

Executive Summary

The Bridge to Excellence Master Plan for St. Mary's County Public Schools reflects the work of a diverse group of stakeholders who share in the vision of the school system, "Fulfilling the Promise in Every Child." At various levels, through a variety of school system work groups, a Bridge to Excellence Master Plan Advisory Group, public forums, educators, parents, community members, business partners, and elected officials have come together to:

- Analyze the school system's strengths and needs.
- Analyze aggregate and disaggregate data to effectively align and, as needed, realign resources to target students and schools who are most significantly challenged regarding achievement.
- Identify the current status of curriculum, instruction, assessment, high quality teachers, school day programs, intervention and enrichment programs, and extended day and extended year programs.
- Outline the expectations for the next five years of academic growth in the school system.
- Identify how the school system will systematically progress towards achieving identified goals.
- Outline how progress will be measured along the way.
- Identify targeted scientifically research based methods, materials, and programs that support improved student achievement and elimination of performance gaps for identified subgroups.
- Align and, as appropriate, realign budget and facility resources to support the identified goals, objectives, strategies, and activities.

The process for collecting and analyzing the data and drafting the plan included four key components:

- We identified an individual, our **Point of Contact**, who would be responsible for overseeing the development of the plan.
- We established a **Master Plan Work Group** that worked in two tiers. The first tier was comprised of members of the Superintendent's Executive Team (Curriculum and Instruction, Pupil Services, Special Education, Facilities, Human Resources, Technology and Facilities) and other members of the Division of Instruction (professional development, assessment, content supervisors, and other resource staff). This first tier of Work Group Members analyzed all school system data over a 4-month period (September-December, 2002), determined trends and patterns within the data and defined the root cause for various deficiencies. A second tier of Work Group Members joined us in the spring. This tier was comprised of Administrators and Supervisors. This group met for three long evenings (dinner included) to process and sort the data, define essential questions, take those questions back to their schools for input and then return to the whole group to refine the framework for the plan. From these evenings came the objectives and strategies for the plan. Tier one members then worked to create the activities with each content supervisor working with teams from their content to refine their section of the plan. Instructional Resource Teachers met as

a group with Dr. Ron Thomas and Dr. Mike Hickey to refine the plan from their lens. These various members of the Work Group drafted a preliminary plan.

- We established a process to inform and invite feedback from our greater school community through the School Improvement Teams and from the general community through two evening forums. This constituted our **Master Plan Advisory Group**. We took the preliminary plan to these two groups (school community and general community). These evening forums included members of the faith community, professors from St. Mary's College of Maryland with responsibilities for our student teachers, the Dean of the College of Southern Maryland, County Commissioners, Board of Education Members, the director of the St. Mary's County Health Department, representatives from the Red Cross, the Lion's Club, the Rotary, the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Special Education, the Budget Advisory Committee, the local newspaper and numerous parents from all levels...elementary, middle and high school. We had two daytime forums that included teacher representatives from each school as well as members of the Master Plan Work Group. After each gathering, we sent essential questions back to schools for reflection and comment. Revisions were made after each meeting based on input from stakeholders.
- When the preliminary plan was complete, we met with **private school officials** to discuss planning and implementation of the ESEA Title I, Title II, Title III, Title IV and Title V programs.

As we worked with each component of our community, we shared our vision for including a vast array of stakeholders. In our correspondence we shared that, "Casting a wide net ensures that decisions respond to the real needs of the diverse populations attending our schools. Broad involvement will help foster ownership of our final plan".

Throughout this process, the school system's stakeholders were guided by the overall philosophy of Maryland's Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the report of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools, Achievement Matters Most, and the St. Mary's County Board of Education Goals. The teams evaluated each area in light of the required identified results outlined in the Bridge to Excellence Master Plan Guidelines (MSDE, 2002):

- Accelerate the academic achievement for each student.
- Eliminate achievement gaps that persist for students from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds; students with disabilities; and English language learners.
- Substantially increase the participation of minority and economically disadvantaged students in advanced courses and rigorous instruction (honors, gifted and talented, advanced placement).
- Provide full-day kindergarten programs for all students.
- Provide prekindergarten programs for all at risk four-year-old children.
- Explicitly align curriculum, instruction, and assessment in all schools.
- Ensure school environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.
- Elevate teacher and principal quality through hiring, recruiting, and retention strategies that result in highly qualified teachers, administrators, and staff in each school.

- Invest in high quality professional development that is focused on the needs of teachers and their students.
- Strengthen parent and community support for learning and expanding opportunities for involving families and communities in education.
- Integrate technology effectively into curricula and instruction.
- Foster continuous and sustainable improvement in schools identified as “in need of improvement” (Title I low-performing schools, local reconstitution schools, and state reconstitution schools).
- Equalize resources among poor and affluent schools and provide additional resources to high-minority and high-poverty schools.

To achieve these purposes, St. Mary’s County Public Schools adopted the five ESEA goals as the overarching guiding focus for development of the plan.

ESEA Goals

1. By 2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
2. All LEP students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
3. By 2005-2006, all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.
4. All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug-free, and conducive to learning.
5. All students will graduate from high school.

Cross Walk Themes

Required cross-program themes were infused throughout the master plan either as stand alone objectives, strategies and activities, or embedded components, as appropriate, within the five ESEA goal areas. In addition to those themes identified above, cross-program themes included:

1. Integration of the components of Education that is Multicultural.
2. Integrated fine arts.
3. Meeting the needs of gifted and talented students.
4. Ongoing technical assistance and support to all schools and targeted support for schools identified for school improvement, corrective action, and restructuring.
5. Activities to improve teacher capacity and quality.
6. Strategies to integrate technology into curriculum, instruction, and high quality professional development.
7. Strategies to improve the academic achievement of English language learners.
8. Strategies for drug and violence prevention

In addition, the work and advisory teams structured their objectives, strategies, and activities around the three questions posed in the Bridge to Excellence Master Plan guidance document:

1. What do we want for our children?
2. How might we provide it?
3. How will we know that we've done it well?

What do we want for our children?

This question is answered by our system vision, mission and goals and the alignment with the five ESEA goals, previously referenced, that serve to frame our plan.

St. Mary's County Public School System's Vision
Fulfilling the Promise in Every Child

St. Mary's County Public School System's Mission
To enable students to develop their intellectual and personal potential for a lifetime of learning and for responsible, productive participation in our diverse and changing world

St. Mary's County Public School System's Goals

1. Increased Student Achievement
2. Supportive Partnerships
3. Safe and Orderly School Environment
4. Effective and Efficient Use of Resources

We want all of our children, regardless of ability, disability, ethnicity, race, socio-economic background, or English language learners to be equally exposed to high quality challenging curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers and support staff. We want all children to attend school in safe and drug free environments that are conducive to learning.

How might we provide it?

This is the heart of our master plan. Our needs assessment provided us with information about our strengths and weaknesses. We used that information to craft our objectives, strategies and activities to improve our performance. Each objective of the master plan outlines the strategies necessary to meet the objective and the activities that will occur in our classrooms. For each activity, there is an implementation plan with accomplishment measures and impact measures. Each activity includes the budget required for implementation. Each activity includes a forward look at what our next steps will be over the next four years. As our schools implement the master plan, through their individual school's action plans (School Improvement Plans), we will achieve the consistency of purpose that is necessary to raise the achievement of all students...students advanced in their knowledge and skills, those achieving proficiency and those still considered basic in their performance. Our goal is to accelerate the achievement of every child.

How will we know that we've done it well?

The answer to this question is addressed throughout the master plan. This question is the essence of the school system's accountability process. The data collected, disaggregated, and analyzed to address this question will drive the future development and revisions to the master plan. Results of local and state formative and summative assessment data points that indicate increasing numbers of aggregate and disaggregate student populations achieving at proficiency or better levels in reading and mathematics and demonstrating Adequate Yearly Progress will validate how well we are doing. Additionally, data points regarding the percentage of students being taught by "highly qualified" staff; the number of persistently dangerous schools, as defined by the state; and increased percentage of aggregate and disaggregate groups students graduating from high school with a regular diploma; and reduced drop out rates, for aggregate and disaggregate groups of students will confirm our progress and success.

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL INITIATIVES ALIGNMENT

FEDERAL	STATE	STATE	LOCAL
<p>ESEA <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> January 2002</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed toward closing the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind. Ushers in sweeping reforms based on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger accountability for results Expanded options and choice for parents Emphasis on teacher quality Emphasis on teaching methods and evidenced-based practices that work. Consolidation and flexibility. 	<p><i>Visionary Panel: Achievement Matters Most</i> January 2002</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maryland's next phase of school reform must focus on improving classroom instruction. The state and local school systems must align every aspect of education – educators' preparation and professional development, policymaking, testing, curriculum, leadership, and funding -- to support the classroom teacher and students. Greater attention to equity through strategies that hold teachers and school leaders accountable for closing the achievement gaps. Teacher quality matters -- it matters more than anything else. 	<p><i>The Bridge to Excellence In Public Schools Act</i> April 2002</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects a standard-based approach to financing public education in Maryland. Initiates a new finance structure based on the premise that when students have access to rigorous curriculum, highly qualified teachers, and programs that employ proven strategies and methods for student learning, all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or socio-economic background can achieve. Each local school system is required to <i>develop a master plan</i> that outlines steps to improve the achievement of all students. 	<p><i>SMCPS 2002-2007 Goals</i> July 2002</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased student achievement to enable students to develop their intellectual and personal potential. Supportive partnerships to better prepare our students for transition to institutions of higher education or entry into the increasingly more demanding workplace. Emphasize and promote a safe and orderly learning and work environment. Ensure the effective and efficient use of school system resources.
OVERARCHING THEMES			
CURRICULUM ~ INSTRUCTION ~ TEACHER QUALITY ~ ALIGNMENT ~ ACCOUNTABILITY ~ FUNDING			