The Executive Summary

I. Introduction

Transition is never easy. The comfort of the familiar is challenged by the unknown new. This was the case in 2015 as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment shouldered aside the Maryland State Assessment (MSA). It was also true for SMCPS, as we moved from a superintendent known to us for the past nine years, and welcomed an interim, who was later appointed superintendent for the next four years. For both assessment and leadership, SMPCS is setting new baselines and rebuilding expectations.

Setting new baselines provides great opportunity - an opportunity to review, rethink, and reset what we are doing to meet the expectations of our stakeholders. To do this fully, we went back to the essential twenty-two words that have guided SMPCS since 2006 - our mission statement:

Know the learner and the learning,
expecting excellence from both.
Accept no excuses, educating all with
rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships.

From this bedrock, we began our discussion about what we, as a school system, are committed to and to whom we owe this commitment. It was rewarding work that revealed a sound foundation that needed little more than an organizing concept. We fashioned our responses into five categories of commitment statements. They are: our commitments to students, our commitments to staff, our commitments to schools, our commitments to stakeholders, and our commitments to sustainability to move forward over the next four years. The logo below captures how each element supports one another - with *students* in the center of all our work, supported by *staff, schools,* and *stakeholder*s - ultimately built upon a model of fiscal and organizational *sustainability*. Our Commitments establish the framework for our five-year plan. With new leadership and a new direction for St. Mary's County Public Schools, we are blazing a new path for our students. This new path is predicated on a set of new benchmarks set by forthcoming PARCC achievement levels identified in the first years of testing. Coupled with the commitments and community input, this data and pending reauthorization of ESEA, SMCPS will be well positioned to develop a comprehensive five-year plan during the 2015-2016 school year.

The commitment statements for each category have been presented to all facets of leadership in SMCPS and revised with their input. Our questions were presented to school based staff for input:

1. What value do you place on this commitment?
2. To what extent do you see this commitment demonstrated by SMCPS?
3. To what extent do these commitments reflect the vision of SMCPS?
4. What do you consider as next steps for fulfilling this commitment?

We will be presenting this to students and stakeholders in the fall for their response as well. The following capture our work to date and reflects the input of several hundred staff members.

Commitments

St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) has made a commitment to work beyond the words we speak and to fully embrace the dedication to our students, staff, schools, and stakeholders. This year has ushered in new leadership for the school system, but not new voices. The newly appointed superintendent, an experienced leader in SMCPS, has brought forward a renewed dedication reflected in a series of commitments, which form the basis of our five-year vision.

- **Our commitment to students** is our focus on teaching and learning in order to support students in achieving their goals.

  1.1 Students have equitable access to rigorous and relevant learning.
  1.2 Students are engaged in learning experiences that meet their needs and interests.
  1.3 Students are safe and supported in their academic, social, and emotional growth.
  1.4 Student learning is aligned to nationally recognized standards.
  1.5 Student learning is measured in a fair, meaningful, and timely way.
  1.6 Student learning is designed to support students' preparation for a balanced lifestyle.

- **Our commitment to staff** is our engagement in and support of professional growth to meet the expectations of performance.

  2.1 Staff have a deep understanding of factors that impact learning.
  2.2 Staff are highly qualified, highly effective, and diverse.
  2.3 Staff are engaged in an open, trusting, and solution-oriented environment.
  2.4 Staff actively drive their learning and advancement.
  2.5 Staff are supported and accountable in meeting expectations for performance.
  2.6 Leadership is grown from within the school system.

- **Our commitment to schools** is to create and maintain safe, engaging, learning environments for our students and staff.

  3.1 Schools are well maintained, safe, and welcoming learning environments.
  3.2 Schools support the social and emotional safety and well being of students.
  3.3 School programs support the development of the whole child.
  3.4 Schools support learning, effectiveness, and efficiency.

- **Our commitment to stakeholders** is to inform and engage our parents and partners in the education of our children.

4.1 Family and community members are welcomed as supportive partners.
4.2 Two-way communication with stakeholders is open, honest, and timely.
4.3 Partnerships anchor our schools and students to the community we serve.

The final set of commitment statements ties to the four areas above, with specific attention to ensuring that our work can carry forward.

- **Our commitment to sustainability** is to only invest in that which furthers our mission and is explicitly built into our budget.

    5.1 We invest in instructional resources.
    5.2 We invest in programs, experiences, and learning for students.
    5.3 We invest in technology to engage, educate, and communicate.
    5.4 We invest in our people.
    5.5 We invest in technology to enhance efficiency and further productivity.
    5.6 We invest in professional development, internal advancement, and growing our own.
    5.7 We develop long-range plans for the growing needs of our school system.
    5.8 We invest in our schools, classrooms, and work spaces.
    5.9 We invest in our system infrastructure.
    5.10 We invest in communication systems to tell our story.
    5.11 We develop and implement a budget that is understandable and transparent.
    5.12 We are responsible and accountable to our stakeholders.

We are focusing on commitments and gathering input from all stakeholders in the organization to define those commitments and identify actions which support those commitments.

Principals shared the commitment statements and input was sought via a google survey. To date, we have over 700 responses to the commitment statements from staff. Throughout this Fall, we are surveying parents and community members to gather stakeholder input about these commitments. Students will provide input through quarterly meetings of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.

II. Universal Design for Learning

Our first commitment to students is that they will have equitable access to rigorous and relevant learning (1.1). Not every student learns in the same way on the same day, so we recognize the need for differentiation - both in the way we instruct and how students access content to ensure every student has the opportunity to reach the high standards of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS). To this end, St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) has put several initiatives in place.

First, we have made it a clear expectation for our teachers, with elements of our teacher evaluation system. Over the last fifteen years, we have institutionalized Charlotte Danielson's framework as part of our Teacher Performance Assessment System (TPAS). In working with this model, we have also provided further expectations and enhanced language within the rubrics of teacher performance. In the SMCPS TPAS model, differentiation and the presentation of content through multiple modalities is a clear expectation (Domain 1d, 1e, 3c, and 3e).

Further, we have invested in a myriad of instructional resources to provide multiple representations and access to information. Through a DODEA grant, SMCPS has been able to invest in nearly $2M of iPads to permeate our schools with interactive technologies. Coupled with interactive whiteboards (both SMART and Promethean boards), digital streaming content, and additional technologies, we have made an investment in our classrooms for access and engagement.

Beyond the hardware, we have invested in and embedded the instructional content resources, such as APEX digital curricula to support multi-modal instruction, intervention and recovery. This resource offers a range of material and interactive curricula from comprehensive full courses to skill/content-specific tutorials. Teachers have full access to these tools for embedding within the instruction. Beyond APEX, additional tools include Discovery Streaming, IXL, and Moodle-based classroom modules. Further, we are implementing an individualized math program (ALEKS, through McGraw Hill), which will help to tailor interventions specifically for closing the achievement gaps for student groups of underperformance.

Our comprehensive data warehouse provides school teams with a plethora of student learning data that helps identify students' strengths and challenge. The data can be reviewed and analyzed down to the instructional objective level, which helps teacher teams to target interventions and supports for students, as well as areas for enrichment and acceleration. School teams flexibly group students based these targeted areas, and time is set aside in the instructional blocks for these differentiated supports. For example, in mathematics, "math lab" time provides specified time within the day to provide interventions within a small group. Similarly, process for small group reading is embedded in the reading/language arts block.

Technology is one tool, but virtual tools may not be best for every student. With that in mind, tangible manipulatives are used throughout the instructional process. In mathematics, for example, base-ten blocks are utilized as part of the scope and sequence of instruction in the curriculum.

Just as no student learns the same way every day, no single method of presentation is used. Some children grasp information better through visual or auditory than through printed text. In truth, children need a variety of representations. Teachers present material and students engage with content in different ways. Students are still expected to meet the learning standards of the content.

Our comprehensive data warehouse provides detailed performance levels of students at the objective level. Through ongoing data analysis, teacher teams determine interventions and supports.

One of the challenges experienced in providing for a Universal Design for Learning is ensuring consistency. Consistency is challenging both in the implementation of the instructional practice and in the delivery through instructional technologies. Therefore, we continue to place an emphasis on professional development. Each of our system-wide professional development days include focused attention to this area. Sessions for teachers include both the modeling of instruction and the purposeful integration within our curriculum documents themselves.

Further, we recognize that instructional technologies are an integral tool for delivering multimodal instruction. A key priority in the 2015-2016 school year is to update the technologies in our schools. Elementary schools that have inventories of 8-9 year old computers cannot keep up with the interactive technologies that support a UDL classroom. Therefore, new investments and attention to this area will help address this area of disparity.

Each of these initiatives have been reinforced with high quality and job-embedded professional development.

In accordance with COMAR 13A.03.06.05, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines and Principles, beginning in the 2014 •2015 school year, local school systems shall use UDL guidelines and principles, in the development or revision of curriculum and materials1.

SYSTEMATIC INTEGRATION OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

In COMAR 13A.03.06.01. 01, the purpose of the requirement is to promote the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to maximize learning opportunities for students, including students with disabilities, students who are gifted and talented, and students who are English language learners, and guide local school systems in the development of curriculum, instructional planning, instructional delivery, material selection, and assessments.

UDL Point of Contact: Crystal Johnston	
UDL Principle/Mode	**Representation - Process**
Means of Representation: providing the learner various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.	Material and content are presented in a variety of ways to allow for different modalities of delivery and interaction. Material is presented through multiple media, including print, oral, visual, and interactive technology. Curricula have been designed with multiple presentations in mind, with many courses being built online through Moodle, with embedded video, text, and interactive media.
Means for Expressions: providing the learner alternatives for demonstrating their knowledge and skills (what they know)	**Expression Action - Product** Students demonstrate their understandings in a variety of ways, including through personal and individual interactive technologies (e.g., iPads, etc). Students develop products that include a variety of media (e.g., print, audio, online).
Means for Engagement: tap into learners interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.	**Multiple Options for Engagement** Students engage the content through a variety of ways that allow them to demonstrate their understandings based on their strengths and affinities. Students projects and performances take a myriad of forms, including that which involves technology, or in written, oral, or physical demonstrations. Students may present collaboratively, individually, or virtually, depending on the task and content, to allow for varied ways of tapping into students' strengths.

III. Budget Narrative

   a) **System Priorities**

Data Systems to Support Instruction:

The Race to the Top initiative supported data systems to support instruction with the leasing of laptops and carts for classroom instruction. All funding for this project was expended as indicated. Local funding contributed to the continuation of laptop leases to facilitate online learning and assessment. The Performance Matters data warehouse that has been institutionalized over 10 years continues, with enhancements to facilitate online assessments aligned to PARCC. Grant funding and local funding combine to further this initiative. As this is an ongoing initiative, it continues aligned with current Master Plan Goals.

Great Teachers and Leaders:

St. Mary's County Public Schools spent less on unrestricted recruitment, retention, and orientation of professional staff by $37,333. SMCPS continues to be diligent in ensuring the best pricing to support this initiative. Through collaborative efforts of staff and scheduling we were able to cut costs while maintaining our efforts to attract highly qualified teachers through the various recruiting initiatives and increasing teacher retention efforts through professional development and personnel support.

Mandatory Cost of Doing Business:

St. Mary's County Public Schools had a decrease of $1,067,321 in mandatory cost of doing business, a component of which was due to the efforts of the Student Transportation office review and consolidation of stops and bus routes (combine bus stops in developments, assigning bus routes to drivers living in the nearby areas, etc.) Additionally, there were savings with the cancellation of the APEX and FLOW after-school program travel costs, as well as a decrease in the cost of fuel. Overall, salaries and wages were lower than projected due to the soft hiring freeze on vacancies recognized through attrition throughout the year.

Other Items

Other items deemed necessary by St. Mary's County Public Schools increased overall by $2,127,590. Of this increase, $576,728 was for the cost of the utilization of a temporary employment agency to provide needed staffing associated with Special Education, and $208,148 for Race to the Top other supplies and materials. Unrestricted contracted costs increase was $388,813 ($76,600 Technology Installation/Modifications; $35,160 Heating/HVAC; $18,930 Repair of Buildings; $13,272 Plumbing; $18,447 for Equipment Lease – copiers; $113,323 for snow removal; and $113,081 for special education contracted temp agency costs). Other supplies and materials increase of $217,673 to purchase instructional and special education technology supplies.   Also, an increase in Equipment of $736,228 for Operations of Plant – Capitalized Technology Equipment and Vehicles, and for Student Transportation Bus purchases.

Standards and Assessments:

Fairlead Academies increased spending of $29,937. This additional spending was contributed to the utilization of a temporary staffing agency to provide support to the program allocated under contracted services.

Under this reform area, the SMCPS Race to the Top allocation was greater due to the higher emphasis on the Standards and Assessments area supporting instruction.

b) **Fiscal Outlook**
For FY 2015, SMCPS realized a net position decrease of $24.5 million in the government wide statements. There was an increase in our liabilities of $7.4 million, predominantly as a result of the net OPEB obligation increase of $5.4m. Assets increased by an overall $32.8 million, due predominantly to an increase in capital assets value. Of particular note is the increase in General Fund - fund balance, to $8.5 million, of which $2.0 million is unassigned, and $5.0 million is assigned to future healthcare calls, unanticipated fuel increases, snow or other emergencies. Understanding the dire state of our fund balance in FY2014 at $480,726 unassigned, 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 towards a healthcare reserve.

For FY 2016, with the state aid formula being based primarily on local wealth and change in student enrollment, state revenue contribution increased by $2.2 million, while undesignated local government funding increased by $4.1m. This is inclusive of $4.0 million in required funding for the pension cost shift per SB1301, and one-time funding of $2.0 million towards the paying off of technology leases.

c) **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 SB1301. 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.

IV. Goal Progress

Academies and 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:*** The STEM academies at the elementary, middle, and high school levels 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 accommodates over 350 students and has as its focus integrated instruction and environmental themes. The school now provides a program for students in grades K–8, with 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 is alternative learning pathway available to all high schools students that may need it. A "fairlead" is a nautical device used to guide a line, rope, or cable around an object or out of the way, thus enabling the sailor to pilot the craft. Fairlead Academy does much the same by taking struggling students and guiding them through high school – helping them avoid obstacles that they may encounter in their home high school. 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. There are over 220 students currently being served by this initiative in all grade levels of high school. The graduation rate of Fairlead Academy students has risen to over 90%.

- *Academy of Finance:* The Academy of Finance at Chopticon High School provides 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:* The Global and International Studies program at Leonardtown High School hosts over 130 students, including students from our other two high schools, who 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. 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.

Addressing Achievement Gaps

As is evidenced in the commitment statements, our work puts our students first, with a focus on equity, achievement, and the whole child. We recognize that student achievement does not simply come from academic support alone. To that end, we have redesigned school improvement to capture the tenets of educating the whole child, attending to their academic, social, and emotional development.

Aligning to the Maryland State Department of Education's vision to prepare all students for college and career, our goals, initiatives, and strategies consider all subgroups and specialized populations as we promote academic excellence. Our persistent performance gaps are analyzed and addressed routinely for the system, for each school, and for each individual student. We have a variety of initiatives focused on teaching and learning that will be implemented throughout our five year plan, Vision 20/20. We have identified a significant gap with all measurable data points (achievement, discipline, and attendance) between our economically disadvantaged students, minority students, special needs students and the rest of our population. SMCPS has experienced an increase in the number of students receiving free and reduced meals, as approximately 1 in 3 students in our community live with the challenges of poverty. Most pronounced in our data review are the achievement gaps that are persistent for our students in poverty.

To address these gaps, our staff must have a deep understanding of factors that impact learning. We have dedicated our professional development efforts throughout the year to address these needs. We are engaged in an on-going relationship with The Upside Down Organization to understand the impact of poverty on the brain and to learn, through professional development, what specific strategies can be used in the classroom to address this impact in order to maximize learning. Each month's leadership development seminar will embed an extensive look at teaching students who live in poverty, with site-based follow-up for each school. Understanding and intervening on behalf of our students who face challenges is our priority. This envelops our work across all areas, recognizing the impact chronic and acute stress has for our students' learning & behavior.

Alignment to the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards

For the last several years, St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) has fully embraced the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards the implementation of these rigorous 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. Throughout the year, our students were asked to demonstrate independence and perseverance, construct arguments, comprehend, critique, support with evidence, and use resources, strategies, and tools to demonstrate strong content knowledge. We transitioned 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.

With the transition 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 across all curriculum areas. This focus emphasizes analytical and higher-level thinking and comprehension.

Furthermore, 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 that centers on the shifts of the Common Core.

Assessments for Learning

SMCPS has developed a balanced assessment plan to help guide teaching and learning. Through the use of formative and performance assessments, students can demonstrate their learning on an ongoing basis. Formative content assessments help to identify where students are and to design instructional supports, interventions, or extensions based on where students need them most. Performance assessments across content areas are designed to offer students opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge of the curriculum. The assessments vary from content to content based on each one's standards and instruction.

Another key element in the SMCPS assessment plan is flexibility. While some county assessments are required to ensure consistency of expectations, others are offered as instructional resources for teachers to integrate as appropriate to the needs of their students and the schedule within which they are working. Therefore, testing windows are offered rather than rigid dates for giving an assessment. Another element of flexibility is in offering the assessments through different means. Some are provided through a traditional paper/pencil administration, while others utilize technology through an interactive online platform. Beyond those approaches, some performance assessments allow endless possibilities of how students can demonstrate their learning (e.g., through presentation, multi-media, etc.).
The purpose of assessment is to measure students' proficiency and learning in order to make instructional decisions. In that sense, assessment is a tool in the teacher's toolbox. Used appropriately, this tool is one of many used to design and build an architectural masterpiece of learning. Active, problem-based learning, and critical thinking are key elements that guide the work in designing the blueprints for each class and its daily instruction.

Behavioral Supports and Interventions

The Code of Conduct for St. Mary's County Public Schools is designed to reflect a discipline philosophy based on the goals of fostering, teaching, and acknowledging positive behavior. Additionally, we recognize the critical need to keep students connected to school so that they may graduate college and career ready. To this end, we have reviewed our discipline practices to coincide with the statewide guidance on discipline, emphasizing the effort to provide intervention and positive reinforcement.

Data Systems to Support Instruction

The Race to the Top initiative supported data systems to support instruction with the leasing of laptops and carts for classroom instruction. All funding for this project was expended as indicated. Local funding contributed to the continuation of laptop leases to facilitate online learning and assessment. The Performance Matters data warehouse that has been institutionalized over 10 years continues, with enhancements to facilitate online assessments aligned to PARCC. Grant funding and local funding

combine to further this initiative. As this is an ongoing initiative, it continues aligned with current Master Plan Goals.

Fulfilling our Commitments

St. Mary's County Public Schools has made a commitment to our students, staff, schools, and stakeholders. Our commitment is our mission: Know the learner and the learning, expecting excellence in both - Accepting no excuses, educating ALL with rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships. These just aren't words, they are what drive our work. They are the very purpose to which we dedicate ourselves each day. As we embark on the 2015-2016 school year - and beyond - we commit to providing our students with opportunities and supports to prepare for the world beyond the walls of our classrooms. They are the reason for our work. Our Students. Our Future.

Graduation Rate

Demonstrating our preparedness for students to be college and career ready have led to remarkable achievements in our graduation rate. The four-year cohort graduation rate continued to climb this past year as **93.5 percent** of the class of 2014. The new rate represents an increase of 10.7 percent over five years. At the same time, the four-year cohort dropout rate fell from 10.98 percent in 2010 to 4.44 percent in 2014. Both measures outpace the Maryland State Average.

The achievement of our students represents our work towards closing the achievement gap as graduation rates for all demographic groups have improved.
- **90.43%** of African American students graduated on time, an increase of **20.77%** over five years
- **94.34%** of Hispanic/Latino students graduated on time, an increase of **10.56%** over five years
- **93.63%** of White/Caucasian students graduated on time, an increase of **8.68%** over five years
- The graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students has increased **14.86%** over five years
- The graduation rate for special education students has increased **12.16%** over five years

Our students are graduating college and career ready.
- 53.2 % of 2014 graduates were University System of Maryland (USM) completers
- 28.7% of 2014 graduates were Career and Technology (CTE) completers
- 17.1% of 2014 graduates met BOTH the USM and CTE completer requirements

Great Teachers and Leaders

St. Mary's County Public Schools spent less on unrestricted recruitment, retention, and orientation of professional staff by $37,333. SMCPS continues to be diligent in ensuring the best pricing to support this initiative. Through collaborative efforts of staff and scheduling we were able to cut costs while maintaining our efforts to attract highly qualified teachers through the various recruiting initiatives and increasing teacher retention efforts through professional development and personnel support.

SMCPS is in year 5 of the Teacher Principal Evaluation (TPE), with year 1 as a pilot/development year. Teachers and leaders are fully utilizing Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as the evidence of student learning that contributes to their evaluation. There is zero cost for this initiative, other than in-kind human resources, as SMCPS utilizes a platform developed in house, and all training is done by in-house

resident experts and leaders. These initiatives align with the Master Plan goals related to highly qualified staff.

3. Please describe the steps that the school system proposes to take to permit students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries to overcome barriers that impede access to, or participation in, a program or activity.

Our mission clearly addresses the focus and attention to the belief that all children can and will learn:

Know the learner and the learning, expecting excellence in both, educating all with rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships.

This belief is evident in such areas as our course selection process, where students are default-selected to the next highest course of study, conveying the expectation for higher and more rigorous classes, such as AP courses, where we have realized a continuous increase of students taking these courses, as well as a pass rate higher than the state and national average (63% earning a 3 or better). This success is amplified by our highest graduation rate on record, where more students from each demographic group experienced gains.

We have made the processes for applying to academy programs transparent, and presented public presentations, online videos, and open application processes to all students. In addition, we have provided an equitable distribution of resources to our schools (e.g., through laptop and iPad carts) including the infusion of technology so students can access resources, even when that access is limited at home.

Finally, we cannot understate the importance of school counselors and school teams who consistently review student data and progress to ensure that their academic needs are met and that the students are working on the most appropriate and rigorous course of study.

Middle School Task Force

Concomitant to our work toward the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS), we are revisiting our structures and supports at the middle school level. This critical age group requires a careful examination of how we provide integrated learning pathways to success. Curricula has been redesigned and re-sequenced to align to the MCCRS in reading and mathematics; however, cross-disciplinary literacy, the C3 standards in social studies, STEM, and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) have great value for students. Therefore, we will be looking closely at the instructional model for middle school to determine needs for planning.

New Grading Regulations

One of our key commitments to students is that student learning is measured in a fair, meaningful, and timely way (Commitment 1.5). To that end, staff have carefully reviewed our grading regulations. With the primary focus of grading as a means to give feedback to students about their learning, each element of our procedures was carefully analyzed to ensure that this intent was clearly articulated in each area. Therefore, regulations were put in place that emphasized the timely and specific feedback related to learning standards. Student assignments posted to the Home Access Center (HAC), the online

gradebook, must include reference to the content/standard to which the standard is aligned, and the grades must be posted within a specific time to give feedback. Additionally, processes for recovery of learning and re-teaching were explicitly defined to articulate how students can maintain a positive trajectory for learning.

Standards and Assessments

Due to the shift in the curriculum from the Maryland State Curriculum to the Common Core State Standards/Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, local assessments and curriculum documents were revised to reflect these changes. There was not a shift in expenditures as SMCPS was fully implementing a formative assessment cycle reflecting the curriculum; thus the content and format of the assessment may have changed, but the inherent process did not, nor did the related Master Plan goals.

Fairlead Academies increased spending of $29,937. This additional spending was contributed to the utilization of a temporary staffing agency to provide support to the program allocated under contracted services.

Under this reform area, the SMCPS Race to the Top allocation was greater due to the higher emphasis on the Standards and Assessments area supporting instruction.

Virtual Learning and Recovery

St. Mary's County Public Schools continues in its partnership with America's Promise Alliance and Apex Learning® to provide comprehensive digital curriculum to students at all of our high schools. This three-year partnership has resulted in the implementation of programs for remediation, credit recovery, unit recovery, supplemental courses, Advanced Placement, and summer school. The program at each of our high schools includes a dedicated teacher running a resource room each period of the day, where students can complete work, receive tutoring, and monitor their graduation plan.

FINANCE

Analyzing Questions

Please respond to the following questions using the information provided in the **Prior Year**

Variance Table. Questions 3 and 4 below are based on all ARRA funds.

Revenue and Expenditure Analysis

1. Did actual FY 2015 revenue meet expectations as anticipated in the Master Plan Update for 2014? If not, identify the changes and the impact any changes had on the FY 2015 budget and on the system's progress towards achieving Master Plan goals. Please include any subsequent appropriations in your comparison table and narrative analysis.

St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) realized higher than anticipated revenue for FY 2015 of $1,041,580. Actual state revenues had a slight increase over FY 2015 of $614,780, predominantly due to increases in restricted state grant awards and the receipt of quality teacher incentive awards. Restricted funding for Federal ARRA was realized at $182,481, as well as an increase in Title I and Special Education IDEA of $54,938 and $237,873 respectively, while the overall other miscellaneous Federal grants decreased by $194,121. Local revenue realized an increase of $123,899 due to the increase in field trip revenues and insurance refunds. Finally, there were other miscellaneous funding increases of $21,730.

2. For each assurance area, please provide a narrative discussion of the changes in expenditures and the impact of these changes on the Master Plan goals.

St. Mary's County Public Schools expended all RTTT funds by FY2014. In addition, due to fiscal constraints, budget allocations were virtually frozen in all categorical areas of instruction for the last four fiscal years. Nonetheless, the following narrative cites the focus of the expenditures.

3. Please describe the steps that the school system proposes to take to permit students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries to overcome barriers that impede access to, or participation in, a program or activity.

Our mission clearly addresses the focus and attention to the belief that all children can and will learn:

Know the learner and the learning, expecting excellence in both, educating all with rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships.

This belief is evident in such areas as our course selection process, where students are default-selected to the next highest course of study, conveying the expectation for higher and more rigorous classes, such as AP courses, where we have realized a continuous increase of students taking these courses, as well as a pass rate higher than the state and national average (63% earning a 3 or better). This success is amplified by our highest graduation rate on record, where more students from each demographic group experienced gains.

We have made the processes for applying to academy programs transparent, and presented public presentations, online videos, and open application processes to all students. In addition, we have provided an equitable distribution of resources to our schools (e.g., through laptop and iPad carts) including the infusion of technology so students can access resources, even when that access is limited at home.

Finally, we cannot understate the importance of school counselors and school teams who consistently review student data and progress to ensure that their academic needs are met and that the students are working on the most appropriate and rigorous course of study.

4. How has the potential "funding cliff" impacted current discussions and subsequent decisions regarding the most effective use of ARRA funds?

The most significant funding cliff was realized in prior fiscal years with the ending of ARRA. However, it should be noted that to avoid such a cliff, the allocations were spent on material and infrastructure expenses so as not to burden the system with recurring costs such as personnel or extended contracts. As with other funding, if a line item of funding is set to terminate, initial and ongoing discussions of planning are explicitly planned to utilize funding for one-time costs.