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ABSTRACT

This document offers many of the insights and comments of Maryland elementary school teachers who scored the 1992 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) tests. The MSPAP covers reading, writing, social studies, mathematics, and science and is administered to students in grades 3, 5, and 8. The document contains the teachers' most salient observations and suggestions organized by content area and grade level. Some comments crossed content area or grade level lines, and were, therefore, gathered in a separate section. Wherever possible the grade level which the teacher scored is indicated in parentheses. Examples from a section containing comments that applied across grades and content areas included the following: (1) students need work on paraphrasing; (2) students often did not provide critical, specific responses to the question "why"; (3) many students only partially followed directions; (4) students often listed specific details when asked to list main ideas; (5) students had great difficulty analyzing how they did something and/or why certain strategies were useful; (6) many students did not read the complete question before responding; (7) many students did not know how to read a test question; and (8) many students did not know how to express their thoughts on paper. An appendix contains a copy of the form that solicited teachers' comments. (JB)

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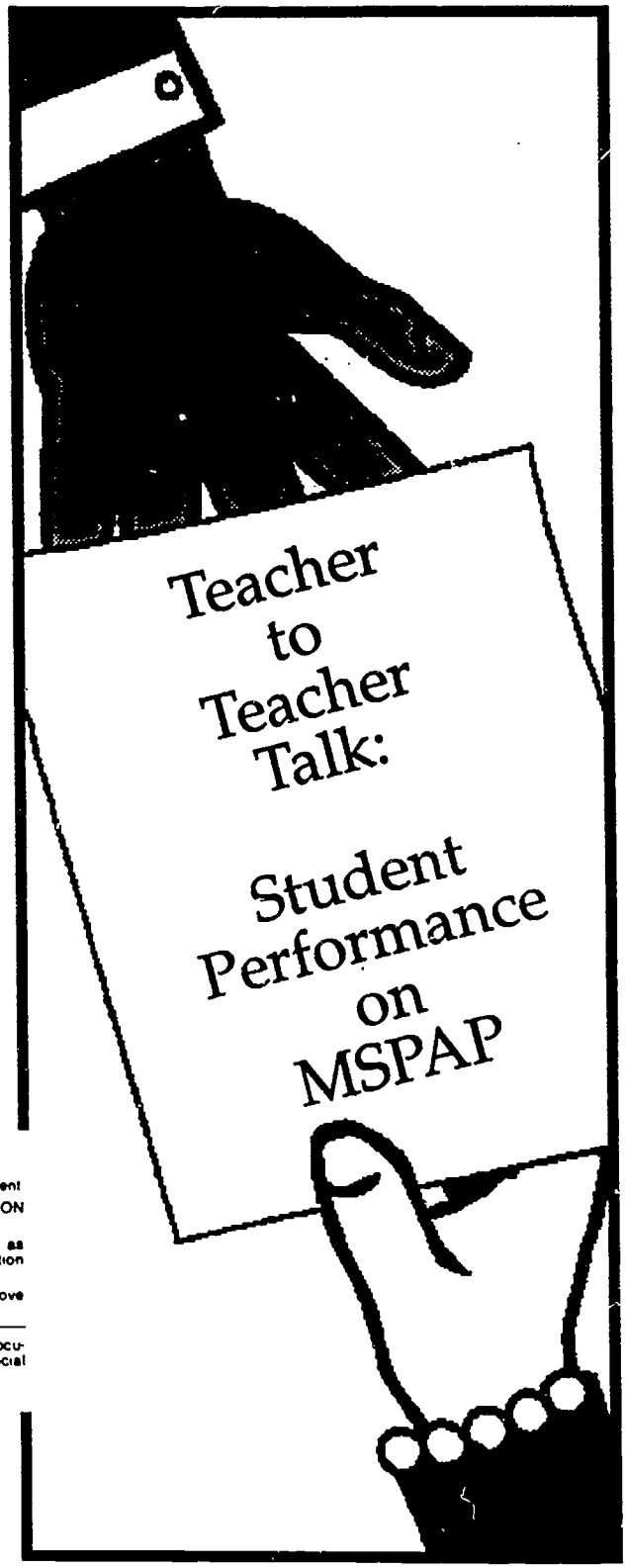

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INTRODUCTION

Last summer, over six hundred teachers gathered at one of four schools around the state to score student responses to the 1992 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) tests. MSPAP is scored by teachers not just because they bring considerable experience to the job of judging student work, but because they are then able to apply what they've learned from MSPAP about student performance in their classrooms.

At each site, I repeatedly heard scorers say "This experience has really had a tremendous impact on what and how I'll be teaching when I return to the classroom." It was gratifying to know that all the hard work of scorers could contribute much more than performance data. In order to make the most of what this cadre of teachers had learned, I decided to solicit from them some observations about student performance on MSPAP. I invited the scorers to respond to one key question on a form I distributed. That question was **"On the basis of your experience scoring MSPAP, what are a few impressions that you would most like to share with other teachers about student performance?"** (see Appendix A for sample Teacher to Teacher talk form) I asked that they imagine returning to school in September and having their best friend and colleague ask, "So what did you learn from scoring this summer? What can you tell me that might make a difference in my classroom?"

The response was overwhelming. Nearly half of the teachers took the time to provide feedback. Their observations and suggestions were all acute, and were it possible, each and every one would be shared with you. However, in the interest of creating a resource that would be useful and convenient for classroom teachers to consult, I asked several content area supervisors to help go through the hundreds of responses and identify the ideas and information which they thought were most important and best expressed. The following pages contain, in the words of teachers who scored the 1992 MSPAP, the most salient observations and suggestions from the Teacher to Teacher Talk forms. These have been organized by the content area and grade level of the activities which that teacher scored. Scorer's comments often have clear relevance to teachers dealing with other grades and content areas, however, and you are encouraged to consider all observations and suggestions. Some comments seemed to cross content area or grade level lines, and are therefore gathered in a separate section; whenever possible, in those cases, the grade level which that teacher scored is indicated in parentheses.

It is hoped that Teacher to Teacher Talk will be useful to you in your efforts to enhance your students' learning—not merely so that schools and districts show improvement on the MSPAP, but so that all Maryland students are truly prepared for the tasks and challenges that await them in the year 2000 and beyond.

Gail Lynn Goldberg
Specialist in Test Development and MSPAP Scoring Lead

Acknowledgements

Teacher to Teacher Talk obviously would not have been possible without the energy and thoughtfulness of the hundreds of teachers who have scored MSPAP. Special thanks go to the supervisors who had the difficult job of selecting from the many responses those comments which they felt would be most useful to classroom teachers: Barbara Graves, Program Supervisor of Social Studies (Charles County), Joseph I. Mills, Jr., Supervisor of Mathematics (Harford County), Ellen Oberfelder, Curriculum Specialist, English/Language (Baltimore City), and Brad Yohe, Supervisor of Science (Carroll County). Thanks as well to: Portia White, Specialist in Test Development, MSDE, and to the scoring site managers from Measurement Incorporated, for helping to obtain the Teacher to Teacher forms; to Susan Carole Ciotta, Graphics Coordinator, MSDE, for her document design work; and to Roslyn Downing, Support Staff, for patiently and carefully transcribing comments from teachers' feedback forms for this guide.

READING — GRADE 3

- *Students need to read questions more than once, mentally, or physically highlighting key tasks. Many questions have 2 parts and students are completing only one part. Also, if a task asks for an example from the reading, students often leave out an example altogether or provide one from a source other than the text. As always, encourage children to include as much information as possible in their answers — but not extraneous "filler."*

- *Students need additional instruction on identifying and conveying the main idea. The formulation of comparison ideas and questions needs to be an area of instruction in the future.*

- *Work needed on reading and interpreting directions and reading for information and extending the understanding through personal experience.*

- *Students need help with main ideas and details.*

- *Students do a superb job of sounding out difficult words. The spelling may be incorrect, but the words are attacked phonetically. Students are not following directions completely. They read and do a little, then they stop.*

- *Prepare students for the **de**tail in the question and encourage them to always support their thinking.*

- *Students need additional work in answering **why** questions — giving specific **text-based** reasons for answers or opinions.*

- *Help in showing differences and similarities is greatly needed also.*

- *When asked to give main idea, most children retold the story or listed many details...and they were unable to state brief main idea concepts.*

READING — GRADE 5

- *Many students do not appear to comprehend the questions.*

- *Encourage students to always attempt to answer all questions, rather than be discouraged and afraid to try. Think and give their best guess! Employ every opportunity to read passages and answer questions based on the passage.*

- *Work on identifying the author's mood and feelings.*

- *More time is needed on mapping out stories. Comparing characters to yourself is needed. Students had trouble taking what they put on a chart or graphic organizer into written text.*

- *Story Elements — the majority of students could identify characters and setting. Many students could identify problem and resolution. Many students went beyond the question and also included a list of events or a summary. Students often drew pictures in response to the question about the story elements. The pictures were often very detailed and labeled neatly.*

- *The children are having trouble with making references back to the text. The child will answer a question so generally that you can only give the answer partial credit.*

- *Many, if not most, students complete the thought process at the superficial or general level of understanding. Instruction must continue to teach children how to extend and connect their thoughts to demonstrate a developed understanding of what they are reading.*

- *Students have problems setting up an organizing chart and translating the chart to paragraph form. Even for those who are able to make the transition, it is rare that a student makes extensions or connections. Students need to learn to write "recommendations" with back-up details. Just saying a story is "good" or "bad" and words to that effect needs to be extended to meaningful information for the reader.*

- *Basic test-taking skills for grade 5 students would be helpful. For example: Read directions carefully and look for key words. Reread directions. If time allows, proofread. Students seem to have difficulty with supporting their opinions with details from the story. Students have difficulty with identifying mood/feeling of the story and with stating how they were able to predict supported by details from the story.*

- *In general, students in grade 5 have difficulty with supportive material. Grade 5 should also address the concept of extension/details in their daily class work to ensure the fact that grade 5 students will be able to expand thinking/writing and speaking beyond the simplistic yes/no type of answer.*

- *Teachers should instruct students to reread before writing responses — and answer the question completely. They should also inform students with limited vocabularies to draw responses when that option is given or to write regardless of spelling problems.*

- *Teachers could prepare their students to: 1) be able to justify their answers; 2) read entire directions and recognize key words or directives; and 3) be able to complete a graph. Read long pieces of literature at one sitting.*

- *Students need work on stating a main idea in their own words (instead of simply writing the title). Students need to continually practice using **specifics** from text to back up what they say. Students need to read directions carefully and **do exactly** as the directions ask.*

- *Skimming techniques need to be developed in order to finish the booklet. Comprehension skills are lacking — sequencing, summarizing, main idea.*

- *Group work/brainstorming/sharing ideas are activities that lend themselves to preparation for the test. Writing journal entries that explain how a student arrives at an answer would help.*

- *If a question asks for 2 or more parts to a response, the first is often given, but the rest is frequently ignored.*

- *Teach students to answer the question that is asked.*

- *Degree of difficulty items were not accurate indications of how students actually performed on given tasks. Students failed to respond to items or responded incorrectly to all or many items and they still circled "very" easy or "somewhat" easy.*

- *Some students are completing the graphic organizers well; keep using them in practice. Focus on author's purpose and text supports. There is a need for students to reread directions and questions before writing; also, focus on how to interpret and answer questions.*

READING — GRADE 8

- *Work on taking notes from a reading. Organize notes (ex: outline). Practice reading and following directions which include several tasks (2-5) to complete.*

- *Need to work on finding examples from story to prove theory/support ideas. Have students create their own charts.*

- *Students need assistance in the interpretation of literature. Skills requiring work include identifying main events, conflict and resolution, poetry interpretation and applications to personal experience and thoughts.*

- *The children need practice in contrasting - comparing materials and characters.*

- *Need to focus on:*
  1) *Concept of comparison/contrast.*
  2) *Main ideas/major topics from reading selections.*
  3) *Giving explanations for their responses (ex. processes they chose to use or decisions they had made in their work.*
  4) *Thoroughly presenting information on a topic (Students seem to be more interested in writing the least amount possible, rather than thoroughly discussing a topic).*
  5) *Specific directive words caused problems (ex. "cite") probably because they were not a part of the child's working vocabulary.*

- *Students generally seem to have difficulty synthesizing information for a given task — perhaps due to the student's inability to read or comprehend directions.*

- *Things to work on: getting students to pay closer attention both to main ideas and to key details in their reading that will be incorporated into written responses.*

- *Reading difficulties: interpretative and analytical thought.*

- ***Things students can do well:** identify figures of speech in a poem; tell what a story is about; identify problem, but not always solution; identify vivid language in a literary text and show how it contributes to the text.*

- ***Things students can not yet do well enough:** Support all answers **specifically** from text (a big problem); relate what they read to their own lives (students did not do this even when the question specifically asked them to); identify mood of a literary piece and explain how author achieved it.*

WRITING/LANGUAGE IN USE — GRADE 3

- *Students are doing a better job on stories than poems in the written expression part of the test. Fragments and run-on sentences are common weaknesses. Story lines are weak and not always sequential. Many stories begin with "Once upon a time" and end with "and they lived happily ever after." Students need to learn new techniques for beginning and ending a story. Students do not answer questions in complete sentences.*

- *Students need work transferring information from one source to another correctly (not reversing numbers, spelling correctly).*

- *Give students the experience of "referring back" a few pages in order to answer questions. Make sure poetry is written in proper form. Also, make sure letter writing is in proper form. Make sure written work stays with the topic (quality not quantity).*

- *Detected so many errors in spelling as well as grammatical errors regarding punctuation marks, capitalizations and subject/verb usage.*

- *Instruction should attend to use of the dictionary — reinforce/introduce use of the dictionary in the revision stage of creative writing. Work on answering questions in complete sentences — complete thoughts, when responses are to be scored for language in use.*

- *Students respond best to questions requiring short answers. They don't take the time, usually, to "write a paragraph." Instructions should attend to emphasizing reading and following directions — so many of the answers have nothing to do with the question. Attend to the form asked for in the question, i.e. list, paragraph, drawing, etc.*

- *Children must be able to write in sentences. Most children were able to read the questions but did not give an in-depth answer. This would have increased their scores.*

- *In writing a letter, many students put the comma after Dear, John. They need to distinguish between "Our" and "Are."*

- *Activities where the students were asked to write a note to a friend on a particular topic seemed to generate the most interest.*

- *When working in class on written expression, also include language usage (too many run-on sentences were evident).*

- *Students must work on using standard English.*

- *Many very creative stories, but students did a poor job on the language usage again.*

- *Many students have a good grasp of the writing process. However, the ideas of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are definite weaknesses. Students seem to enjoy the writing activity where they could choose the genre (p. 17) and this is where they demonstrated a great deal of creativity.*

- *Many tests started with very good answers and then students "faded" — they left the remainder blank.*

- *Children seemed to enjoy drawing to explain their ideas instead of writing an explanation. Their writing is very "wordy" and repetitive in the writing to inform. We must encourage children to always use their experiences as a source of information. Must also teach proofreading skil ; — editing, too!*

- *They need to read directions carefully. Follow multi-step directions. Teachers may also find it helpful to score answers using rubrics making sure students answer the questions that are asked.*

- *In the area of writing, third graders have much difficulty determining when and where to use simple punctuation. They seem to write much like they talk, connecting strings of thoughts with the word "and" until it becomes a one paragraph run-on sentence. Another problem is developing a piece of writing using adjectives and adverbs to add detail and interest. Most of the writing I've seen has not given much attention to audience.*

WRITING/LANGUAGE IN USE — GRADE 5

- *Students almost always start their answer to a question with an introductory sentence that repeats the words in the question and continues with the word "because" (One problem is that students almost always start their second sentence with "Because". For example, "I would not like to live like Adeleen. Because she had to work hard." Grammar and punctuation need to be addressed! Students have good, logical, creative thoughts, but cannot put those ideas in writing. Run-on sentences a critical deficiency. When students had the opportunity to work in a cooperative learning situation, their responses were much more thoughtful than when they responded on their own. Even grammatical errors were fewer when peers were involved. Cooperative learning strategies are working.*

- *Teachers need to realize that students should learn to answer LU [Language in Use] questions with **several** sentences.*

- *Great lack of basic writing skills and language mechanics—these need emphasis in class. Very few understand the difference in writing to inform and writing to persuade.*

- *I have detected so many errors in spelling as well as grammatical errors regarding punctuation marks, capitalizations and subject/verb usage.*

- *Capitalization and punctuation. Recognizing a run-on sentence. Formulating compound sentences. Being able to take a stand on an issue and give supporting statements to back it up.*

- *Sentence order. Hyphenate words. Legible handwriting. PROOFREAD!!!*

- *Violence often exhibited in students' writings. Are we to just write this off as endemic in our society, glibly pass it off as morbid exploration — curiosity, or recognize it as a real problem? I've heard one suggestion test administrators might follow: Instruct students to avoid violence in their written stories — perhaps suggest topics: memoir, the first time I..., modern fairytale, fable, etc., coming of age.*

- *Students need to be sure to elaborate answers — give reasons, examples, etc.*

- *More emphasis should be put on basic writing. Example — sentence structure, verb and subject agreement and how to write a story.*

- *Language Usage — Watch out for run-on sentences. Teach children how to revise for this very common error. Peer editing — Help students learn that suggestions are required. It helps your partner. Many students didn't want to say anything negative — Just "IT'S OKAY!" Help children understand **all** writing can always be improved.*

- *Generally, students have great ideas that are appropriate responses; however, recording the responses continues to be a major problem for many of our students. Also, I have found that many 5th graders do not capitalize the beginning of a sentence or use punctuation at the end of sentences. I would encourage teachers to help students become more proficient at proofreading their own written work—especially to correct basic capitalization and punctuation errors.*

- *Maryland students clearly are being exposed to the writing process (organizing, editing, rewriting, etc.) Great! The variety of literary forms we are scoring for personal expressions indicates that the teaching of creative writing is a priority.*

- *Students are enthusiastic about writing a story, poem, or play. This is their chance to extend themselves. They are reticent about drawing conclusions about mood or feeling — if they even understand the terminology. Students, when asked to write descriptive paragraphs, rarely take more than one stance. They need to be able to write beyond the first idea that pops into their heads.*

- *Need work on correct use of "a" and "an ."*

- *Doing well: Making predictions about a given situation; group revision and editing of writing.*

- *Students need help in writing congruent paragraphs in essays. Students need help in using information from booklets to answer test questions in another booklet.*

- *Students seem to like activities that involve giving their own opinions.*

- *Give opportunities to write and express feelings about real-life situations, emphasizing the need to explain whey they answered in a certain way. Emphasize use of homonyms. More vocabulary development.*

- *Students need to learn the difference in writing creatively and writing for a specific purpose.*

- *Students did fairly well on arriving at conclusions, making predictions, writing to inform.*

- *More is less and less is more! Just because the entire space is filled does not mean that the student's answer is correct. Sometimes detailed answers are needed but many do not know when to stop. Perhaps introduce writing prompts and how to begin writing. I have read some wonderfully creative pieces of writing, but could not give credit because they did not address the topic. Address personification in some form.*

WRITING/LANGUAGE IN USE — GRADE 8

- *The students generally do very well with the closure statements. There seems to be a clearer understanding of the question when the beginning of the "correct" answer is given as a lead-in.*

- *Inability to write "If-Then" statements.*

- *Most students attempt the creative writing and seem to do well with it. They put things in a definite order and use lots of descriptions. Spelling seems to be their downfall. Many students are turned on by poetry and many of the poems written by students have been quite well done.*

- *The students wrote much better than last year. The stories, essays, etc. were more fully developed and showed more creativity. The children seem to need more work with poetry interpretation and most definitely with punctuation. Homophones (especially they're, there, their; too, two; and your and you're) need lots of reinforcement. The verb tense agreement was generally good.*

- *Students need to know that responses should be written in complete sentences, because of the weight that is placed on this in Language Usage. They need to attend to the prompt and reread their work to reduce errors. When the prompt states to attend to correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization the students need to be reminded of the importance of this. The writing process improved the overall student work significantly. It is a worthwhile area to concentrate on.*

- *Students should also be taught to use standard English, when possible, in formal writing. The students should also be taught to express themselves vividly, trying to limit street language and violence.*

- *Need work on how to compare/contrast and how to use graphic organizers that suit what the question asks.*

- *Give the students exercises in citing evidence or giving support to their writing.*

- *Need to work on explaining a process clearly.*

- *Students generally do not organize their writing in paragraphs. Students need to work on homonyms. Some common mistakes include the misuse of: threw/through; no/know/now; there/their/they're; were/we're/where.*

- *Students generally seem to have difficulty synthesizing information for a given task. Commas, and punctuation in general, have become very obsolete.*

- *Things to work on: getting students to pay closer attention both to main ideas and to key details in their reading that will be incorporated into written responses. Doing drill exercises on basic language arts skills such as homonyms, contractions, etc. Emphasizing the value of proofreading.*

- *Language Usage difficulties — overwhelming sentence structure: fragment/run-on errors. Language Usage successes — content and tone supersede style. Writing successes — generally good organizational/ se . encing skills*

- *Writing for personal expression — they attend to the writing and the language usage. Place end punctuation mark at the end of each piece of writing — many students fail to do this.*

- *No matter where they live in this state, students cannot spell; they are very weak on sentence structure and mechanics. Also, vocabulary is very weak.*

MATHEMATICS — GRADE 3

- *Students had the following difficulties:*
  - *answering the question*
  - *justifying their answers*
  - *computing area and perimeter*
  - *ining up the decimal point*
  - *labeling answers*
  - *using manipulatives because they did not have enough experience doing so*
  - *tallying and collecting data*
  - *rounding*
  - *using number sentences*
  - *working with money*
  - *understanding congruency and symmetry*
  - *understanding mathematical vocabulary*
  - *knowing that there could be more than one answer*

- *Students had a difficult time explaining reasoning for math questions. Students need to understand that answers must contain precise measurements or examples to receive full credit for explanations.*

- *Students appeared to enjoy math tasks that related to their personal experiences. They need to be familiar with flipping coins and the concept of chance. The students need to understand the concept that every problem does not necessarily have one definitive outcome. They also need to be familiar with the vocabulary words "tally," "results," "conclusions," and "probability."*

- *It was apparent in scoring the math portion of the test that those students who had had experience (hands on) in recording results enjoyed the tasks and did well. It was apparent that some students had very little experience with manipulatives working on "REAL" problems. They often made a real effort but to say that they understood the tasks would be a gross overstatement.*

- *Mathematical vocabulary needs to be improved — i.e., number sentence, difference, sum, area, perimeter, congruent, symmetry, operations, cost. In many cases the children recieved a "O" because they did know (or didn't read) the terms used in the question.*

- *Remember to include units on all answers (i.e., inches, square inches, centimeters).*

MATHEMATICS — GRADE 5

- *Students had the following difficulties:*
  - *justifying how they do things in mathematics activities*
  - *labeling graphs*
  - *understanding units of measure*
  - *distinguishing between meter and centimeter*
  - *calculating area and perimeter*
  - *transferring ideas into writing*
  - *answering the question*
  - *measuring correctly*
  - *using compass, ruler and protractor*
  - *understanding the vocabulary used*
  - *computing probability*
  - *adding fractions and decimals*
  - *comparing fractions and decimals*
  - *using line plots and data tables*

- *Math activities need to be taught as a series of related questions. We found that children do not relate information gained in a previous question to other subsequent questions.*

MATHEMATICS — GRADE 8

- *Students had the following difficulties:*
  - *following directions*
  - *labeling answers correctly*
  - *answering questions with multiple steps*
  - *justifying their answers*
  - *making generalizations*
  - *collecting and interpreting data*
  - *using precise mathematical vocabulary*
  - *using formulas*
  - *knowing the difference between area and perimeter*
  - *using dimensions properly*

- *Students must not only learn different types of graphs, but when it is appropriate to use certain types. Again, stress labeling axis and titles. Stress x axis, independent variable, y axis, despendent....When students are given a task, they need to be guided to look at the total activity, then to reread for the parts....Students need to use scale drawing to construct blueprints.*

- *Instruction should attend to 1) graphs (title, correct x and y axis, connecting dots for a line graph); 2) probability; 3) fraction decimal ratios; 4) writing area correctly; and 5) reasons for choosing central tendencies.*

- *Graphing: Students need to locate 0 at the correct place on a graph and generally, to be able to distinguish a graph from a chart.*

- *Ratios: Students need to be able to set up equal ratios to find a missing term and conduct the procedure to find the missing term.*

- *Students must answer test questions for <u>all</u> and <u>only all</u> of that for which they are asked.*

- *Students exhibited some proficiency in averaging (and rounding off), plotting data on graphs (plotting of points), and reading a line graph.*

- *More time needs to be spent on statistics, including a) collecting and organizing data; b) types of graphs and all the components; and c) why use the mean or mode etc. — not just give the definition.*

SOCIAL STUDIES — GRADE 3

- *Students are doing pretty well reading maps, but need practice creating a key for a map and using their own key symbols to label a blank map.*

- *Teachers need to be very conscious in their classroom discussions about following student answers with the question, "why?" The students need to be in the habit of explaining the reasons behind their answers.*

- *Work with different styles of graphic organizers. Work on cardinal directions — especially NE, NW, SE, SW. Work on deciphering directions — what does the answer need/have to have. Work on labeling pictures/drawings.*

SOCIAL STUDIES — GRADE 5

- *Events of the past need to be related to current events in the regular class and discussed in small and large groups.*

- *The achievements of Maryland students are encouraging and, at the fifth grade level, often impressive. I expected a greater range of abilities between fifth and eighth grade students.*

- *Need practice in interpreting newspaper headlines.*

- *Need to work on using a key with a map.*

- *Lack of background or content knowledge seems to influence student answers in social studies.*

- *Student did not seem to have an understanding of natural resources and their functions.*

- *Please generate activities which will cause children to question and think critically, to analyze and to relate school to life.*

- *In some cases, it is difficult for the student to move from historic era to present time in order to think and respond.*

SOCIAL STUDIES — GRADE 8

- *Need to work on creating a map using map elements such as date, title, source, key, compass, etc.*

- *Students either seem to lack the background knowledge or were reluctant to express it or weren't sparked to use it; instead, most tried to respond purely from the material presented.*

- *Problem solving skills are very weak; these need to be stressed.*

- *Students seem to rely on recall activities — they are too dependent on these activities. Classroom teachers need to do less of recall assignments and more activities that require creativity and independent thinking (i.e., political cartoons, if you were a merchant/farmer at that time, past to present comparison).*

- *Students should thoroughly read directions and cover everything asked. Students did well on questions that asked them to describe their thoughts and feelings.*

- *The students do not seem to do as well with questions regarding* ***charts and graphs*** *and where* ***multiple answers*** *must be gleaned (analyzed) from the readings. They also do poorly with the "if - then" statements.*

- *Students had difficulty with concepts such as tariffs, quotas, free trade, etc. Work in Econc nics needed!*

SOCIAL STUDIES — ACROSS GRADES

- *Students need to read and follow directions. Teachers should suggest exercises that encourage students to analyze what is requested prior to beginning a task response. Students need to identify a main idea (or ideas) and support it with adequate detail (from prior knowledge and/or text). Students need to be able to summarize, draw a conclusion and/or make a generalization. Students need practice comparing and contrasting. Students need practice labeling graphs, charts, maps, diagrams, drawings, etc. Students need to continue to develop map skills to include map reading, creating keys, understanding cardinal and intermediate directions, using map elements. Students need to transfer information from graphs, cartoons, maps into a written explanation and vice versa.*

SCIENCE — GRADE 3

- *Students should have more experience reading and interpreting directions, labeling answers correctly, and justifying answers by explaining in writing how those answers were attained.*

- *In the science/reading sections, students are having trouble summarizing, relating answers to text, and putting definitions/experiments in their own words.*

- *Students do not seem to understand labeling or drawing to convey scientific information. They also seem to need more practice in comparing and contrasting.*

- *Students were generally enthusiastic about hands-on investigation but were unable to label diagrams correctly. When asked to describe things they observed, they used words like "yucky," "awesome," "weird," and "gross."*

- *Students need to work with different types of graphic organizers and be better able to choose an appropriate one for conveying ideas and information.*

- *Students appeared to be enthusiastic about the "hands on" science activities. They generally could list observations... but often needed to be more specific in describing "properties" that were not observable but which they had to conceptualize.*

SCIENCE — GRADE 5

- *More work needed on providing supporting details to justify answers.*

- *Some children did not comprehend the word "evidence."*

- *Students would benefit from setting up more charts or tables with data from hands-on experiments. Remind students to record units of measurement as well as numerals. Discuss what variables are and how they affect every science experiment you do.*

- *Students often did well making predictions about a given situation and creating a data table.*

- *Students need help 1) making graphs which include all needed information; 2) reading and following directions like "do not forget to label contents"; 3) drawing webs to show relationships (like food web); 4) using information from resources to answer questions in response booklet.*

- *Students have difficulty drawing conclusions from information given. Many do not give evidence from text to back up answers when asked to do so.*

- *Discuss what variables are and how they affect every science experiment you do.*

SCIENCE — GRADE 8

- *Students did not zero in on certain vocabulary words in the tasks such as "layers" in a sketch or "environments" that were to be taken from information sheets. This once again seems to tie in with skills in following directions. Students did not seem to use the context clues to help in figuring out a meaning to help complete the tasks.*

- *Frequently students are asked to explain or justify their answers. It is important for students to use mathematical and scientific terms to support answers. Practice with multiple step directions would be beneficial for students completing tasks on the tests. Underlining key words or specific directions would be a great aid.*

- *Students seemed to have trouble with the task of independently creating their own charts for given information. Also, students did not distinguish pertinent information in the directions for completing a chart.*

SCIENCE — ACROSS GRADES

- *Students have difficulty following directions.*
- *Students need to read tasks carefully.*
- *Students tend to give short, incomplete responses.*
- *Students have difficulty with supporting arguments with details from prior knowledge or personal experience.*
- *Metacognition explanations are difficult for students or are unfamiliar to them.*
- *Problems putting thoughts into written formats.*

General Interest — Across Grades and Content Areas

- *Students need work on paraphrasing, summarizing (grade 3)*

- *Overall, the 3rd graders do not read and respond to the whole question or set of directions. Also, they need to be trained to answer one question, then go on to the next question as a **new** experience which **might** require them to refer back to previous information. (grade 3)*

- *One frequent problem was not providing **valid** reasons for their reasons "why" (ex: it was nice, good, great, etc.) — need more critical responses. Need more focus on story maps — most students wrote the exact information for both maps, also more attention should be given to how characters **change** throughout a story. (grade 3)*

- *Children seem to have difficulty applying information learned from expository text. When children are asked to explain their thinking, they seem to be at "at loss for words." (grade 3)*

- *Many students only partially followed the directions or were able to explain what they had done. (grade 3)*

- *Students often listed specific details when asked to list main ideas — differentiating between these two needs to be stressed. The overall difficulty many students had was in reading, understanding and following written directions. (grade 3)*

- *Students need to be encouraged to elaborate their answers and use text examples to support their answers. Teachers may find it helpful to give students rubrics and allow them to score performance tasks so that they have a better idea of what is expected. (grade 3)*

- *Great deal of difficulty analyzing how they did something and/or why certain strategies are useful; difficulty following written directions of substantial length. (grade 5)*

- *Try to teach students how to read prompts and follow directions (written). Also, students need to answer the questions ASKED. (grade 5)*

- *The most important thing that I feel needs to be stressed statewide is that the children must write good, well-constructed sentences, not just in language arts, but also in social studies and other content areas. (grade 5)*

- *Tasks which involve reasoning and drawing conclusions need to be emphasized more in curriculum throughout the year. Purposeful curriculum is essential in that students see a direct correlation between what they learn in class and everyday life situations, as well as what they are being testing on. (grade 5)*

- *Teachers in all areas should occasionally grade papers for more than one concern (i.e. content, writing, language). Youngsters may benefit by having samples of both acceptable and unacceptable responses. Asking youngsters to evaluate sample responses may be beneficial. (grade 5)*

- *Some type of morale boosting needs to be injected into the testing program. Many students voice negative comments about the testing process and themselves in relation to the testing process. Some of the negativity seems educator and parent initiated in origin. The growth that can be witnessed in MSPAP in just one year is commendable. Continued improvements throughout the next few years will certainly quiet the critics of the MSDE. (grade 5)*

- *Many students don't read the complete question before answering. They seem to choose one or two key words from the question and begin writing while missing the main idea. The questions are designed to help the students make connections from question to question. They often miss those connections. (grade 5)*

- *Generally, students seem to be able to find creative, thoughtful solutions to problems. However, they often reach for a creative answer to a problem rather than the correct answer to the question being asked. The rich detail that is present in their writing is negated by their lack of attention to the appropriate task. Rather than examining and answering the question presented, they seem to key into one word in the question and write about it. Often these tangents make it seem as if students are answering a question that is not on the page. Overall, students' power of description and use of vocabulary is very good, but they need work on their thinking skills. (grade 5)*

➤ *When I examined the responses which were incorrect more closely, I came to the following conclusions:*

1) *Many students do not know how to read a test question, i.e., "What does this question want from me?" Some students mistake "why" for "who" or "how." Other students will repeat the question or part of the question as their responses. Still another problem is that students offer a response which does not refer back to the appropriate resources.*

2) *Many students do not know how to express their thoughts on paper. Some of the wording utilized in responses was incoherent. I would like to see students learn how to write what they think. I would also like to see them analyzing what they have just written even if it is a short sentence.*

3) *Overall, I was very impressed with the 5th grade handwriting skills. I would like to see a general improvement however in those students with illegible writing. I was surprised to find so many correct responses amongst the sloppy, twisted, and sometimes dislocated lines.*

Really, I was impressed overall with the students' ability to reason and respond. We <u>do</u> have a long way to go....Nevertheless, if students learn to take a question, tear it apart, analyze each segment, use reasoning to find the answer, and finally place that response on paper in a legible manner, test scores just might improve. (grade 5)

➤ *Generally, application to actual situations in an on-going basis will give students the skills and opportunities to master what they learn, i.e. — finding perimeter, area, investigating, using data to support a position, what constitutes evidence, etc. (grade 5)*

➤ *Students for the most part need to learn to follow a series of written directions independently. (grade 5)*

➤ *Students need to be exact in stating facts. The word "differ" denotes more than one side. (grade 8)*

➤ *Give the students exercises in reading and following directions (oral and written directions; students repeat and rewrite; recheck to see that directions have been followed). Help the students to recognize when a title or heading is appropriate. For example, a poster should have a heading so that those who refer to the poster are aware of the subject being discussed. (grade 8)*

- *Students do not follow directions — they take things too literally and are unwilling to learn with the materials **at hand** by using their thinking skills. (grade 8)*

- *Students need to develop strategies to use when solving problems which develop spatial concepts and deductive reasoning. They also need work to determine the probability of an event or anything (Students really had problems with this). (grade 8)*

- *The students are not justifying or explaining as well as it's assumed that they will. Students should be reminded to stay within the subject presented when they answer. (grade 8)*

- *Students seem to have great difficulty with high level critical thinking skills (i.e., synthesis, evaluation). I would plan more activities in class that require students to formulate plans and find alternate solutions to problems. (grade 8)*

- *Many careless mistakes have been made because the youngsters just haven't read or followed directions. For instance, when asked for examples, many students only made one point. Thus, that response could only be awarded partial credit. (grade 8)*

- *Budgeting time to accomplish a task (especially in order to avoid frustration with a time limit — most of the students who ran out of time had this as their downfall. Students need work on generalizing from data to draw conclusions. (grade 8)*

- *Most students seemed willing to put forth a great amount of work for a test in which most of them saw little personal investments or profit. This willingness definitely has its limits, though. The great majority of students gave up the effort towards the end of the week. (grade 8)*

- *Students do not read the questions carefully. Often they do not answer the question asked. Students need to follow directions to the letter (i.e. rounding math answers when asked to). (grade 8)*

POSTSCRIPT

The success of MSPAP in fostering school improvement depends in great part upon teachers sharing what they are learning about what students know and can do. Do consider getting more involved in some way in Maryland's school improvement initiatives, and keep the teacher-to-teacher talk going!

APPENDIX A

TEACHER TO TEACHER TALK: STUDENT PERFORMANCE ON MSPAP

In the course of scoring one part of the 1992 MSPAP, you have probably made a number of observations about what Maryland students appear to know and be able to do. Please take a few moments to respond to the question below. Your responses will then be collated and shared with other educators around the state.

On the basis of your experience scoring MSPAP, what are a few impressions that you would most like to share with other teachers about student performance?

(e.g., what are some things that you see students generally doing very well or very poorly? What kinds of activities seem to generate interest and enthusiasm, and which do not? Which outcomes are students generally demonstrating, and which not? What sorts of things should instruction attend to, based on what you've seen?)

Name (optional) _____

Cluster _____ Grade _____ Team _____

Content Area(s) scored _____

Please use other side if necessary. Thank you for your feedback.