

*Supplemental Educational Services Under the No Child Left Behind Act: How to Improve Quality and Access*

**Testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor at the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education**

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Chairman Kildee, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on how Maryland has implemented the Supplemental Educational Services (SES) component of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). My name is Ann Chafin, and I am the Assistant State Superintendent for Student, Family and School Support at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). I have been in the role for less than a year and served, prior to this, as Maryland's State Director for Title I. I have fifteen years experience in one of Maryland's 24 school districts as Director of Research and Assessment.

I am pleased to share with you Maryland's progress and successes in implementing the Supplemental Educational Services program mandated for Title I. Under the insightful direction of our State Superintendent, Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, MSDE has been proactive in implementing NCLB. Dr. Grasmick is never content with compliance when it comes to educating Maryland students so we make every effort to ensure compliance but step beyond it to excellence.

Title I, as you well know, is a compensatory program. That means we must offer programming that compensates for the lack of rich, varied experiences that often form the basis for academic achievement; that recognizes and addresses health and environmental issues that cause education to slip down the list of priorities; and that is delivered by the best teachers and administrators that we can possibly provide.

It has been my experience that when educators find their own children struggling in school they most frequently turn to a tutor. The SES program extends this opportunity to the economically disadvantaged children of this country who are attending low-performing schools. Our philosophy has been simply, if educators believe in tutoring, this program ought to work. And the SES program is working in Maryland.

First, SES providers are selected through rigorous application and review processes in Maryland. We believe the application requirements are the first steps toward providing quality services to our children. Based on what we have learned over the last six years, we have refined the application to more closely align the programs described by the vendors with Maryland's Voluntary State Curriculum. If this work is to be effective, vendors must be instructing students on the same material that is expected of them in their classrooms and on the Maryland School Assessment.

We have also encouraged and required vendors to work closely with the school systems and the schools so that communication is clear and school personnel feel they have input into the process.

Our data reporting requirements ask that MSDE, each local school system and each vendor reconcile any discrepancies in participation, attendance, goals setting and parental notification before we declare the information final. In order to assure that this cooperation is evident, we offer extensive technical assistance to potential vendors prior to their application. When all players are fully informed and participatory, the quality of SES programs improves.

Part of program improvement in Maryland must be credited to our monitoring system. Noted in the January 23, 2007 publication of Education Daily, Maryland is referred to as the “data dream.” In 2002, we developed an instrument that collected information on each student receiving services, each provider, and each local school system. In 2003, we converted that instrument to an Access data file that allowed us to disaggregate data state-wide, set up reporting dates, and trained local systems and providers to use it. The Access file collects and monitors contact hours with students, as well as, contacts with parents, local systems, and classroom teachers, measurable goals, and parent outreach methods, among other data. The message to all providers and local systems in Maryland is that every aspect of SES is under scrutiny. It is valued and important, and our data collection system is taken seriously. Delivering the best opportunities available to our students is our focus. Monitoring also includes site visit reports that identify findings and commendations, all available on our websites.

Local school systems assist in all aspects of the program. Early on, all LEA SES Coordinators were invited to become part of the SES Collaboration Team. We meet four times a year and candidly discuss our concerns and contribute to resolutions. The State Department facilitates the discussion and researches the questions. The relationships forged through the team saved countless hours for local systems, and the entire State moved forward together. We developed a Toolkit and, today, the toolkit continues to be updated with new documents the LEAs are using. All documents, including the minutes of the meetings are posted on the website. Now, we have LEAs attending the meetings that are not yet required to offer SES but want to be prepared if SES is a requirement.

One of the team’s most frequently discussed concerns is how to increase parent involvement. Those discussions have paid off. Today, with a national participation rate of about 19%, Maryland’s participation rate is about 68%. The statute requires local school systems to engage in aggressive parent outreach. Parents of eligible children must select a provider to tutor their child. If parents don’t select, students do not participate. The six LEAs required to offer SES in Maryland work hard at strategies that are effective. Local systems stopped offering provider fairs; parents don’t come. They stopped using letters that are too hard to read; parents can’t understand them. Local systems enlisted the help of the individual schools, and parents felt more engaged. We worked through our collaboration team to remove every barrier to parent participation,

including an agreement from each LEA that providers may use their school buildings. Last year, SES funds allowed for the participation of 15,837 students; of those 10,718 participated—an impressive 68%. Baltimore City enjoys a remarkable 99% participation rate.

Two areas continue to leave us with unanswered questions. One, in our rural areas we have limited access to vendors. Although Maryland has almost 50 vendors on the approved list, most of them only work in the metropolitan areas. We had an instance in Western Maryland where parents of second graders in a school requested SES but no vendors were available for primary tutoring in that area. We were able to redirect dollars to a summer program for those students, but that was not a long term solution.

Also, we continue to struggle with programs for special needs students. Although many of our vendors do offer these services, it requires much more monitoring and support to ensure that the IEP is honored and the work is directed at the appropriate strategies.

As proud as I am of the accomplishments made in Maryland with this program, I must put it in a context. Maryland has only 24 school districts, admittedly some of them are quite large, but still only 24. We have an internal monitoring structure that allows me to assign two districts to each Title I specialist, in addition to many other responsibilities. This means that we know each coordinator and can help them address their individual issues. When it comes to SES, only 6 of those 24 districts must offer SES. Other states that have hundreds of school districts have a much more difficult job of technical assistance, monitoring and communication.

The successes we have experienced in this program so far are due to the decision by MSDE to dedicate two positions to this work. Dr. Jane Fleming has led the development of the monitoring instrument and the oversight of the implementation of the program. She is our secret weapon. Site visits with written feedback that are posted for the world to see are some of our best tools for improvement. Dr. Fleming, supported by a loaned educator from a school district, developed that process also.

Additionally, Maryland has only begun the process of evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. We have a contract in place to pursue the relationship between the work of each of our approved vendors and success on the Maryland School Assessment. When we reach the point of removing vendors from our list because of lack of effectiveness, this program will enter another political realm. We look forward to the support of the US Department of Education as we make these very difficult decisions.

Thank you for this opportunity.