Interagency Commission on School Construction

Larry Hogan
Governor
Edward J. Kasemeyer
Chairperson
Robert Gorrell
Executive Director

200 W Baltimore Street
Baltimore MD 21201
mdschoolconstruction.org
iac.pscp@maryland.gov
(410) 767-0617

Frequently Asked Questions About Maintenance-Effectiveness Assessments (MEAs)

Why are Maintenance-Effectiveness Assessments (MEAs) conducted?
The IAC's mission is to achieve a safe, healthy, and educationally sufficient learning environment for every child in every seat in Maryland.[1] One way in which the IAC carries out this mission is by conducting—per COMAR 14.39.02.18—Maintenance-Effectiveness Assessments (MEAs) at a sample set of school facilities each year within each Local Education Agency (LEA). The MEAs help the IAC identify the extent to which each LEA is performing maintenance likely to support a safe, healthy, and educationally sufficient learning environment. The MEAs also produce comparable data on maintenance effectiveness that the IAC can use to identify best practices in maintenance and facilities management that it can share with all LEAs in the state.

What is maintenance?
The IAC subscribes to the National Council on School Facilities's (NCSF's) definition[2] of maintenance as *"[t]he work required to keep a facility . . . in such condition that it may be fully functional and continuously utilized for its expected lifespan, for its intended purpose, and at its maximum energy efficiency. Includes both routine and capital maintenance."*

Routine maintenance includes *"[r]outine, preventive, predictive, and emergent unscheduled tasks and repairs required to ensure that a facility functions according to its design and for its expected lifespan. Includes scheduled inspections, record keeping, equipment servicing, replacement of lamps and filters, replacement of failed equipment components such as motors, pumps and switches, responding to calls for emergency repairs, patching holes, and repairing furniture and fixtures."*

Capital maintenance includes *"[m]ajor repair, alteration, and replacement of building systems, equipment, finishes and components, including their removal and disposal. These system and component renewals occur more often at the end of a building system's or equipment's useful life. They will sustain or extend the useful life of the entire facility but are insufficient to result in the facility becoming "like new." Includes improvement of roadways and drainage; replacement of playing fields, roofs, HVAC systems, windows, and doors; structural repairs; and installation or replacement of long-life assets in a facility such furniture, fixtures, and equipment."*

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[1] In addition, the Maryland Educational Facilities Sufficiency Standards (EFSS) state that "[a] school facility must be safe (COMAR 13A.01.04.03) and capable of being maintained." COMAR 13A.01.04.03 states in relevant part that "[a]ll students in Maryland's public schools, without exception . . . have the right to educational environments that are: A. Safe; [and] B. Appropriate for academic achievement . . . ."
[2] https://www.facilitiescouncil.org/s/NCSF-Facilities-Data-Definitions_May2016.pdf.

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Who is responsible for maintenance?
As the owner of the facility, the LEA is responsible for making sure that the necessary maintenance work is done. In addition, to the extent that incomplete new construction or unresolved construction punch-list items cause any issues affecting the use, operations, or maintenance of a facility, it is the LEA's responsibility to resolve them. There is no single standard for which department(s), unit(s), or resources—either in-house or contracted (outsourced)—should carry out any needed work. Each LEA may organize its operational and capital resources differently. In some LEAs, certain maintenance activities are carried out by custodial staff. For this reason, the MEA is intended as a measure of the effectiveness of the maintenance work conducted by LEA as a whole, and not as a rating of any specific department.

What is the MEA and how does it work?
The MEA is not an assessment of the condition of a facility. It is an assessment of maintenance effectiveness as seen in that facility. The role of the IAC assessor is to evaluate the evidence of maintenance processes, structures, and practices that is visible on the day of the assessment.

The condition of building systems and components within a facility can help to provide visible evidence of the effectiveness of maintenance. However, condition is not the only factor that can be considered as evidence, and condition alone does not directly determine the effectiveness of maintenance. It is quite possible for a relatively new facility or building system to be in good overall condition due to its young age but to nevertheless be inadequately maintained because the owner has not performed the routine or reactive maintenance needed to keep the item in such condition that it may be fully functional and continuously utilized for its expected lifespan, for its intended purpose, and at its maximum energy efficiency. Conversely, it is possible for the condition of a relatively old facility or building system to have a short remaining useful life while its actual age and condition show that it has received effective maintenance over the years. Sometimes, building systems become unmaintainable due to a failure to perform sufficient routine and/or capital maintenance over the course of years, which constitutes ineffective maintenance by definition, and often results in poorly functioning systems and unsafe conditions.

The MEAs do not make any judgments about an LEA's capacity to perform maintenance. This is because the MEAs are based upon the observed *results* of the maintenance (or lack thereof) as well as the documentation provided by the LEA. The MEA does not evaluate or rate the LEA's maintenance budgets or staffing levels directly.

Which MEA rating is "good enough?"
In the MEA, the IAC uses a five-level rating scale for 21 facility-component categories and four categories of maintenance management. For each category, the IAC's MEA rubric spells out the

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criteria for achieving each of the five rating levels. As an example, the following criteria apply to the category HVAC: Forced Air Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning:

Category	Rating	Criteria
HVAC: Forced-air Heating, Ventilation, & Air Conditioning (incl. Filters) (10)	Superior	• No problems or issues visible; and • Evidence that only normal preventive maintenance is required.
	Good	• Evidence of systems functioning normally with no signs of corrosion, collapsed or missing filters, leaks, or activated alarm indicators; • Evidence of issues that may require minor repairs or cleanup but do not affect structural integrity or intended uses; and • Evidence of routinely above-standard custodial and maintenance practices.
	Adequate	• Evidence of systems functioning normally with few signs of corrosion, collapsed or missing filters, leaks, or activated alarm indicators; • Evidence of issues that may require repairs or cleanup but do not significantly affect structural integrity or intended uses; and • Evidence of regular competent custodial and maintenance practices.
	Not Adequate	• System is not functioning as intended; • Evidence of significant signs of corrosion, collapsed or missing filters, leaking, or activated alarm indicators; • Evidence of issues requiring significant repairs or replacement; or • Evidence of inconsistent custodial or maintenance practices.
	Poor	• System is nonfunctional or unsafe to operate; • Evidence of extensive signs of corrosion, collapsed or missing filters, leaking, or activated alarm indicators; • Evidence of issues requiring extensive repairs or replacement; or • Evidence of consistently sub-standard custodial or maintenance practices.

The category ratings are then weighted and combined to arrive at an overall rating at the facility level.

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Score Range	Overall Rating	Description
90–100%	Superior	Maintenance is likely to extend the life of systems within the facility beyond expected.
80–89%	Good	
70–79%	Adequate	Maintenance is sufficient to achieve the life of each system within the facility and, with appropriate capital spending and renewal, the total expected facility lifespan.
60–69%	Not Adequate	Maintenance is insufficient to achieve the expected life cycle of systems within the facility.
0-59%	Poor	

Achieving fiscal sustainability requires that each LEA obtain at a minimum the expected lifespan from each building system and facility. The minimum level of maintenance effectiveness necessary to achieve this outcome is Adequate maintenance. LEAs performing maintenance that earns a Superior rating will see the greatest possible benefits both financially and in supporting an educationally sufficient learning environment. Nevertheless, the IAC recognizes that each LEA has limited funding and staffing resources with which to maintain its portfolio of facilities. In order for an LEA to ensure that none of its facilities receive maintenance below the Adequate level, the LEA may need to strategically manage its delivery of maintenance such that its effectiveness is less than Superior in some instances.

Each year, the Maryland Department of Budget and Management (DBM) collects and publishes performance statistics as part of the State's Managing for Results (MFR) program for accountability. The IAC's MFR metrics include a measurement of the percentage of LEAs that achieved an average overall MEA rating of Adequate or greater. In FY 2021, 20 out of 24 or 83% of Maryland LEAs achieved an average overall rating of Adequate or greater.