

**(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools (40 points)**

The extent to which—

- (i) The State has a charter school law that does not prohibit or effectively inhibit increasing the number of high-performing charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State, measured (as set forth in Appendix B) by the percentage of total schools in the State that are allowed to be charter schools or otherwise restrict student enrollment in charter schools;
- (ii) The State has laws, statutes, regulations, or guidelines regarding how charter school authorizers approve, monitor, hold accountable, reauthorize, and close charter schools; in particular, whether authorizers require that student achievement (as defined in this notice) be one significant factor, among others, in authorization or renewal; encourage charter schools that serve student populations that are similar to local district student populations, especially relative to high-need students (as defined in this notice); and have closed or not renewed ineffective charter schools;
- (iii) The State's charter schools receive (as set forth in Appendix B) equitable funding compared to traditional public schools, and a commensurate share of local, State, and Federal revenues;
- (iv) The State provides charter schools with funding for facilities (for leasing facilities, purchasing facilities, or making tenant improvements), assistance with facilities acquisition, access to public facilities, the ability to share in bonds and mill levies, or other supports; and the extent to which the State does not impose any facility-related requirements on charter schools that are stricter than those applied to traditional public schools; and
- (v) The State enables LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools (as defined in this notice) other than charter schools.

*In the text box below, the State shall describe its current status in meeting the criterion. The narrative or attachments shall also include, at a minimum, the evidence listed below, and how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State's success in meeting the criterion. The narrative and attachments may also include any additional information the State believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. For attachments included in the Appendix, note in the narrative the location where the attachments can be found.*

Evidence for (F)(2)(i):

- A description of the State's applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- The number of charter schools allowed under State law and the percentage this represents of the total number of schools in the State.
- The number and types of charter schools currently operating in the State.

Evidence for (F)(2)(ii):

- A description of the State’s approach to charter school accountability and authorization, and a description of the State’s applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- For each of the last five years:
  - The number of charter school applications made in the State.
  - The number of charter school applications approved.
  - The number of charter school applications denied and reasons for the denials (academic, financial, low enrollment, other).
  - The number of charter schools closed (including charter schools that were not reauthorized to operate).

Evidence for (F)(2)(iii):

- A description of the State’s applicable statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- A description of the State’s approach to charter school funding, the amount of funding passed through to charter schools per student, and how those amounts compare with traditional public school per-student funding allocations.

Evidence for (F)(2)(iv):

- A description of the State’s applicable statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- A description of the statewide facilities supports provided to charter schools, if any.

Evidence for (F)(2)(v):

- A description of how the State enables LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools (as defined in this notice) other than charter schools.

*Recommended maximum response length: Six pages*

### **Section (F)(2)(i): Charter School Expansion**

Charter schools are an integral part of Maryland’s public education landscape. The State’s charter schools have often served at the forefront of innovation and have represented much-needed choices for families who previously had few or no options for their children. As the charter movement grows in Maryland, the State will focus its efforts on ensuring not only the quantity of its charter schools but also their quality. Maryland will use Race to the Top funds to help advance the crucial goals of (1) making sure that only

high-quality charter schools exist and thrive across the State; (2) creating incentives for charter schools to be used as a school turnaround strategy; and (3) improving the transparency and consistency of the charter school approval process.

Maryland enacted its charter school law — Maryland Education Code, Article 9 §101, et. seq. — in 2003. It establishes charter schools as alternative means within public school systems to provide innovative learning opportunities and creative approaches to improve students’ education. Maryland has no charter school cap, nor does the State restrict student enrollment, and the State encourages and supports the expansion of charter schools every year.

Forty-two schools are currently serving 11,832 students in six LEAs. The following list documents the annual increase of charter schools in Maryland since the charter school law passed in 2003.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Charter Schools Opened</b>	<b>Types of Charter Schools — Non-LEAs (County Boards serve as Authorizers)</b>
2005	16	9 new — 7 conversions
2006	7	5 new — 2 conversions
2007	9	6 new — 3 conversions
2008	4	3 new — 1 conversion
2009	9	3 new — 6 conversions
<b>Total</b>	45 (three closed; please see Section (F)(2)(ii) for details)	26 new — 19 conversions

In 2010, four new charter schools will open their doors, bringing the total number of educational options for Maryland families to 46. This represents 3 percent of all public schools in the State.

As the table below demonstrates, charter school growth in Maryland has risen since the law passed in 2003 at an average rate of six schools annually. Maryland’s growth rate exceeds that of some of the states identified in 2010 by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools as having the strongest policy environments for charter schools, including the District of Columbia,

Massachusetts, and Georgia. If Maryland continues on this track, which is expected, the State will have as many or more charter schools in the next 10 years as some comparable states have had at similar points in their histories.

Charter School Law Ranking	States	Year Law Adopted	Number of Charter Schools
1	Minnesota	1991 (19 yrs)	168
2	District of Columbia	1995 (15 yrs)	83
3	California	1992 (18 yrs)	750
4	Georgia	1993 (17 yrs)	62
5	Colorado	1993 (17 yrs)	133
6	Massachusetts	1993 (17 yrs)	61
7	Utah	1998 (12 yrs)	51
8	New York	1998 (12 yrs)	94
9	Louisiana	1995 (15 yrs)	66
10	Arizona	1994 (16 yrs)	464
30	Maryland	2003 (7 yrs)	42

This growth rate demonstrates Maryland’s commitment to charter school expansion and its support in offering high-quality education options to Maryland’s families. The State fully recognizes that Maryland is still in an early developmental stage in the

evolution of its charter school law, and that increasing Maryland’s current rate of charter school growth will require continuous efforts to encourage improvements and changes.

School systems in Maryland are beginning to recognize the benefits that charter schools can create for their students, families, and school communities. Although charter schools are still a relatively new concept in Maryland, many districts have begun to embrace charter schools as a launching pad for reform. For example, Prince George’s County Public Schools created the “Portfolio of School Choices,” a request for proposals (RFP)–driven initiative that invites charter school proposals and contract school proposals (designed similar to charter schools) that address district and community needs. Baltimore City and Anne Arundel County have put similar initiatives in place.

Maryland’s emphasis on and action toward charter/transformation school expansion and excellence using Race to the Top funds, outlined in Section (F)(2)(ii), brings the State even closer to *realizing* the possibilities of high-quality charter schools. Although much work remains to be done to create a culture in which charter schools can be valued widely as change agents for educational systems — and as models for transforming schools into more innovative, autonomous, and accountable choice options for families — there can be no doubt of the benefits to Maryland families brought by the charter school law. Now, as Maryland prepares for even greater expansion, the State proposes using Race to the Top funds to enact a new policy that will strengthen adherence to the Maryland charter school law by creating more transparency in the charter approval process, offering incentives to use charter schools in turnaround efforts, and ensuring that charter schools operate with as much flexibility as the law currently allows.

### **Section (F)(2)(ii): Charter School Accountability**

Maryland’s charter school law identifies the responsibilities of public charter schools and authorizers, which in Maryland are the local boards of education. Following are highlights of the law; the full statute is included as Appendix 51.

## **Accountability**

*(§9-102) “A public charter school operates under the supervision of the public chartering authority from which its charter is granted and in accordance with its charter, and except as provided in §9-106 of this title, the provisions of law and regulation governing other public schools.”*

*(§9-104) “The county board of education (as the primary authorizer) shall review the application and render a decision within 120 days of receipt of the application.”*

*(§9-106-c) “A waiver may not be granted from provisions of law or regulation relating to: audit requirements, the measurement of student achievement, including all assessments required for other public schools, and the health, safety, or civil rights of a student or an employee of the charter school.”*

*(§9-107) “Responsibilities of public chartering authority: granting charters, authorizing process and application, ensure that operators of the charter school are informed of the human, fiscal and organizational capacity needed to fulfill the school’s responsibilities.”*

*(§9-110) “Each county board shall develop a public charter school policy and submit it to the State Board which shall include guidelines and procedures regarding: evaluation of public charter schools, revocation of a charter, reporting requirements and financial, programmatic, or compliance audits of public charter schools”*

Since the inception of the charter school law, Maryland has provided technical assistance to charter school developers, operators, and authorizers to support the implementation of accountability measures and related policies through the Office of School Innovation at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

The State has written several publications to assist stakeholders in the development of charter schools in Maryland, as follows. These publications serve as models for each authorizing LEA to adopt for its own community.

- ***Maryland Charter School Model Policy and Resource Guide:*** This guide provides information regarding the implementation of the Maryland charter school law and provides authorizers guidance in developing charter school policies and related procedures. This includes information about the development of the charter school application, the charter school agreement, flow charts that help explain the steps needed to have a successful and smooth charter school approval process, and questions and answers to assist authorizers in answering the questions of charter school applicants. The model application includes a section titled “Student Performance Accountability” that requires developers to state clearly how they will assess and report student performance progress and how they will ensure that they are meeting performance standards.
- ***Maryland Model Charter School Application Guidelines:*** This manual expands on the charter school application, includes details and forms that can be used for a template for charter school developers to prepare their application, and provides a framework for authorizing LEAs to use in the development of their application process. This model application also includes a document titled “The Accountability Plan,” which contains sections on the development of the school’s goals and performance objectives; indicators of performance, promotion, and graduation standards and processes; targets; assessment tools; processes to measure and report performance and progress; and ways to identify performance gaps and use the school-improvement planning process.
- ***Maryland Charter School Founder’s Manual:*** This manual provides charter school developers or founders a wealth of information needed to start and successfully launch a charter school in Maryland. It provides a framework for

developers, beginning with understanding the capacity needed to start a charter school, and guides them through a strategic planning process that results in the integration of many accountability elements and a “to do” approach for school implementation.

- ***Special Education in Charter Schools: A Resource Primer for the State of Maryland:*** This resource guide provides charter school stakeholders with an understanding of the laws and requirements related to providing educational services to students with disabilities and to assist in the conceptual alignment of the school’s goals and structure with special education services. Accountability measures related to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act compliance are included as an integral part in the successful implementation of the charter school program.
- ***Maryland Model Performance Contract:*** This document provides a template for authorizers to use in developing an open, comprehensive, clear, and transparent process through which charter schools can be successful in planning and operating a high-quality charter school. The manual includes many toolkits that can be used to increase the successful implementation of oversight, monitoring, reporting, intervention, and renewal/revocation processes needed to ensure accountability.
- ***Charter School Closure: The Authorizer’s Role in Ensuring an Orderly Dissolution:*** This publication provides the guidance needed to organize school closure in the event of a contract revocation of a charter school.

Maryland believes that these documents have laid a strong foundation for charter school authorization, accountability, and renewal. As the table below explains, in the past five school years, three charter schools have closed and 45 applications have been denied for incompleteness and lack of quality (approximately half of those that applied). The three charter schools closed due to issues not directly related to student achievement:

- The first school to close did so at the end of its first year of operation in 2006. The authorizer’s main concern regarding this school was its lack of financial accountability.
- The second school closed after two years of operation in 2007 because of facility issues.

- The most recent closing of a charter school (in 2009) stemmed from the concern that the school was not meeting its stated mission to serve as an educational alternative program for troubled youth.

Since the closing of these charter schools, Maryland has delivered additional technical assistance opportunities to assist charter developers and operators to implement measures to ensure effective and efficient charter school management.

The following table describes the history of charter schools in Maryland.

School Year	# of Applications	# of Approvals	# of Denials and Reason	# of Withdrawals	# Closed and Reason
2002–03	1	1	0	0	1 (reason: established before Maryland charter school law)
2003–04 *	0	0	0	0	0
2004–05	15	15	0	0	0
2005–06	8	7	1 (reason: lack of quality)		0
2006–07	9	9	0	0	2 (reasons: governance and management concerns; lack of adequate facilities)
2007–08	26	5	20 (reasons: incomplete applications and lack of quality)	2	0
2008–09	22	9	13 (reasons: incomplete applications and lack of quality)	0	1 (reason: inability to fulfill mission)
2009–10	15	4	11 (reasons: incomplete applications and lack of quality)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

\*Maryland charter school law passed.

Although Maryland is committed to increasing the number of charter schools, it also is deeply invested in the development of charter school quality to ensure that only academically and fiscally sound charter schools exist across its 24 LEAs. The State realizes that providing model applications, performance contracts, and other resources may not be enough. For example, external groups have noted that Maryland’s charter authorization and renewal process is not always transparent and that the State must do more to ensure that authorizers are incorporating effective processes to support the establishment and continuation of high-quality charter schools. As a result, Maryland has developed a policy to increase transparency in all chartering processes. The State Board of Education is scheduled to adopt the overall policy during the June 22, 2010, board meeting. The policy draft is included in Appendix 52.

Race to the Top funds give the State additional opportunities to carry out the intent of the new policy so that charter schools are true partners in Maryland’s education reform strategy. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the State’s persistently lowest-achieving schools. As described below, charter schools have a role in the turnaround strategy both as one of the options allowed in the Race to the Top guidelines and as a way to enable LEAs to develop portfolios of schools with innovative approaches.

Using the Race to the Top funds, Maryland proposes to implement the following strategies and tactics upon receipt of Race to the Top funds and continuing for the four-year grant:

- The State will partner with two school systems that have the greatest number of low-achieving schools and provide an incentive for these systems to convert two of each LEAs schools in restructuring to charter schools. The school systems will be able to secure charter school operators with proven success to reopen the schools as public charter schools by 2012–13 after thoughtful planning with the operator, the LEA, the Breakthrough Center (described in Section (E)(2)), and the school community.
- Maryland also will develop a partnership initiative between these four schools in restructuring, which will be selected to convert to four “fresh start” charter schools and four existing high-performing charter schools. This partnership is intended

to help develop capacity for improvement by providing opportunities for demonstration of best practice, coaching, mentoring, and joint learning.

- Maryland will coordinate this effort through the Office of School Innovation as well as the Breakthrough Center (described in Section (E)) as part of the State's strategy to turn around its persistently lowest-achieving schools.
- The State will design Maryland's Charter School Quality Standards and implement related learning experiences that will be shared with all charter schools and authorizers. These standards will serve as the foundation of an assessment framework that will be specially designed to enable charter schools to conduct self-assessments (similar to the regional accreditation process) every three years to help guide the schools' improvement and strategic development efforts. Maryland will work with the charter school community and LEA authorizers to develop these standards as the backbone of charter school development, application, and renewal processes.
- Maryland will share these standards, learning experiences, and self-assessment frameworks with LEAs, with the goal of serving as a vehicle for learning and possible replication.
- Maryland will strengthen the charter school authorizing processes:
  - The State will link the Charter School Quality Standards to the model application, performance contract, and renewal processes.
  - The State will work closely to with LEAs to implement the new State Charter School Policy, which will provide specific guidance to help authorizers accomplish the following:
    - Post application, review process, and assessment rubric online to ensure an open and transparent charter school approval process.
    - Modify charter school applications and performance contracts to contain explanations of how the school will achieve academic growth for all students, as well as signed statements by the charter developer and the authorizer committing to certain flexibilities from district regulations in exchange for charter accountability.

- Provide required flexibilities of school system procedures and include these flexibilities in the performance contract and in its overall charter school policy, which speaks to the willingness of the school system to negotiate flexibilities in collective bargaining agreements that could affect the implementation of charter school innovations.
    - Create performance contracts that clearly spell out roles and responsibilities for the authorizer and the charter school operator, the evaluation and renewal process, and any reporting requirements.
  - The State will hold annual statewide training sessions for authorizers and developers on how to use the Charter School Quality Standards to approve high-quality applications, develop performance contracts, and implement effective renewal processes.

These strategies have been summarized into three key goals to guide implementation efforts.

<b>GOAL I: THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION (OSI) ALONG WITH THE TITLE I OFFICE AND THE BREAKTHROUGH CENTER, WILL DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP WITH TWO SCHOOL SYSTEMS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF LOW-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS TO CONVERT SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING TO CHARTER SCHOOLS.</b>		
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
A. Form partnership with two school systems to implement an alternative governance model using charter schools as an option for four schools in restructuring.	Partnership formed and schools selected in 2010–11	OSI, Title I Office, and Breakthrough Center
B. School systems use incentive funds to support improvement activities, including the recruitment and contracting of charter operators and the planning of the conversion of these schools to charters, and to assist with needed transition activities to inform and involve stakeholders.	2010–11	OSI, Title I Office, Breakthrough Center, and LEAs
C. Four high-performing charter schools are selected and initiate their	2010–11	OSI, Breakthrough Center, LEAs,

**GOAL I: THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION (OSI) ALONG WITH THE TITLE I OFFICE AND THE BREAKTHROUGH CENTER, WILL DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP WITH TWO SCHOOL SYSTEMS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF LOW-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS TO CONVERT SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING TO CHARTER SCHOOLS.**

<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
partnership with the four schools in restructuring.		and schools
D. Four schools in restructuring begin planning year with charter school operator, LEA, MSDE, and school community.	2011–12	OSI, Title I Office, Breakthrough Center, and LEAs
E. Four schools reopen as “fresh start” charter schools.	2012–13	OSI, Title I Office, Breakthrough Center, and LEAs

**GOAL II: THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION WILL ADVANCE THE WORK OF DESIGNING MARYLAND’S CHARTER SCHOOL QUALITY STANDARDS TO DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS TO CONDUCT SELF-ASSESSMENT EVERY THREE YEARS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.**

<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
A. Design quality standards for charter schools in Maryland with feedback and participation from Maryland’s charter school community as well as national experts (by January 2011).	2010–11	OSI with consultants and charter school Stakeholders
B. Design, publish, and distribute an implementation guide to all charter schools and LEA charter school offices.	2011–12	OSI with consultants
C. Provide training to charter schools on the implementation of the quality standards, and to LEA charter school liaisons.	2011–14	OSI
D. Develop the evaluation model for this project.	2010–11	External project evaluation
E. Design the self-assessment process and implement a piloting incentive.	2010–11	External project evaluation
F. Work to align charter school accountability process with charter school quality standards (see table for Goal III below).	2010–11	OSI
G. Provide training to all charter schools on conducting the self-assessment process so that it can be implemented statewide.	2012–14	OSI
H. Develop teams that will help support the implementation process.	2012–13	OSI and selected schools
I. Assess how charter schools have used the quality standards.	2013–14	External project evaluation

**GOAL II: THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION WILL ADVANCE THE WORK OF DESIGNING MARYLAND'S CHARTER SCHOOL QUALITY STANDARDS TO DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS TO CONDUCT SELF-ASSESSMENT EVERY THREE YEARS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.**

<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
J. Develop and disseminate publication of the self-assessment process.	2013–14	OSI with consultants

**GOAL III: STRENGTHEN THE CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING PROCESSES**

<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
A. State Board of Education passes new policy to ensure transparency and openness in charter school authorization and renewal processes.	June 2010	OSI, MSDE staff, and State Board
B. Provide statewide training on the implementation of the new policy.	Fall 2010	OSI, LEA charter school liaisons, County Boards, Superintendents, charter school operators and leaders
C. Align new State Charter School policy with charter school publications and resources.	2010–11	OSI
D. Charter schools opening in 2011–12 and those having their contract renewal in 2011–12 will be the first to implement the new performance contracts and renewal documents.	2011–12	OSI, charter school liaisons
E. Hold annual statewide training sessions for authorizers, current charter schools, and developers.	2011–14	OSI
F. Develop evaluation to determine how the new State policy has been implemented statewide.	2013–14	External project evaluator

The new Charter School Quality Standards will be embedded in every LEA’s application, performance contract with the charter schools, and renewal documents to provide a more uniform and coherent way to ensure charter school quality throughout the State.

Maryland’s new charter school policy will provide guidance to all charter schools and LEAs to ensure an unprecedented level of consistency and openness in the charter school approval and renewal processes — addressing a key deficiency that may have unintentionally led to uncertainty in the charter school process. With the assistance of Race to the Top funds in these endeavors, the State will ensure that the charter school movement continues to grow and thrive in Maryland, and that the quality of Maryland’s innovative charter schools is just as important as quantity.

#### **Section (F)(2)(iii): Equitable Funding for Charter Schools**

Maryland’s charter school law requires that charter schools receive commensurate funding (Education Code 9-§109, Disbursement of Funds; see Appendix 51). The Maryland State Board of Education has established a definition for commensurate funding. This definition has resulted in the establishment of a funding formula for charter schools so that charter school students receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as their peers in non-charter schools in the same school district. State and federal program funding also is guaranteed to charter schools as authorizers, and charter school operators are reminded of this requirement every fall. Maryland State offices administering such programs ensure that appropriate funding is available to charter schools based on the school’s eligibility for such programs.

#### **Section (F)(2)(iv): Facilities Funding for Charter Schools**

Maryland currently provides several statewide facility supports to charter schools. For example, charter schools housed in LEA-owned properties are eligible for State Public School Construction Program capital funding (COMAR 13A.01.02.03) (see Appendix 53). State operating dollars provided to charter schools may be used for facilities expenses, and the State does not impose

any facility-related requirements on charter schools that are stricter than those applied to traditional public schools. In addition, the State Department of Education provides technical support to charter school operators regarding facilities as requested. The State Superintendent of Schools reviews and approves construction plans for charter schools as required for traditional public schools (see Appendix 53). Maryland recognizes that charter schools face different facilities burdens than non-charter schools, and the State is committed to seeking and supporting opportunities for legislative changes that will increase facility supports to charter schools directly.

### **Section (F)(2)(v): Innovative, Autonomous Schools**

MSDE has a proven record of expanding innovative initiatives, creating tailored educational programs, and making decisions that promote new and exciting school innovations that improve public education in Maryland. The State's national recognition confirms these successes.

For example, the Maryland State Board of Education voted unanimously to support Senate Bill 714, Education — Residential Boarding Education Program-At-Risk Youth. This bill established a Maryland boarding school under the supervision of MSDE. The SEED School opened its doors in August 2008 to serve Maryland students who are determined to be at risk and disadvantaged. It had 80 students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade in 2008–09 and 160 students in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades in 2009–10. The program's governing board reports annually to MSDE and has demonstrated success in established accountability areas, such as academic standards, fiscal issues, and program growth. Please see Section (F)(3) for a description of the statute that created and governs the school.

The opportunity created by this type of program serves as an advantage to at-risk students from across the State of Maryland to begin to realize their potential as college-bound students. This school also offers disadvantaged students an opportunity to access a range of support services and opportunities to help ensure academic and social success. Such a school adds to Maryland's national reputation for innovation and creativity in public education. In fact, the SEED School was featured recently on CBS News' *60 Minutes* program.

In addition, LEAs have wide latitude to open schools in such areas as dropout prevention, recovery of dropouts, and academically disadvantaged students. LEAs operate a variety of alternative schools that have various paradigms. One such school, the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, opened in 2009 in Baltimore City to serve approximately 600 young women in grades 6–12 when it becomes fully enrolled. The school uses a single-gender approach to customize the education program to better serve the interests and needs of students, using a holistic model to guide their development in several areas: academic, social-emotional, and physical.

Maryland's 24 LEAs also experiment with innovative school models. For example, Baltimore City Public Schools began experimenting with innovation schools in 2001 to redesign, transform, and revitalize neighborhood high schools chosen for this effort. Each school is operated by a nonprofit governing board with the authority to oversee the implementation of the reform efforts in the schools. The model has to be approved, and there is no entrance requirement. Students are admitted through a lottery process.

Baltimore City also has transformation schools, with specific themes and a unique curriculum designed for college readiness or alternative programs. Operated by experienced, independent education entities, these schools provide students and parents with additional choices for their grades 6–12 education. Presently, there are 12 transformation schools in Baltimore City, and the expectation is for 24 more to open in the next four years. Students are admitted through a lottery process. Principals of all Baltimore City schools are provided the following autonomies, regardless of the type of school: budget, personnel, day-to-day operations, and professional development from outside entities.

Maryland believes that a portfolio approach to school design will allow innovation to flourish; state support for the types of schools described above is robust.