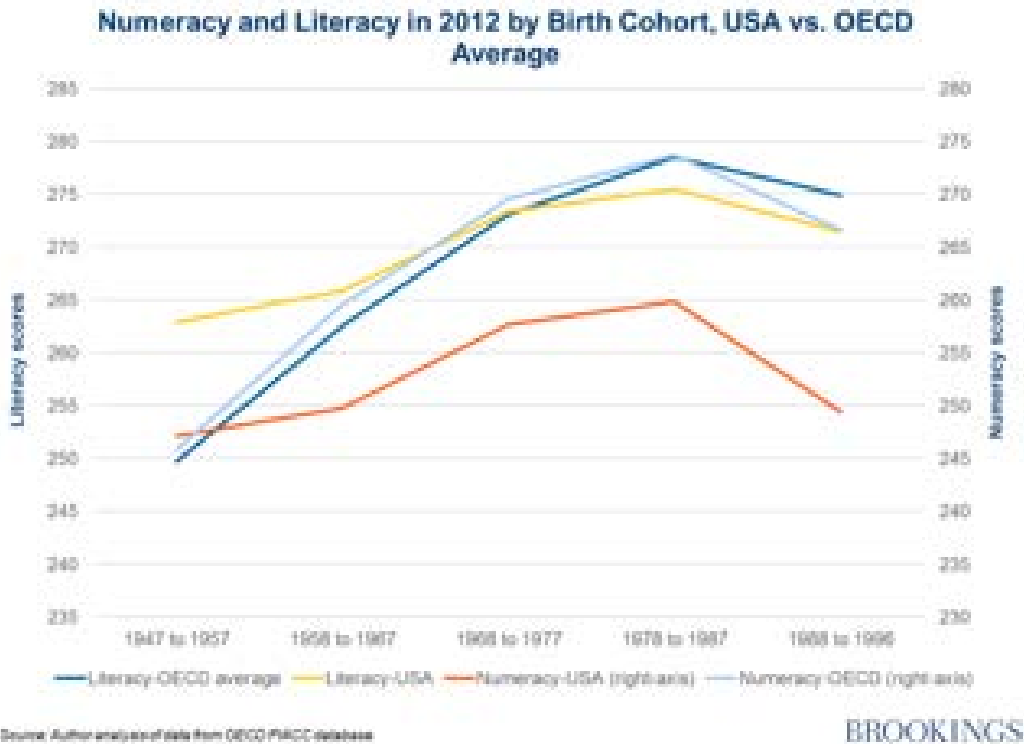


**REVISED DRAFT
A Call to Action**

Beginning in 1983 when *A Nation at Risk* sounded an alarm bell, numerous reports have raised concerns that the American education system is no longer competitive in the world and that US students are not receiving the quality of education being provided by other economically advanced countries. The steady decline in US student achievement is captured well in the graph below from an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report, which shows that in both literacy and numeracy, US students have fallen from a leadership position after World War II to considerably below average in recent years.

US Student Performance No Longer Leads the World



Another gauge of how poorly US schools perform in relation to other industrial and post-industrial nations is the results on the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) exam. It is given in math, science and reading to representative samples of 15-year-olds from 72 industrialized nations. The table below shows how far back US student performance is from students in top performing countries, and the gap between the US and top performing countries is generally increasing.

US rankings on PISA

<u>Year (Countries Tested)</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Science</u>
2000 (32)	15	19	14
2003 (41)	18	28	22
2006 (57)	NR	34	28
2009 (65)	17	30	22
2012 (65)	24	36	28
2015 (72)	23	39	25

Unfortunately, it is not just our average student performance that lags student performance of top performing systems. Of equally grave concern, a smaller proportion of the best US students make it into the global top quarter of student performance than is the case in many other countries. Moreover, these top performing systems have relatively small achievement gaps based on income and minority or immigrant status. And to dispel the myth that other countries do not have the same diversity as the US, many of the top systems have higher proportions of minority and immigrant students than the US. Although these results show just how far relative US student performance has fallen in recent decades, they also show that it is possible to build systems where essentially all students perform at a high level.

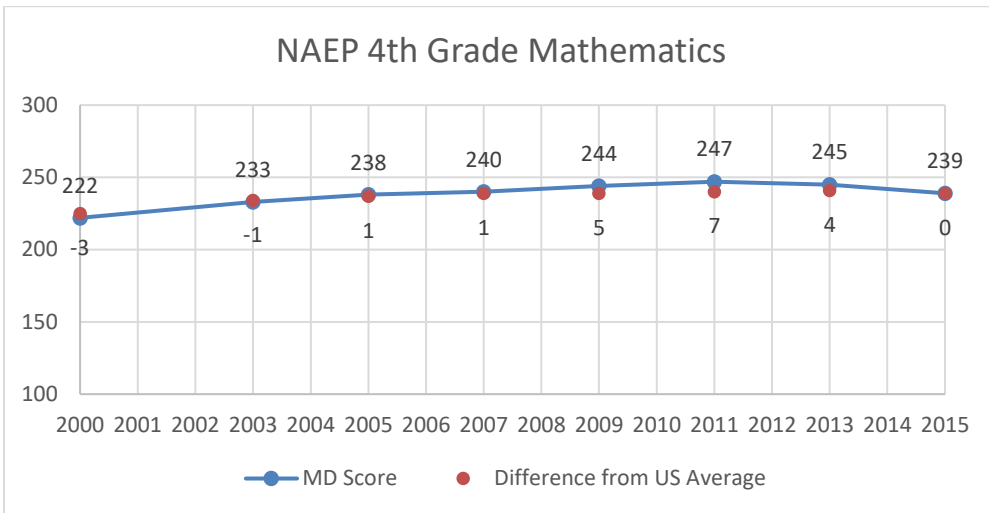
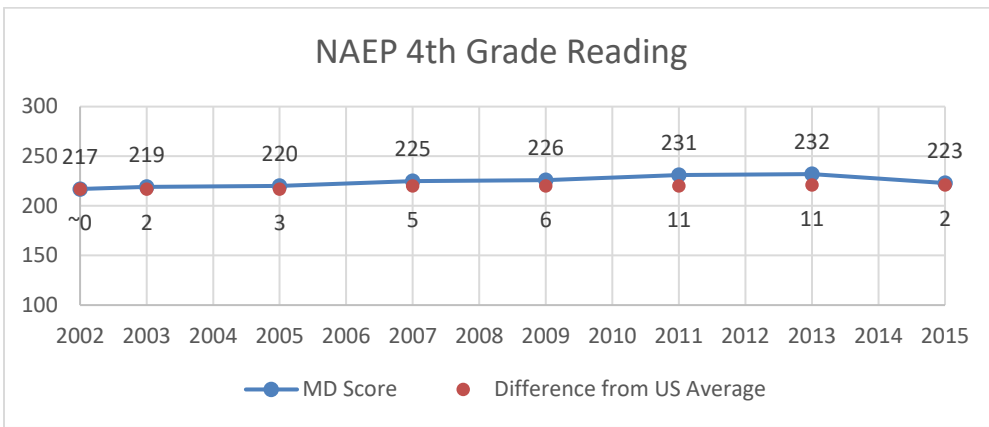
While education in America as a whole continues to languish, one state—Massachusetts—did take bold action, adopting many of the standards recommended in *A Nation at Risk* and other reports as well as practices used by top performing countries. Overall, its education system is now competitive with the best in the world, although it does continue to have higher achievement gaps based on race and ethnicity than the other top performing systems.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Maryland launched a significant effort to advance its P-12 system. It adopted higher academic standards aligned with assessments that were state-of-the-art at the time (the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program or MSPAP). In 2002, the General Assembly enacted the landmark Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act that invested \$1.3 billion additional State aid in public education based on the concept of “adequacy” in funding to enable students to achieve higher academic standards. Subsequent actions aligned early childhood education with the K-12 system, expanded early childhood education, and aligned college and career readiness with higher education. For a time these policy and financial investments appeared to be working. Maryland was even named the best state education system in the country by Quality Counts, displacing Massachusetts, for five years in a row beginning in the late 2000s. Massachusetts has since

reclaimed its top status in the US and, as noted above, has risen to among the best in the world.

Maryland Students’ Performance Is Average within the US

Despite Maryland’s investment in K-12 education and the modest progress that has been made, Maryland’s K-12 system is average at best *within the US*. That troubling conclusion is based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card and given to representative samples of fourth, eighth and twelfth graders in every state. Maryland’s performance on NAEP in 2015, while somewhat better than 10 years ago, is considerably below the aspirations of the Bridge to Excellence legislation



Maryland Rankings on NAEP 2015

- 29th in 4th grade math
- 26th in 4th grade reading
- 25th in 8th grade math
- 18th in 8th grade reading

Further, the gaps in achievement between socioeconomic, racial, and special needs populations are far too large in Maryland (as in other states.) For example, the average gap in NAEP performance between white and African American students in Maryland is 29 points. Massachusetts' gap is roughly the same, but overall Massachusetts ranks 1st on NAEP in most grades and subjects. So while the achievement gap is similar, both white and African American students in Massachusetts are performing better, in some cases significantly better, than Maryland students.

Putting it bluntly, despite a significant increase in State funding over the past 15 years, Maryland students still perform in the middle of the pack within the US, which is in the middle of the pack against the rest of the modern world. This reality came as a surprise to many on the Commission, who generally thought, like many Marylanders, that our young people were doing well on a national if not a global level. Looking at the PISA and NAEP results, however, the deeply troubling reality is that—when it comes to actual learning outcomes—Maryland's public education system is a long way from performing at the level of the best in the world, even the best in the United States.

In the 21st Century, High Quality P-12 Education is an Essential Key to Civic Participation, Economic Success and Social Equity

Marylanders must find the present situation unacceptable for multiple reasons. One is that, with the nation's highest concentrations of federal labs and research universities producing cutting edge research, our State has set its sights on becoming a global leader in the technology driven, innovation economy. Such an economy requires a highly skilled and well-educated workforce. By 2022—just four years from now—two-thirds of Maryland jobs will require a postsecondary credential, be it an industry certification or a 2- or 4-year college degree. At present, Maryland employers must recruit too high a proportion of their skilled “knowledge” workforce from out of state. With the ever-growing number of states vying against us for leadership in the new economy, this is not a sustainable strategy. If Maryland hopes to lead the innovation economy, its education system must ensure every child has opportunities—and outcomes—that match the best in the world.

Second, in today's world, access to high quality education is indispensable for each individual. Personal income is highly correlated with education level. For much of the 20th century, a high school diploma was sufficient for a person to get a well-paid job and enjoy a good quality of life. But that's no longer true. Today, a person with a postsecondary degree earns roughly \$1 million more over a lifetime as an individual with only a high school diploma. That gap will widen further as more routine, low-skill jobs give way to automation and to higher unemployment for individuals with inadequate education and training. The harsh reality is that in today's world, a high

quality education is essentially the only path to a career capable of supporting a middle class family.

But it's not just the economy and the individual that benefits from a high quality education system. All Marylanders will benefit if the State has an education system that prepares all students for successful and rewarding careers because, as education and income levels rise, among other things, so does civic engagement and the quality of life in communities, while healthcare costs and crime rates decline. Although some young Marylanders have access to such a public education, too many across our State, especially in areas of concentrated poverty, do not have the same opportunity. That is not right. And ultimately it jeopardizes the future of all Marylanders.

Success is Possible for Maryland

Developing policies that would enable *all* of Maryland's schools to match the best in the world is a daunting challenge but, that is what the Commission was charged to do. The Commission has concluded that such a goal is achievable, provided Maryland makes a sustained, statewide commitment to systemic change. Massachusetts did just that, maintained its commitment for over two decades, and achieved its present status as one of the highest performing systems in the world. If Massachusetts were a nation, it would rank in the top five on several of the PISA test scores. This begs the question: If Massachusetts can perform at this level, why can't Maryland?

There is much to be gleaned from the Massachusetts experience. Twenty-five years ago, the state united around an ambitious K-12 reform agenda. It developed a bold plan and, despite economic ups and downs and political shifts, Massachusetts stuck with that plan. It increased standards for teacher certification and student performance and invested in both, while also holding schools and students accountable. In essence, it reached a "grand bargain" among stakeholders that required each group to compromise on some matters in order to get the education system they all wanted for their state. Today, in addition to PISA, Massachusetts stands out on NAEP scores, the education level of its citizens, and the average income of its workforce. Surely Maryland can do this as well and more. Leaders in Massachusetts are the first to say that they have more work to do, especially in closing achievement gaps based on race and family income. The Commission firmly believes Maryland has the opportunity to develop a system that is not just a leader in the US but among the best in the world and, thereby, become a beacon for the rest of the nation.

Preliminary Recommendations to Build a World-Class System in Maryland

Based on its extensive analysis of some of the world's top performing education systems, a process that Maryland is the first state to undertake in the US, the Commission is in unanimous agreement on key steps that Maryland must take if it is

to develop a P-12 system that performs at the level of the best systems in the world. It must significantly increase its investment in quality early-childhood education. It must devote considerably more resources to at-risk-students, which includes students from low-income families, English language learners, and students with disabilities. It must transform teaching into a high status profession with appropriate compensation for effective teachers. It must develop a system with college and career pathways tightly aligned from the early grades through graduation, one that catches students as soon as they begin to fall behind and enables students to move immediately into college or a profession with an industry-recognized credential when they exit high school. And it must strengthen its system of governance and accountability, align funding in P-12 education with the Commission's recommendations, and give the State's citizens confidence their investments in P-12 education are producing the desired results, results that will make Maryland education not just a leader in the US but among the world's highest performing systems.

The Commission's recommendations will require an increased investment by the State, which the Commission will quantify over the coming months. Just as important, however, the education system envisioned by the Commission also demands significant changes in many current practices, which means that some present expenditures can be redirected in more productive ways to support the Commission's recommendations. As an OCED report documents, above a base level of funding, *how* money is spent is more important than *how much* is spent. While Massachusetts still has work to do, it has achieved its impressive results *spending only a little more (less than 10 percent per student) than Maryland does.*

A Vision for Maryland Schools

With the implementation of these recommendations, Maryland could build an education system that:

- Provides a system of early childhood education that enables all students to enter kindergarten ready to learn;
- Has an ample supply of high quality, appropriately compensated teachers;
- Provides the kind of support that children growing up in areas of concentrated poverty need to succeed in school and in life;
- Gives struggling learners and students with disabilities the kind of support that will enable them to succeed;
- Significantly reduces achievement gaps based on income and race;
- Greatly reduces the number of students who graduate from high school only to find out that they need remediation before they can take credit-level courses in college;
- Doubles the proportion of our high school students taking and succeeding in AP courses and International Baccalaureate programs; and

- Gives high school students the chance to earn an Associate’s degree in high school and finish high school ready to go to work with an industry–certified credential or to start the last two years of college, saving themselves and their parents a great deal of money.

Achieving a Grand Alliance

In moving to the final phase of its work, the Commission recognizes that much hard work and many difficult decisions lie ahead. It must come to agreement on greater specificity for its recommendations. It must develop a detailed analysis of their costs, all tied to better designed funding formulas. And it must reach its own “grand alliance,” as Massachusetts did, to create a final report that enjoys strong support among the various stakeholders represented on the Commission and across the State. For this grand alliance to be successful, it must ultimately be embraced and sustained by the State’s political, educational and business leaders -- and just as importantly, by the very people it is intended to support -- the citizens of Maryland.

Despite these challenges, this is a moment of great opportunity for the State. Some of the groundwork for a high quality education system has already been laid. While not at the level of high performing systems globally, Maryland is seen as a national leader in its approach to early childhood education, as are its efforts to build a strong system of career and technical education. The State has also made a good start at building out curriculum frameworks across some subjects and grade levels and has been a national leader in both student participation and success in Advanced Placement courses. Moreover, the comprehensive college and career readiness legislation enacted in 2013 laid a strong foundation for the P–12 and higher education systems to work with much greater synergy. Excellent schools already exist in Maryland, schools that provide a thoughtfully developed and aligned education curricula designed to bring every student from early childhood to a college and career readiness standards in high school. They just do not exist in nearly enough numbers nor in nearly enough regions of the State.

As it approaches the completion of its work, the Commission is mindful that the State will face a significant choice. It can ignore the recommendations, as generally happened with *A Nation at Risk*, and continue on its present education path, hoping for incremental gains in student performance. It can accept the consequences of maintaining the status quo, and expect to see worsening income disparities and life outcomes for those growing up in areas of concentrated poverty. Or, it can adopt the proposed recommendations, make a long–term commitment to their full implementation, rebuild its system based on practices that have proven to excel elsewhere, distribute the benefits of education much more broadly across the State, and attract and retain businesses because of the excellent caliber of the State’s workforce.

That looks like an easy choice, but it's not. The Commission's recommendations will require the State to make very difficult decisions and embrace a different way of "doing business" in P-12 education, institute major new policies and practices, embrace rigorous accountability, and hold firm for full and complete implementation of its recommendations in the face of those who would rather accept the status quo and simply hope for better outcomes. While the choice is not easy, it is profound. Nothing less than the kind of future we envision for our State and the children of Maryland hangs in the balance.