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Executive Summary

I. Introduction

The last several years have provided us an opportunity to prepare our students and staff for the high expectations of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. With our baseline data established, we now look toward a balanced accountability system that includes both the measures of student achievement associated with PARCC and with school quality indicators, as well.

Our work this year is focused on two key elements that align with Maryland’s accountability plan and our focus on the whole child. Balanced between student achievement and culture/climate, we remain consistent with our mission and commitments to our students, staff, and stakeholders.

Our mission statement’s words are never truer:

*Know the learner and the learning,
expecting excellence from both.*

*Accept no excuses, educating all with
rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships.*

Coupled with our mission statement are our commitments. These commitments are the bedrock of our work. They are defined by: our commitments to students, to staff, to schools, to stakeholders, and to sustainability as we move forward over the next four years. The logo below captures how each individual element supports the others - with *students* in the center of all our work, supported by *staff, schools, and stakeholders* - ultimately built upon a model of fiscal and organizational *sustainability*.



Commitments

St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) has made a commitment to live the words we speak and demonstrate daily our dedication to our students, staff, schools, and stakeholders. Two years ago we introduced these commitments, and we continue to work toward them. This year, we are not only emphasizing these commitments, but seeking to define evidence of these commitments in action.

- **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.

Addressing Achievement Gaps

As evidenced in these commitment statements, one can conclude that our work puts students first, with a focus on equity, achievement, and the whole child. We recognize that student achievement does not solely come from academic support. As is reflected in the Maryland accountability model, we too recognize the importance of both academic achievement and school quality indicators. To that end, we have aligned school improvement to reflect these same elements.

Aligning to the Maryland State Department of Education’s vision to prepare all students to be college and career ready, our goals, initiatives, and strategies consider all subgroups and specialized populations as we promote academic excellence. 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 to address these gaps. Specifically, 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, English Language Learners, and the rest of our population. SMCPs has experienced an increase in the number of students receiving free and reduced meals. The achievement gaps for our students living in poverty are persistent.

Coincident with our first commitment to staff, i.e., staff have a deep understanding of factors that impact learning (2.1), we have dedicated our professional development efforts throughout the year to address these needs. Specifically, we have designed professional development around the two key focus areas:

- Academic Achievement
- Culture and Climate

At the school level, principals work with their staff to develop a professional development plan consistent with these areas. Systemic initiatives include:

Academic Achievement

- Using assessments for student learning
- Implementing formative assessment throughout the instructional process
- Monitoring interventions for consistency and effectiveness

Culture and Climate

- Implementing Multi-tiered Systems of Support or a PBIS model
- Implement Restorative Practices and the Responsive Classroom
- Providing for the RTI Process for monitoring interventions

Understanding and intervening on behalf of students who face challenges is our priority. This encompasses our work in every area, recognizing that chronic and acute stress impacts student learning, behavior and attendance. School success hinges upon our ability to support students who face challenges.

The strategies articulated in the Goals and Objectives section of the Master Plan detail a rationale for each. The explanation of these strategies communicate the consistent approach to instruction, intervention, and support for students who are underperforming in the assessed areas.

Academic Achievement

Over the last several years, SMCPS has embraced the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards. With the implementation of these rigorous educational standards, we established a set of shared goals and expectations for students in grades k-12 which are designed to prepare them for success in college and the workplace. Throughout the year, our students were asked to demonstrate independence and perseverance, construct arguments, comprehend, critique, and support with evidence. Additionally, they used 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 believe will prepare our graduates to face the challenges of a 21st century post-secondary landscape.

The learning outcomes for our students places emphasis on higher levels of thinking, reasoning, modeling, written expression, and conventions of language. To that end curriculum expectations 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 and will provide continuous measures of standard attainment as students move through the curriculum. Teacher teams are involved in ongoing professional development to lead the design of resources and provide professional development that centers on the shifts of the MCCRS as well as how to develop, analyze and then use Formative Assessments to plan and deliver their daily instruction.

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 assessment data is used to identify student strengths and weaknesses. It also informs the instructional plan to include intervention support, which addresses deficit or extension needs. Performance assessments across content areas are designed to offer students opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge of the curriculum. The assessments vary based on content 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. Teacher use these assessments to meet the needs of their students while simultaneously accommodating their schedule. Therefore, testing windows are offered rather than rigid dates for giving an assessment. Another element of flexibility is offering the assessments through different means. Some are provided through a traditional paper/pencil administration, while others utilize an interactive online platform designed to mirror the PARCC assessment 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. SMCPS also utilizes the Performance Matters/UNIFY data warehouse so that leadership and teachers alike can analyze all aspects of the assessments that students are given in order to provide focused individualized feedback and instruction. Active, problem-based learning, and critical thinking are key elements that guide the work in designing the blueprints for each class and each individual classroom and student

Using Formative Assessments to Drive Instructional Decision Making

In reviewing assessment data, SMCPS leadership has employed the professional development model of collaborative and peer support to review data and allow for differentiated, individually guided professional dialogue for each school team. System leaders utilized the aggregated and disaggregated PARCC English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics data to analyze trends in both System and School PARCC performance through the dual lens of proficiency and growth, respectively. Coupled with our local formative assessments, the system was able to help schools truly analyze student performance. This ongoing professional learning and collaboration continues throughout the year with a focus on trends with respect to each school's and the overall system's content and classroom performance.

This year will be our school system's second year participating in the Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME) cohort. FAME is a collaborative professional development process that consists of five self-study modules, application activities, communities of practice, leadership support, and support by

formative assessment specialists at the Maryland State Department of Education. The goals of FAME are to encourage and support teacher reflection and dialogue around the topic of formative assessments, help teachers revise and refine their current practices within their own classroom and school, and create lasting change in schools and districts. SMCPS will have two schools participating in year two and numerous cohorts around the county will begin year one throughout this school year.

Monitoring Interventions and Providing Support

In working to eliminate achievement gaps for students who are underperforming, we have employed targeted instructional interventions aimed at specific content and skill gaps. School teams identify the appropriate intervention and use progress monitoring to assess a student's academic performance that examines the student's rate of improvement (i.e., responsiveness to instruction), through which we evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Of special attention in progress monitoring is the focus on the fidelity of implementation. This includes the selection of evidence-based tools, with consideration for cultural/linguistic responsiveness and recognition of individual student strengths.

Interventions begin with setting the target by using a variety of data to include specified performance data from both lagging and leading data, as well as classroom observation and formative assessments. Through collaborative analysis of this data, teacher teams identify the target population for interventions and create action plans, data findings, and focus skill calendars. Through this process, teams develop individual lesson plans and utilize leading data to drive instruction and monitor progress. Progress monitoring includes a deeper dive into the data to review, reassess, and reteach skills. Ultimately this is a recursive and ongoing process as these teams discuss new outcomes and make necessary changes to the next iteration of the intervention.

Graduation Rate

Demonstrating our preparedness for students to be college and career ready has led to remarkable achievements in our graduation rate. The four-year cohort graduation rate continued to climb this past year to 93.7 percent for the class of 2016. The new rate represents a continued increase over five years. At the same time, the four-year cohort dropout rate fell from 10.98 percent in 2010 to 4.27 percent in 2016. 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.

- **89.2%** of African American students graduated on time, an increase of **12%** over five years
- **>95%** of Hispanic/Latino students graduated on time, an increase of **11%** over five years
- **94.5%** of White/Caucasian students graduated on time, an increase of **5%** over five years
- The graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students has increased by **19%** over five years
- The graduation rate for special education students has increased by **14%** over five years

Our students are graduating college and career ready.

- 56.2 % of 2016 graduates were University System of Maryland (USM) completers
- 23.8% of 2016 graduates were Career and Technology (CTE) completers
- 19.5 % of 2016 graduates met BOTH the USM and CTE completer requirements

Dual Enrollment

We continue to partner with the College of Southern Maryland (CSM), as well as other partner institutions to help our students to be College and Career Ready. This focus has resulted in the expansion of dual enrollment courses offered both on and off campus for our students. During the 2016-2017 school year, 774 students across our three high schools enrolled in courses at CSM for credit, and 1066 students enrolled in courses at SMCPS high schools that were eligible for CSM dual enrollment credit. These courses include Finite Math, Calculus, Human Anatomy, and College Prep English. In addition, over 25 courses at the Dr. James A. Forrest Career and Technology Center have articulated credit agreements with seven (7) colleges and institutes of higher education.

Standards Based Instruction and Feedback

Coupled with formative assessment is the ongoing feedback to students and their parent/guardians about their progress toward mastery of the learning standards. At the elementary school level, we continue our work in transitioning to a standards-based report card to provide students and families with feedback specific to student progress on the MCCR standards. Students in gr. Pre-K through 2 receive a standards based report card. The standards-based report card articulates student progress toward mastery of the identified MCCRS standards for the grade level. Through this process, parents, students and teachers will more clearly understand what is expected, and parent and teachers are better able to work together to guide students, helping them to be successful. Families have been provided with a great deal of [information](#) to support their understanding of their child's progress. Each year, we look to expand the use of a standards based report card. During the 2018-2019 school year, we will implement a standards based reporting system in third grade with fourth grade following in school year 2019-2020. The transition to the standards based reporting will complete with the fifth grade implementation in 2020-2021.

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.

Culture and Climate

- Implementing Multi-tiered Systems of Support or a PBIS model
- Implement Restorative Practices and the Responsive Classroom
- Providing for the RTI Process for monitoring interventions

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

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 through a multi-tier system of supports. We believe it is our responsibility to effectively teach behavior and that all students can exhibit appropriate behavior, with established school-wide expectations or Tier I interventions in place. Given effective Tier I support, adults are united in common language, common practices and consistent application of rules and expectations that are developed and taught by the school. All of our schools have committed to developing school-wide expectations (Tier I) and to defining those expectations in various locations in the building (classroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc.).

Numerous Tier 2 interventions have been implemented this year to assist with challenging behaviors when a student does not respond to Tier I, school-wide expectations, in an effort to reduce out of school suspensions. Interventions include *Zones of Regulation*, *Check and Connect*, *Check In Check Out*, mentoring, and morning meetings. *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect* are the primary curricula used for teaching social and emotional learning. Fourteen schools are actively involved with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

Tier 3 interventions will be developed for individual students who do not respond to Tier I or Tier 2 interventions. Tier 3 interventions are highly individualized to address each students needs.

Restorative Practices

SMCPS has partnered with the Education Association of St. Mary's County (EASMC) and the National Education Association (NEA) organization to provide professional development for staff in restorative practices. Each secondary school is working to develop a plan based on an understanding of the restorative practices model and addressing student behaviors in proactive ways. At the elementary level, schools have taken on the Responsive Classroom model, which builds upon this same premise of relationships, clear expectations, and a proactive approach.

The Student Conduct Committee meets this year to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Code of Conduct, recommend revisions for policies, and recommend interventions to assist schools to move forward, as well as reduce disproportionality. Ongoing data analysis occurs at each meeting. The committee includes the superintendent, deputy superintendent, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members.

RTI Processes for Monitoring Interventions

As a county, SMCPS has piloted the RTI/MTSS Report in our data warehouse known as UNIFY. The RTI/MTSS Report provides the appropriate flexibility and latitude for interventionists to set up, organize, and document a particular intervention (i.e., academic or behavioral) within the UNIFY platform. Specifically, the RTI/MTSS Report is organized to provide reports on the types of interventions and the extent to which the intervention is occurring for each student. School teams can then use this information to compare to formative assessments and progress monitoring tools to determine the effectiveness of the interventions and supports.

It is especially important to have highly effective teachers for our students. Staffing critical shortage areas such as Special Education is a focus to help ensure consistency of interventions, support, and co-teaching. To this end, SMCPS has instituted new strategies for recruitment, including specialized local teacher recruitment fairs. This has included a targeted Special Education job fair. These new recruitment strategies have yielded positive results this year to help ensure that highly effective and highly qualified teachers are serving our students. Along with this, targeted new teacher professional development provides the clear support for teachers to help them start - and maintain – their lasting careers in St. Mary’s County Public Schools.

Professional development in Tier 3 reading instruction has been provided for special education and general education teachers in elementary, middle and high schools. The Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Special Education are collaborating to strengthen core ELA and Math instruction, as well as select evidence based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

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 beliefs that drive our work. They are the very purpose to which we dedicate ourselves each day. As we embark on the 2017-2018 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 reasons for our work. Our Students. Our Future.

