



Investigative Summary 26-0013-I

The SEED School of Maryland

Unsubstantiated Allegation that an Administrator Attempted to Inappropriately Influence the Maryland School Report Card Survey

October 7, 2026

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Maryland Office of the Inspector General for Education



Investigation Overview: OIGE Case No. 26-0013-I

The Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) received an anonymous complaint alleging administrative interference in the Maryland State Report Card survey by a Maryland SEED School administrator (hereinafter referred to as “Administrator”).¹ The complaint alleged that the Administrator instructed students to provide favorable survey responses during an assembly the week of April 13, 2026, and deselected eligible staff members likely to give unfavorable responses from survey participation.

Why did the OIGE perform this investigation?

The Maryland School Report Card provides public accountability and transparency by rating schools on a 1-to-5 star rating scale based on academic metrics and climate surveys, helping parents evaluate school performance, aiding administrators in addressing safety and support needs, and ensuring state intervention resources reach the appropriate campuses. Manipulation of these survey results would distort public data, mislead parents about their children’s learning environment, conceal systemic issues, such as low teacher retention or safety risks, and improperly redirect critical education funding away from schools that need it.

What did the OIGE find?

The OIGE found no evidence to support the allegations. Witnesses interviewed consistently reported that students were not instructed to provide favorable responses and that the Administrator merely instructed the students to take the survey seriously. The Administrator did not “deselect” eligible staff members likely to give unfavorable responses from survey participation. Individual administrators do not have the ability to “deselect” the staff members the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) selects to take the survey. MSDE controls staff eligibility and login credentials for the survey.

What is the impact?

MSDE requires the Maryland School Report Card survey to be administered consistent with the process for state-mandated tests. While no manipulation was uncovered at the Maryland SEED School, the investigation highlighted a potential gap in state testing security protocols. OIGE found that, as a matter of practice, testing coordinators and proctors sign MSDE non-disclosure

¹ Pursuant to OIGE policy and practice, identifying details for subjects and witnesses are omitted and/or generalized in all public reports to safeguard privacy and confidential reporting channels. Standardized non-identifiable terminology is employed in place of specific official titles or personal names throughout this report.

agreements (NDAs) prohibiting them from influencing responses. The form does not explicitly require school administrators to sign the NDAs, leaving executive oversight unaddressed.

What are OIGE's recommendations?

The OIGE recommends that MSDE update its NDA to require school administrators to sign the NDA. This will address executive oversight of testing and provide an additional accountability measure.

Introduction

On April 20, 2026, OIGE received an anonymous complaint alleging administrative interference in the Maryland School Report Card Survey at the Maryland SEED School. The Complaint alleged that the Administrator instructed students during an assembly the week of April 13, 2026, to give favorable survey responses and deselected staff members from participating in the staff survey who were likely to give negative feedback.

Background: The Maryland School Report Card

The Maryland School Report Card serves as an accountability and climate assessment tool for parents, educators, and community members. First mandated under the Every Student Succeeds Act and Maryland State law (COMAR 13A.01.04.06 and Protect Our Schools Act of 2017), the report card incorporates non-academic criteria, such as climate indicators, alongside academic performance metrics. It measures public schools on a 100-point scale and assigns them a 1-to-5-star rating based on academic performance, graduation rates, attendance, and school climate assessments (including student and staff surveys). The survey portion accounts for 10 out of 100 total points on a school's report card (7 points derived from student responses and 3 points from staff responses).

The purpose of the report card is to inform parents and families, guide educational resources, promote accountability, and track school climate. It provides parents data on topics ranging from safety and climate to student growth, which can be used to help them make informed choices about their children's education. State and local school systems (local educational agencies or "LEAs") use the report card to identify underperforming schools that require extra funding, instructional support, targeted interventions, or administrative help. With regard to school climate, the survey captures non-academic risks like classroom support, student-teacher relationships, and staff retention – giving leaders insights into workplace attrition and campus safety. The report card also promotes accountability by holding administrators and local school boards publicly responsible for student outcomes, teacher support, and overall school environment.

A manipulated report could mislead families, conceal systemic failures, erode public trust, and potentially cause state resources to be misallocated. False or slanted responses (such as coaching students or excluding dissatisfied staff) would deprive parents of an accurate picture of the risks, climate, or support level their children face daily. A skewed metric could mask underlying issues like teacher burnout, high staff turnover, bullying, or unsafe environments, decreasing the opportunity for administrative intervention. Lastly, a false report card could undermine confidence in the State's official ratings and could potentially keep a struggling school from receiving critical state grants, intervention programs, or staff support.

Background: The SEED School of Maryland

The Seed School of Maryland is a public college-preparatory boarding school located in Baltimore City. It is the only public, tuition-free boarding school in Maryland, serving approximately 400 students in grades 6 through 12. The school opened in 2008 through state legislation under the governance of the SEED Foundation and the MSDE. It provides an intensive, 24-hour educational environment and its mission is to prepare first-generation and underrepresented students for high school graduation, college success, and lifelong career growth.

Admission to the SEED School is managed through a statewide public lottery system, with eligibility restricted to Maryland families earning under 250% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The school relies on public funding supplemented by private charitable contributions to support its unique academic and student-life model.

For the 2024–2025 school year, the school received a 3-out-of-5-star rating. Its latest Maryland state report card can be found [here](#). At the time of this report’s publication, the 2025-2026 Maryland state report card rating was not yet available.

Background: School Report Card Survey Administration at SEED School

SEED students in grades 6-11 are eligible to take the survey. The survey must be completed on campus during school hours under the supervision of proctors trained by the school testing coordinator. MSDE generates login credentials using enrollment data from early in the calendar year. Students who enroll after this initial window may still participate using a limited number of generic logins, provided they did not take the survey at their previous school. Students are expected to treat the process with the same integrity as any state-mandated test, and school administrators are explicitly prohibited from administering the survey.

Staff members may complete their portion of the survey individually or in a group setting, but they must finish it on the day it is started. Participation is limited strictly to staff whose names and logins are provided by MSDE. Unlike the student protocol, no generic logins are available for staff hired after the initial list is generated.

Investigation Conclusions

Conclusion No. 1

No evidence was found indicating that the Administrator influenced or attempted to influence student responses on the Maryland School Report Card survey.

Interviews with administrative staff present during student gatherings during the week of April 13, 2026 and responsible for survey oversight revealed no evidence that the Administrator coached students on their responses. Rather, the investigation found that the SEED School gathered students on April 16, 2016 on two occasions – in the morning to unveil a new LED screen and again in the afternoon for a wellness fair. During the unveiling of the LED screen, the Maryland School Report Card Survey was discussed with students because it was being administered later that morning. Specifically, the School Testing Coordinator provided log-in instructions and the Administrator reiterated the importance of taking the survey seriously. In doing so, the Administrator cited roommate compatibility as an example of an issue outside the survey’s scope; this comment was meant to clarify the survey’s intended function, not to direct or influence student responses. OIGE reached this conclusion based on the uniform account provided by all interviewed staff, coupled with the absence of any corroborating evidence demonstrating an intent to coerce or guide student answers.

Conclusion No. 2

The Administrator did not alter staff survey eligibility.

The investigation confirmed that MSDE directly manages survey administration files and eligibility rosters via State Assigned Teacher Identifiers, preventing school administrators from deselecting eligible staff. During the 2025-2026 school year, 43 of 47 eligible SEED school staff completed the survey. OIGE determined that the remaining four non-respondents no longer worked at the SEED school during the survey administration window. Thus, their State Assigned Teacher Identifiers were “inactive.”

Recommendations

The OIGE recommends that MSDE implement [NDAs](#) for school administrators. Specifically, MSDE should amend its Maryland School Survey Data Administration Manual to require school administrators to sign NDAs alongside school testing coordinators and proctors, explicitly agreeing under penalty of disciplinary action not to coach, hint, or influence survey responses.

Appendix A. Techniques and Methods

The OIGE conducted the following investigative activities during this inquiry:

- **Witness Interviews:** Conducted interviews with several key staff members at the SEED School of Maryland, including testing coordinators and leadership staff to include the Administrator.
- **Expert & State Official Consultation:** Interviewed MSDE assessment and accountability official regarding survey scoring mechanics, data integrity, and administrative protocols.
- **Document & Data Review:** Reviewed MSDE school report card user guidelines, the Maryland School Survey Data Administration Manual, and the SEED School's internal online activity calendar for April 2026.

Appendix B. Acronyms and Abbreviations

<u>Acronym/Abbreviation</u>	<u>Definition</u>
COMAR	Code of Maryland Regulations
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
LEA	Local Educational Agency
MSDE	Maryland State Department of Education
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
OIGE	Office of the Inspector General for Education
SATID	State Assigned Teacher Identifier