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Baltimore Schools Designate Six Schools As Persistently Dangerous With A Warning To Another

By Patricia Hawke

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires that all states report any schools that are considered persistently dangerous. The state of Maryland is only one of six states that have reported having such schools. Some metro areas with similar or worse problems report no dangerous schools at all.

Since each state sets its own suspension limits for reporting, the NCLB provision is inconsistent across the nation with many states ignoring it all together. The state of Maryland, however, takes it seriously with rules that are more stringent than most other states.

A "persistently dangerous" school designation means the school has a high rate of suspensions for serious offenses. These are violations of assault on another student or teacher, bringing a weapon to school, setting a fire at school, or sexual assault of any type.

The six schools designated as dangerous by the Baltimore schools are:

- Calverton, Thurgood Marshall, and Highlandtown Middle Schools — These schools have been considered dangerous by state standards for the past four years, with Highlandtown closing before the fall of 2006.
- Liberal Arts at Walbrook, Dr. Roland N. Patterson Sr. Academy, and Dr. W.E.B. Dubois High School were all added this year.

The Baltimore schools also had six such schools last year. The number of suspensions and expulsions for dangerous offenses declined at five of the six schools, with three dropping off the list for this year.

A dangerous designation is serious for any of the Baltimore schools. Parents with children attending these schools are notified of the situation and given the option to transfer their children to other schools, as long as the transfer is completed before the beginning of the next school year.

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The dangerous schools provision in the No Child Left Behind Act does have some Baltimore schools educators concerned:

- First, it makes some of the Baltimore schools appear to be the most violent in the nation, though some public schools in other states that ignore the provision or set the suspension limits high are in a much worse shape.
- Second, some Baltimore schools educators question whether an entire school is being labeled for the repetitive acts of only a few students. The Baltimore schools new Academy for College and Career Exploration is one such example. This year it was given a warning and put on probation for only six incidents of suspension for a serious offense. With only 300 students, it quickly hit the state's ceiling, while larger schools do not.
- Third, some Baltimore schools teachers have argued that designated schools become even more chaotic. With principals who are reluctant to give suspensions, the violence at school escalates, while sending the wrong message to the other students -- no punishment for breaking the rules.

Other Baltimore schools educators, however, like the reporting provision. It puts a much-needed focus on improving discipline at these schools, nipping the problem in the bud -- before it is beyond repair. An example is Calverton and Thurgood Marshall. Though still on the list this year, suspensions for serious offenses have dropped significantly over last year.

Designated Baltimore schools do not receive any additional funding to help with their problems; however, the Baltimore schools must present a plan to the state on its strategy to improve these school situations.

The Baltimore schools is committed to resolving the issues in these six middle and high schools. Baltimore schools administrators know that quality educational opportunities only come in a safe learning environment that is free of violence and disruption.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K-12, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more information on Baltimore schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/maryland/baltimore/index.html>

Baltimore Schools Lose In Court -- Ruling Favored Charter Schools

By Patricia Hawke

In 2005, City Neighbors and Patterson Park Public, two charter schools in Baltimore, appealed the Baltimore schools' per student funding formula to the state board. The board ruled in their favor, and the Baltimore schools appealed the board's decision in the Court of Special Appeals, Maryland's

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second highest court. Early this month, the court ruled in favor of the charter schools, requiring Maryland school systems to spend as much money per student at charter schools as they spend at their traditional schools.

Charter schools are publicly funded, but they operate independently under contracts with local school boards. Of the 24 charter schools in the state of Maryland, 17 are located in the Baltimore schools system.

The Baltimore schools' per student funding formula differs between their traditional schools and charter schools. Traditional schools receive the equivalent of approximately \$11,000 per student. Charter schools receive \$5,859 per student in cash, with the remainder received in services provided to the schools by the Baltimore schools system, such as special education and food. City Neighbors and Patterson Park Public contend that this formula limits their ability to choose how to provide services to their students, and the court agreed.

After the court handed down its ruling, the Baltimore schools board met in executive session, issuing a vaguely worded statement. It reiterated that the Baltimore schools remain a strong supporter of charters schools, but believe the recent court ruling will hurt the traditional schools by imposing a financial hardship on the vast majority of them. The statement further noted that the ruling could result in traditional schools receiving less per student funding than the charter schools. Additionally, the statement said that the board is fully committed to complying with the law, but it leaves open the possibility of an appeal by stating that the Baltimore schools board "feels obligated to fully consider its legal options."

After the statement was released, City Neighbors board President Bobbi Macdonald stated that they were not asking for more money, only equity within the Baltimore schools system. City Neighbors attorney Will DuBois underscored the fact that both the state board and the court agreed on a funding model that achieves the parity sought by the two charter schools.

The charter schools hope to meet with the Baltimore schools to discuss the court's ruling. They would like to move forward with the Baltimore schools board toward the interest of all Baltimore schools students. Meanwhile, the Baltimore schools board Chairman Brian D. Morris stated that the Baltimore schools currently is analyzing the financial impact of the court's ruling.

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