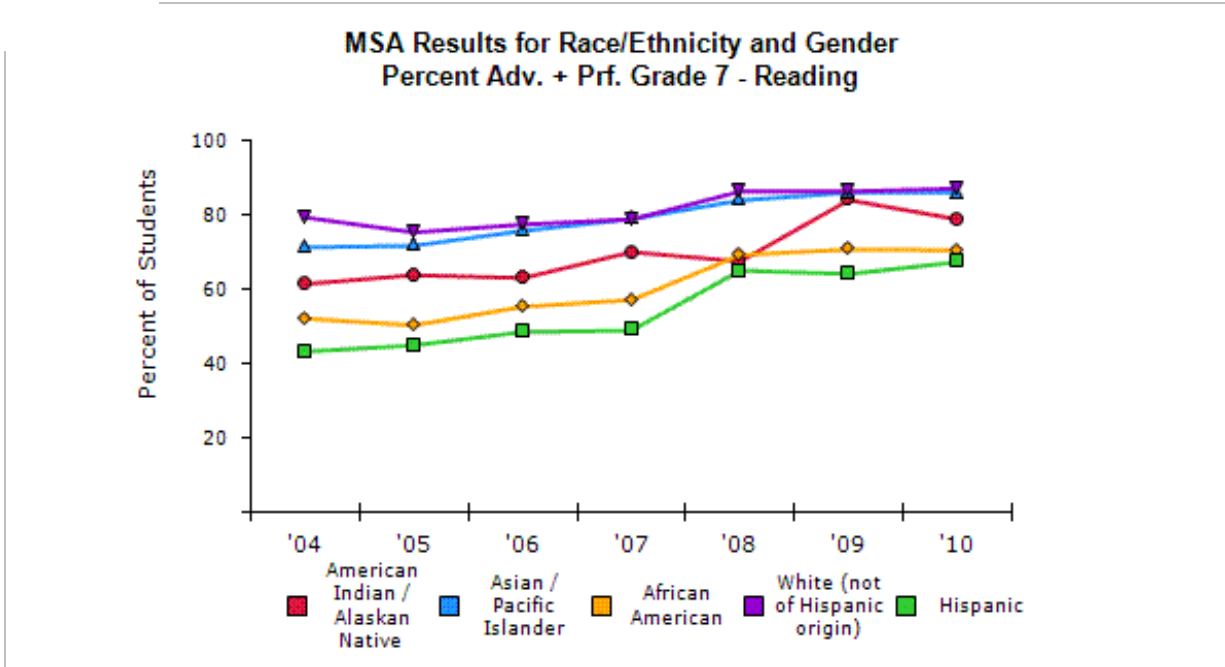
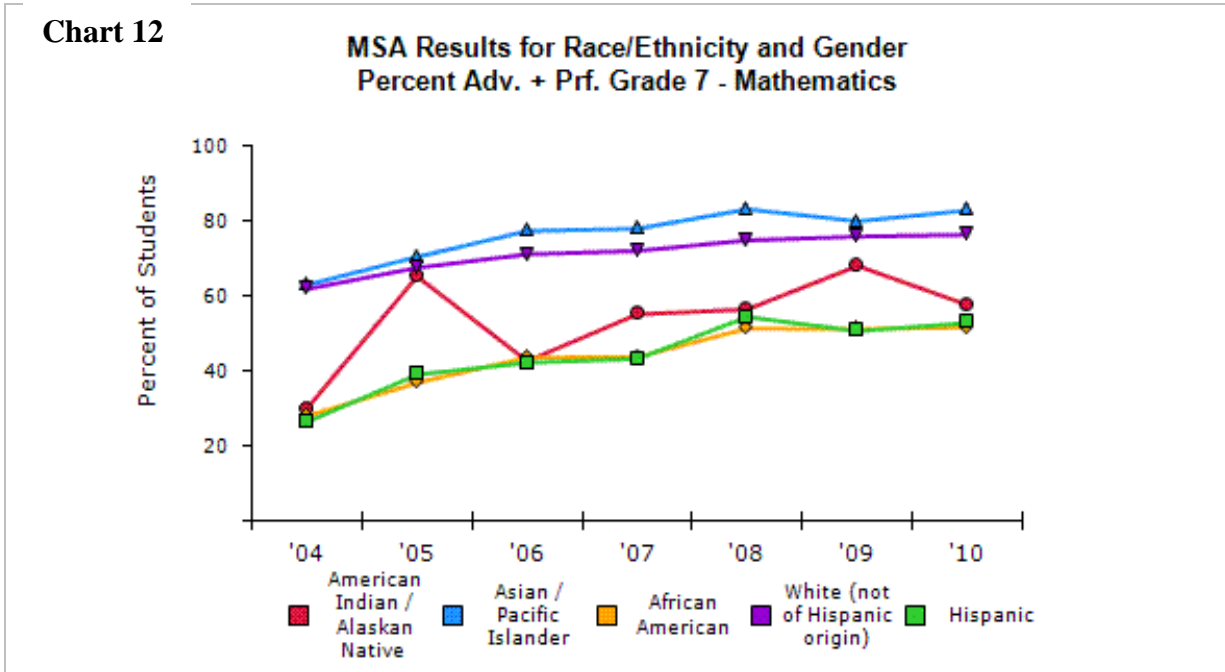
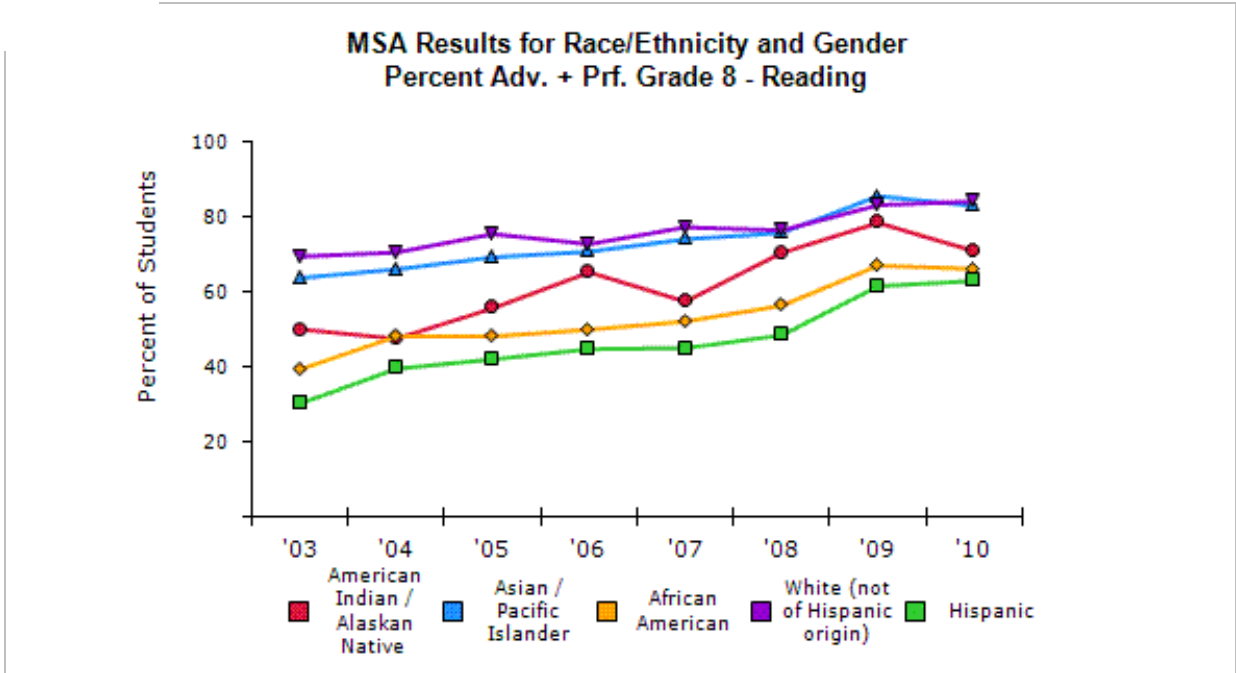


Chart 12

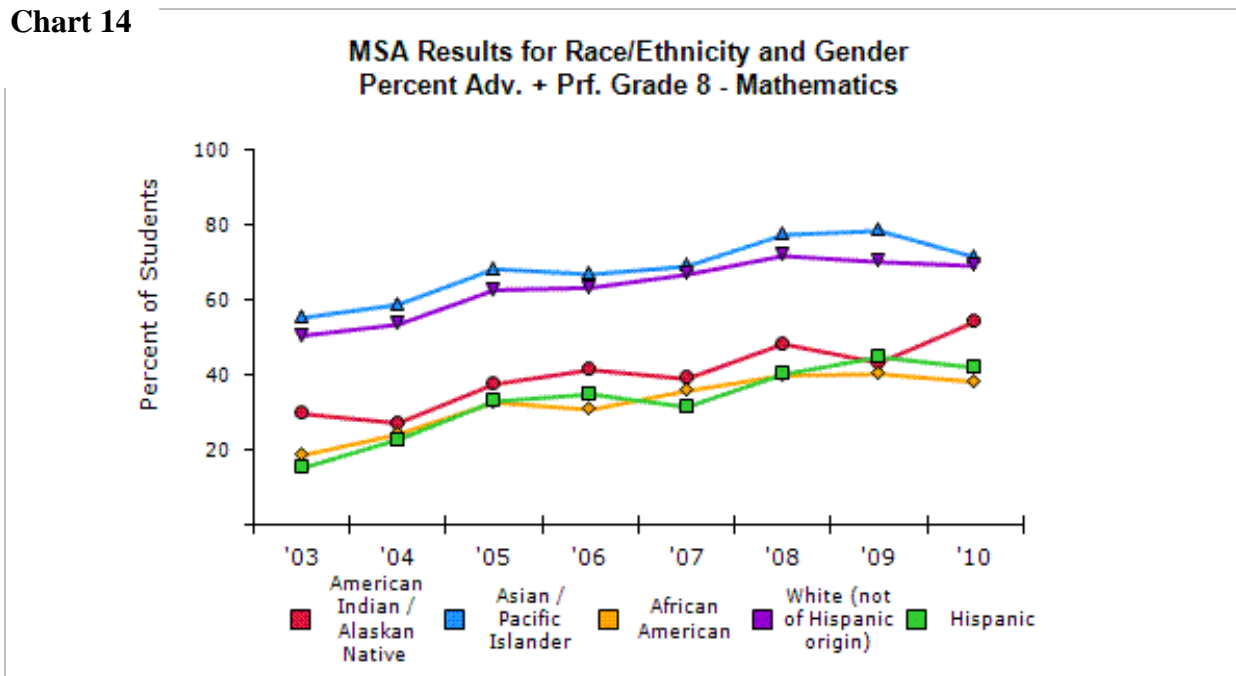




**Chart 13**



**Chart 14**



## Potential Solutions

Despite the underlying cause, subsequent query and action should focus efforts on narrowing the majority/minority test gap and pedagogical modes that will better assist low performers. The State of Maryland relied upon the work of two education researchers from the UK, Paul Black and Dylan William to substantiate the use of summative assessment to gauge learning.<sup>16</sup> The authors, after reviewing studies conducted in the UK and many other countries – including the United States, were very clear to point out that it is formative assessment that gauges learning and improvement in that learning – not summative assessment.

In their expository paper, *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*<sup>17</sup>, Black and William focused on one aspect of teaching – formative assessment. Because teaching and learning should be interactive – the activities, inside the classroom, between teacher and student are what inform teaching. It is the feedback from varied assessment – observation, homework, dialog, and testing as well as self-assessment by the student and student peer assessment -- and the consequential inquiry, reflection and modification by the student and teacher that forms learning. “Such assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs.<sup>18</sup>” Summative assessment, usually assigned and/or executed at the end of a key learning area, comes too late to provide an opportunity for the student to reflect on the information assessment might provide or to make modification to the learning plan or goal.

Formative assessment focuses on the learning. Summative assessment focuses on the grade or rank to substantiate learning. The two are not the same. Political expediency forces educational policy makers to place a heavy emphasis on summative assessment. As a result many teachers feel constrained to teach to the test. “... ‘high stakes’ tests, always dominate both teaching and assessment.<sup>19</sup>”

Black and William stated unequivocally that improving formative assessment would raise standards. Further, studies showed “that improved formative assessment helps the (so-called) low attainers more than the rest, and so reduces the spread of attainment whilst also raising it overall.<sup>20</sup>” Formative assessment requires radical changes in the classroom environment – new modes of pedagogy that work to enhance feedback between teacher and student. Students would have to be actively involved -- not passive receptors of the teachings.

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<sup>16</sup> See School Improvement in Maryland, [http://www.mdk12.org/data/progress/developing\\_c.html](http://www.mdk12.org/data/progress/developing_c.html), downloaded March 10, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> *Inside the Black Box* was published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) November 6, 2001. Full text of article found at <http://weaeducation.typepad.co.uk/files/blackbox-1.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.2

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p.5

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p.3

