

Section A: Executive Summary and State Success Factors Universal for Design of Learning (UDL)

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three years, St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) has fully embraced the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards and with the implementation of these rigorous education standards, we established a set of shared goals and expectations for what students should understand and be able to do in grades K-12 in order to be prepared for success in college and the workplace. The Common Core compelled us to re-sequence learning in Mathematics and Reading Language Arts, leaving some skills behind and moving others to different grade levels. Throughout the year, our students were asked to demonstrate independence and perseverance, construct arguments, comprehend, critique, and support with evidence, and use resources, strategies, and tools to demonstrate strong content knowledge. We moved to deeper and richer lessons, replete with informational texts, analytical writing, and trans-disciplinary project based learning. All of which we fundamentally know will end with our graduates more prepared than ever to face the challenges of a 21st century post-secondary landscape.

In implementing these standards, we have aligned our current work at the secondary level with promoting college and career readiness, as more SMCPS graduates than ever took the SAT and are posting scores better than the state and national average. Our graduates also completed record numbers of Advanced Placement courses and achieved scores of 3 or better on the culminating AP Exams at rates also outpacing the Maryland and national average.

Finally, SMCPS has achieved a record-high 91.5% of students graduating from high school in four years or less for the class of 2013. The first year the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) calculated this new measure, SMCPS posting a percentage of 82.8%. Over the last several years, we have worked tirelessly to examine all aspects of our instructional program and have focused on keeping students in school to attain this high mark – and our work is not over. We expect to see an even higher rate of graduation this year, and expect this trend to continue.

For more information on the successes and progress, visit this site:
<https://sites.google.com/a/smcps.org/all-children-can-and-will-learn/>

BUDGET NARRATIVE

School System Priorities and Distribution of Fiscal Resources

System Priorities—Educational Pathways

Educational Pathways have been established and take priority to assure that students are given varied opportunities to pursue instructional programs that are tailored to their needs:

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Academies: We are now beginning our seventh year of STEM academies at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The academies serve students from all elementary, middle, and high schools across the county. Currently students are enrolled in the program in grades 4–12. This rigorous and unique program of study emphasizes the core areas of mathematics and science with an infusion of technology and engineering. The program includes extensive laboratory experiences using the most contemporary technologies for scientific inquiry, mathematical calculation, engineering design, and problem-solving techniques. There is an emphasis on critical and creative thinking in an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Culminating projects provide opportunity for application of learning. Mentorships and internships are supported by our military contractor community and the Patuxent River Naval Air Station engineers, scientists, and test pilots.

The Chesapeake Public Charter School (CPCS): The Chesapeake Public Charter School opened on August 22, 2007, and now accommodates 360 students. CPCS is Southern Maryland’s first charter school. It has as its focus integrated instruction and environmental themes. The school now provides a program for students in grades K–8, with a waiting list in excess of 250 students. CPCS officially renewed the charter in the summer of 2014. The school now has a full complement of programmatic options including algebra, geometry, and foreign language for the middle school students. CPCS has consistently posted high academic achievement results at both the elementary and middle school levels.

Fairlead Academy: Fairlead Academy opened in 2008–2009 as a grade 9 program designed to meet the academic needs of 60 underachieving students. We realized in 2010 that support for these students must extend into their sophomore year, and in 2011, we further extended support into their junior year. The 2012 school year our commitment to our first cohort concluded when 84% of the students in the program earned their high school diplomas and graduated from high school.

The graduation rate of Fairlead Academy students was 95% for the Class of 2014. At all grade levels, Fairlead students receive extended instructional time in their core content classes, mentoring opportunities, academic and enrichment field trips, and an infusion of interactive technology, while being placed in smaller classes with a 1:15 student-to-teacher ratio. A program that commenced with a cohort of 60 grade 9 students has developed into an articulated pathway through all four years of high school that emphasizes choice and hands-on learning and encourages participation in the instructional programs at the Dr. James A. Forrest Career and Technology Center (JAFCTC). Students in grades 9 and 10 attend their core content classes at the Fairlead Academy on Great Mills Road. When they move into their junior year, they can elect either to attend their home high school or to take all of their classes at the JAFCTC, a choice that is also given to them as seniors. In order to offer core content classes at the JAFCTC, staff was reallocated from the high schools and assigned to full time positions as

math, English, social studies, and science teachers at the Fairlead Academy. Juniors and seniors taking all their classes at the JAFCTC meet all graduation requirements while also completing one of the 24 different Career and Technology Education pathways offered at the school. There are 237 students currently being served by this initiative in all four grade levels of high school.

Academy of Finance: The Academy of Finance opened in the 2008–2009 school year at Chopticon High School to provide interested students with a focused career pathway in the financial services industry. Currently, over 100 students are enrolled in this academy. Students learn about careers in finance, such as banking, insurance, financial planning, business administration, sales, contract oversight, budget analysis, and advertising. The program provides field opportunities to apply classroom learning and incorporates extracurricular programs related to the career interests of students such as the Future Business Leaders of America. Students from our other two high schools (Great Mills High School and Leonardtown High School) are able to transfer to Chopticon High School for enrollment in the academy. A Program Advisory Council guides the program and the rigor of the program has increased to include Advanced Placement courses and a four-year college focus.

Global and International Studies: SMCPS implemented the latest signature program, Global and International Studies, at Leonardtown High School beginning with the 2009–2010 school year. Students from our other two high schools (Great Mills High School and Chopticon High School) are able to transfer to Leonardtown High School for enrollment in this program. The program is designed to provide a rigorous, engaging educational pathway focused on an advanced study of world cultures, contemporary issues, history, and world languages. The SMCPS currently have 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade cohorts serving 135 students and the first cohort of students graduated from the program in 2013. Ninth grade GIS students are enrolled in English Honors and Advanced Placement World History as part of the program. Tenth grade GIS students take English Honors, Advanced Placement U.S. History, and a dedicated Global and International Studies course. Juniors and seniors take a dedicated Advanced Placement Comparative Government and Politics, Advanced Placement English Language, and additional Global and International Studies. Additional credits for high school graduation, Advanced Placement courses, an internship, and a senior capstone project are part of the program requirements.

Academy of Visual and Performing Arts: The Academy of Visual and Performing Arts (AVPA), housed at Chopticon High School, is a pathway that strives to support our population of talented youth who excel in the Arts. AVPA meets the needs of our highly able arts-inspired youth who exhibit desire and motivation to pursue higher levels of achievement and learning in the Arts. Students participating in the AVPA will have a choice of one of three areas of focus: music, theatre, or visual arts.

System Priorities—Other Initiatives

Technology Enhancements: For staff, the SMCPs continues to incorporate technology (Teacher Access Center and Performance Matters Data Warehouse) as administrative tools for data-driven decision making while providing students and parents with information via the Home Access Center. We are also expanding our system tools for efficiency for staff to communicate, manage documentation, and provide a collaborative platform for information sharing via the intranet.

Fiscal Outlook

For FY 2014, SMCPs realized a net position decrease of \$4.8 million in the government wide statements. There was an increase in our liabilities of \$6.9m, predominantly as a result of the net OPEB obligation increase of \$4.6m. Assets increased by an overall \$2m, due to an increase in funding due from other governments, change in capital assets value, and offset by a decrease in cash. Of particular note is the significant decline in General Fund - fund balance, which decreased to \$663,067, of which \$480,726 is unassigned. We had originally budgeted a planned use of \$2,525,000 of fund balance in our FY 2014 operating budget to include \$2 million toward our OPEB obligation. The actual use of fund balance in FY2014 ended up being \$5,284,466 dedicated almost entirely to health care costs. Understanding the dire state of our fund balance, the FY2015 budget was crafted very conservatively and included a change in our health insurance plan to that of a modified retrospective plan and incorporated an appropriation of \$625,000 towards a health care reserve.

With the state aid formula being based primarily on local wealth and change in student enrollment, state revenue contribution increased by \$1.3m, while undesignated local government funding increased by \$4m. Additionally, the county provided \$2m for OPEB and a required \$3.4m for the pension cost shift from per SB1301.

Climate Changes

The transition of the teacher pension costs to the local school system is expected to be financially challenging at the conclusion of the transitional multi-year phase-in plan laid out in SB13014. As the student population grows in St. Mary's County, there is a need for funding for additional staff. This coupled with the pension shift, increased healthcare costs, and expected increases in utilities and fuel places an increased fiscal burden in these tight financial times. Current and long term issues include increased compensation demands by the employee unions due to times without funding increases sufficient to allow for increase in pay for longevity or even a cost of living adjustment to maintain current buying power.

GOAL PROGRESS

Race to the Top Scopes of Work Update

During the fall of 2010 SMCPS gathered a dedicated group of system stakeholders to craft the Scopes of Work (SOW) for our implementation of the Four Assurances embedded in Race to the Top (RTTT). For each assurance, Standards and Assessments, Data Systems to Support Instruction, Great Teachers and Leaders, and Turning Around Lowest Achieving Schools, we created a multi-year plan—replete with expected costs to the system in terms of personnel, capital improvements, materials of instruction, and professional development. The Scopes of Work were presented to our Board of Education, submitted for approval to MSDE, and initiated in earnest in the late spring of 2011 and continued through 2014 at the close of the grant cycle.

Standards and Assessments: Over this past year, we have provided ongoing professional development related to the Common Core and aligned our local assessments. As teachers and leaders attended the state’s College and Career Readiness conferences, those participants returned with a plethora of new learning to integrate into school and system improvement plans.

Our goal this year is to have all teachers fully implementing and assessing student progress on the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards and able to demonstrate their understanding by creating aligned, rigorous, trans- disciplinary performance tasks for all students quarterly.

Data Systems that Support Instruction: We continue our work in advancing technology rich instruction with the inclusion of online course support through Moodle. This integration is promoting familiarity with online tools for learning and assessment. All schools are connected to the internet with a fiber connection so video streaming and on-line learning can occur without service interruption. To achieve this, we have made all buildings wireless so learning and internet access can follow our students and offer untethered flexibility. This further lays the foundation for seamless assessment of students in an online environment—where results can be quickly returned to teachers for analysis and instructional decision-making.

Great Teachers and Leaders: Some of our most engaging work this year continues with the implementation of a teacher evaluation system and a leadership evaluation system that provided a key element of emphasis on student growth. All teachers and principals are in their second year of this pilot and began the 2014-2015 school year by setting Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) that will guide their work with students.

Turning Around Lowest Achieving Schools: As MSDE implements the new rules governing school improvement and moves to site specific Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO), SMCPS will shift its work to reflect these new targets. Currently, we have no schools identified as “Low Achieving.”

Core Content Areas

Reading: With the transition away from MSA and towards PARCC, the assessment schema has shifted to an emphasis on higher levels of thinking and learning. Curriculum expectations will continue to focus on increasing the rigor and depth of assignments and the inclusion of writing in response to text. This focus emphasizes analytical and higher-level thinking and comprehension. In response to the changing instructional and assessment landscape, the focus for our English classrooms this year will be on integrating and aligning writing instruction more effectively with reading.

Mathematics: At the elementary level, formative assessments used to drive targeted instruction will continue to be a focus in St. Mary's County Public Schools. Teacher teams are involved in ongoing professional development to lead the design of resources and providing professional development in key areas related to computational fluency and fractions to align with new standards. At the secondary level, professional development centers on the shifts of the Common Core, with particular attention to focus, coherence, and rigor.

Science: In 2014, for Grade 5, the percentage of all students who were proficient or higher on the Science MSA decreased by 1.1 percentage points to 73.4 % (from 74.5%) For Grade 8, the percentage of all students who were proficient or higher on the Science MSA increased by 0.7 percentage points to 79.7% (from 79%). The refinement of elementary science curriculum is ongoing for the 2014-2015 school year, with a number of new STEM-For-ALL units available for use.

Social Studies: SMCPs recognizes the importance of developing student attitudes that encourage them to synthesize their knowledge and skills, and apply them in a responsible manner within a democratic society. Our Social Studies program outlines the knowledge and skills students must develop in pre-kindergarten to grade 12 based on the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Advanced Placement College Board Standards (AP) and National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) standards. This past academic year second through fifth grade teachers developed a PARCC research simulation task that integrated the Maryland State Curriculum and Common Core State Standards, as well as the College, Career, and Civic Life instructional shift expectations. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) developed Close Analytical Readings (CAR) activities while making a connection between argumentative writing to reading argumentative informational text.

Cross-Cutting Themes and Specific Student Groups in Bridge to Excellence

Educational Technology: In FY 2014, SMCPs targeted professional development centered on collaborative planning of curriculum aligned reading and mathematics activities. SMCPs has expanded the use of Moodle, our learning management system into both the elementary and

secondary classrooms. Two e-Coaches provide site-based and job-embedded professional development to teachers in the integration of instructional technologies. While data driven decision-making is a common focus in SMCPS professional development, interactive technologies and digital resources play a part in the customized professional development.

Additionally as a part of the Race to the Top funding, SMCPS furthered our network infrastructure to allow for access to rich digital content and build student and staff proficiency “in information, media, and technology literacy, knowledge and skills.” (*Investing in Instructional Technologies*) We are committed to working with MSDE’s longitudinal data system to support instruction as well as provide support for the implementation of the common core standards and assessments.

Education That Is Multicultural: For the 2014 school year, St. Mary’s County Public Schools provided Cultural Proficiency training for ALL (new and veteran) employees of the school system. In the past, the Cultural Proficiency approach has helped staff members understand the importance of building positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. It has also helped educators understand the importance of having high expectations for all students. The Cultural Proficiency training will provide our educators with the tools to respond effectively to children and adults who differ from them.

SMCPS continues system wide initiatives to deliver classroom lessons that emphasize the strength that a diverse, inclusive community adds to education. The superintendent and the superintendent’s leadership team will continue to meet with and establish community partnerships with groups and organizations. There are a series of partnerships, events, and meetings scheduled for the 2014-2015 school year for Patuxent River Naval Air Station, the business community and the Chamber of Commerce, the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), MD PIRC (Maryland Parental Information Resource Center), the faith- based community, student groups, and many other civic and social organizations. In addition, the superintendent, along with school leaders, will continue to meet with community members and stakeholder groups to discuss pertinent matters that impact St. Mary’s County Public Schools.

English Language Learners: For the 2014-2015 school year, SMCPS has seen a continued increase in the number of students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Enrollment of ELL students continues its increase, from 165 in 2012-2012 to over 200 in the 2014-2015 school year. For the 2014-2015 school year, we will continue our efforts to offer quality professional development to our content and grade level teachers. Recognizing the continual increase of ELLs to our school system, we are aware of the need to make certain our certified ELL instructors work collaboratively with their content and grade level teachers.

Career and Technology Education: The Career and Technology Education (CTE) program is an integral component of the system’s initiatives for improving student performance, eliminating achievement gaps and providing a variety of career pathways for every student. There are 24 career pathways available through our CTE program at the Dr. James A. Forrest Career and

Technology Center and 10 at our comprehensive high schools. We have one of only five aviation maintenance programs in the nation. Our production engineering program is the model for the state. Our health academy is a three-year program providing dual credit with the community college. Our television video production program is visited by colleagues from across the state, who hope to replicate our model.

Early Learning: According to the 2013-2014 MMSR report, 87% of the children in St. Mary's County enter Kindergarten Fully Ready to Learn. SMCPSS will continue to emphasize the partnership of the teacher and instructional assistant to provide targeted small group instruction is the focus of Kindergarten Teams this year. Further, the initial implementation of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will provide our teachers with information about Kindergarten Readiness at entry. In the spring, the initial roll out of the formative assessments will complete the Ready 4 Kindergarten initiative. Professional development is ongoing to support the integration of these assessments. Finally, St. Mary's County Public Schools has full ownership of the Head Start Program, thus helping to ensure a transitional curriculum for students in pre-K programs to Kindergarten.

Gifted and Talented: SMCPSS provides a continuum of Gifted and Talented Services to students at all grade levels. Students receive gifted and talented program services that begin with participation in the Primary Talent Development Early Learning Program in pre-kindergarten and progress through differentiated and targeted enrichment programs. In the 2014-2015 school year, the SMCPSS will continue to deliver rigorous and standardized instruction that incorporates capstone projects each marking period for highly able students. A literacy lab model is utilized at the elementary level, which facilitates differentiation for challenge and increased rigor. Mathematics instruction is supplemented with locally developed math extension maps and supplemental materials. St. Mary's County Public Schools continues to evaluate and revise course options for students at the secondary level, beginning with Accelerated Common Core 6, and continuing through Pre-AP and the Advanced Placement pathway to ensure that all students are placed in the most challenging courses available. At the high school level, there is an explicit expectation that students will continue with rigorous coursework and "stretch up" to Advanced Placement level courses. Prerequisites for Advanced Placement courses have been reviewed and obstacles such as screening tests have been removed. In fact, all students taking honors level courses in grade 10 are expected and encouraged to continue to Advanced Placement courses in their junior and senior years.

Special Education: The department of Special Education is included at every level of collaboration throughout the system. Special Education teachers, general education teachers, instructional resource teachers, and content specialists meet regularly as Professional Learning Communities to discuss student performance based on data obtained in Performance Matters, formative assessments, progress on IEP goals and objectives and anecdotal records. Instructional recommendations are made and when appropriate and necessary, IEP Teams are

convened to amend a student's IEP. Special Education Supervisors are included and participate in system Administrative and Supervisory (A&S) monthly meetings.

Closing the Achievement Gap for Student Groups

FARMS: For our students receiving Free and Reduced Meal Status (FARMS), double digit gaps persist in reading and mathematics. The gap is also present in our 2012 Four and Five Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, however we have made significant progress, as our most dramatic increase was for our most at-risk students. Students receiving Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) rose 12.9%. Responses shared later in this document outline ongoing interventions, which include after-school programs, integration of engaging technology, and mentoring programs.

African American Males: SMCPs recognizes that we still have a persistent gap between the performance of African American students and their white peers. This gap is seen across grade levels of MSA and all HSA tests. However, we have realized great successes in the graduation rate of African American students. Specifically, African American students who were not receiving Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) posted a 91.89% graduation rate in 2013- beating the county aggregate. Responses shared later in this document outline ongoing interventions and supports, which include after-school programs, integration of engaging technology, and mentoring programs.

English Language Learners: For the 2012-2013 school year, SMCPs met AMAO I, II, and III, yet double digit gaps persist for our English Language Learners (ELL) in reading and mathematics. These gaps might be expected, as ELL students learning an additional language are held to the same standards as fluent English speakers in these content areas.

Special Education: Double digit gaps persist in reading and mathematics achievement as measured by county and state assessments. While the Four-Year and Five-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation rates have increased by 11% since 2011, these graduation rates still lag significantly behind the overall graduation rates for all students in the SMCPs. The greatest success SMCPs has had is with the most profoundly disabled students, is that more than 95% of all special education students assessed using the ALT MSA have achieved proficiency.

System-wide professional development activities include workshops on UDL and how to incorporate the principles that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. During system-wide professional development days, sessions were offered to help teachers implement best practices aligned with UDL principles. The collaborative processes of our co-taught and inclusion classes provide the structure for ensuring instruction is delivered with attention to different learning styles and modalities. Additionally, information on UDL is posted on our professional development google site, with illustrative examples of practice within the various curricula.

Curriculum documents have been structured with specific attention to the conveyance of content through multiple modalities. These include the use of instructional technologies, media, and interactive resources. Further, assessment has also been developed with the idea that students must be able to demonstrate their proficiency and content knowledge in differentiated ways, such as products and performance assessments, as well as traditional formative and summative tests.

SUMMARY

The 2015 school year will see St. Mary's County Public Schools focusing on what matters most – moving our students forward to the goal of graduating college and career ready. We will do this by having assessment data drive our decisions and applying creative and persistent solutions for students who historically struggle. We will harness technology to engage students in the classroom and extend their learning beyond the traditional four walls of the school.

We will do this as we move more deeply into the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards. We will continue to refine our assessments and reconsider what we are asking students to learn and demonstrate. New baselines will be set in this first year of PARCC testing to determine new targets for learning.