

Board of Education of Wicomico County
Bridge to Excellence Master Plan
2003 – 2008

Purpose and Scope

Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, the Maryland State Department of Education requires each school system to develop and implement a five-year comprehensive Master Plan. The Master Plan must include goals and strategies to meet the requirements of both the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and the state's *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002* as well as those outlined in MSDE's *Master Plan Guidance Document*. The Master Plan must integrate and coordinate all state, local, and federal education resources. Decisions about the use of those resources must be linked directly and centrally to improving student learning and ensuring that *all children* receive an adequate education.

Community Profile

Wicomico County, established in 1867 and covering 377 square miles, is centrally located on the Delmarva Peninsula, approximately 25 miles west of Ocean City, Maryland and within a two-hour drive to Baltimore, Washington, D. C., Philadelphia, or Norfolk. It is a largely rural county with Salisbury, the largest city in Wicomico County, initially laid out by a charter granted in 1732. Situated at the headwaters of the Wicomico River, downtown Salisbury is home to over 250 businesses and organizations. The Government Center houses city, county, and state government administrative offices. The Port of Salisbury Marina is the second largest public marina on the Chesapeake Bay with docking facilities for up to 112 boats. The Salisbury-Ocean City Regional Airport has made the area more accessible and desirable to corporations looking to locate on the Eastern Shore and business and industry has rapidly expanded into the area.

The population of the county is 84,644 according to the 2000 census. Approximately 28% of the population is centered in Salisbury. The county population grew by 13.9% from 1990 to 2000. This growth was higher than the 10.8% population growth of the State of Maryland in the same period. Expectations are that the county will continue to see population growth each year.

Executive Summary

Wicomico is among Maryland's poorest counties. According to the 2000 census, the median household income in Wicomico County is \$39,035, considerably lower than the state median income of \$52,868. The county per capita income is \$19,171, compared with \$25,614 for all of Maryland. The poverty rate in the county is 12.8%, while Maryland's poverty rate is 8.5%. Approximately 16% of county households have annual incomes of less than \$15,000. Wicomico County ranks 5th lowest among Maryland Counties in wealth per pupil.

Educational levels among adults in the county are lower than for the State as a whole. Of the population aged 25 and over, about 6% have less than a 9th grade education, while approximately 81% have a high school diploma or equivalency. Approximately 27% of the population of Wicomico County hold some type of post-high school degree.

School System Profile

Wicomico County and its school system were both established under the Constitution of 1867. By 1868, twenty-four one-room schools had been authorized for construction to bring basic education to children in all parts of the county. As of September 30, 2002, public school enrollment was 14,335 in grades pre-K through 12 in 25 schools (16 elementary schools, one elementary/middle school, 3 middle schools, one middle/high school, 3 high schools, and one evening high school).

The diversity of the Wicomico County public schools continues to grow. In the 2001-2002 school year, with enrollment of 14,116, African Americans comprised 35.7% of the public school enrollment. While Hispanics made up only 2.4% of the school population, they are the fastest growing minority in the schools. Asian students totaled 2.3% of the total Wicomico County public school population. Eighty-five percent (85%) of school-age children in Wicomico County attend public schools, 13% attend non-public schools and 2% are home-schooled.

A Maryland chart of At-Risk Student Populations for the 2001-2002 school year lists Wicomico County as having 35% of its students receiving free and reduced meals (FARMS), 9th highest of

Executive Summary

Maryland counties. As of October 30, 2002, 39.09% of Wicomico County students were eligible for FARMs. Thirteen of Wicomico County's 25 schools receive Title I funds for additional educational services to meet the needs of the county's poorest children. English Language Learners comprise 2.05% of Wicomico County students and 11.7% of students receive Special Education services.

Mobility of students continues to present a challenge to the school system that is trying to provide a first class education to each child. The disruption of the educational process that which occurs when students leave school during the year or enter after the school year has begun, causes students to fall behind their peers in academic achievement. Approximately 20% of all students enrolled in the Wicomico County school system during 2002, either left the system during the school year or started school after the year had begun. In elementary and middle school, more students entered late, while in high school, a higher percentage of students left before the year was completed.

Wicomico County has a well-trained professional staff with varied educational backgrounds and teaching experiences. Approximately 80% have master's degrees, equivalencies or doctorates. The school system employs 1,113 certificated teachers whose average tenure is fifteen years and 287 instructional assistants whose average tenure is eight years. Students are provided with guidance services and each school has a nurse. To help each child reach his potential, special area personnel serve in the following capacities: resource teachers; school psychologists; occupational, speech, and physical therapists; special education teachers; teachers for English Language Learners; and gifted and talented teachers.

Finance, human resource, and technology departments, staffed with professionals in their respective fields, provide management and administration support. Technology is used both as an instructional tool and to facilitate administrative functions, maintain student data, and provide assessment information. A Board of Education of Wicomico County website (www.wcboe.org) enables the public to obtain information about the school system electronically.

Executive Summary

In addition, a support staff consisting primarily of classroom assistants, custodians, cafeteria workers and secretaries help to keep the schools running smoothly and promote educational achievement. The Wicomico County school system provides a comprehensive food service program in each school. Free or reduced-price meals are available to children qualifying under federal government guidelines. Transportation is provided to approximately 90% of all county students who ride the bus to and from school. All elementary students living more than one mile from school and secondary students living more than one and one-half miles are eligible for transportation.

Community-based Education

Wicomico County Public Schools offers academic and other educational opportunities to the community. Basic Education (ABE) is taught at the Adult Learning Center and can lead one to earn a G.E.D. The G.E.D. or General Education Development is high school level instruction that may lead to a high school equivalency certificate. Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (E.S.O.L.) offerings are also available. Parenting programs are offered in a variety of community settings including places of employment and local churches.

Community Involvement in the Public Schools

The Wicomico County public school system enjoys the support of the community it serves. Volunteers are a vital part of the operation of the school system. Approximately 1,000 parents and other volunteers devote time and effort to helping students. Parents and representatives of community businesses and civic organizations support the schools by serving on task forces, school improvement teams and advisory committees, by sponsoring incentive and recognition programs, and by providing resources to supplement instructional as well as extra-curricular offerings.

Governance

A seven-member Board of Education, appointed by the Governor of Maryland, sets school system policy, which is carried out by the Superintendent, three assistant superintendents (for Administrative Services, Instruction and Curriculum, and Student Services) and a workforce of approximately 2,000. A student representative participates on the Board in an advisory capacity.

Vision/Mission/Beliefs

On March 11, 1997 the Board of Education of Wicomico County, after a broad-based consultation and review process, adopted the following vision, mission, and belief statements to guide the policy of the Board. These statements continue to guide Wicomico County as it develops, implements and evaluates its Master Plan.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Wicomico County Public School System is to provide all students an educational foundation and a set of skills which will enable them to become responsible and productive citizens in our society.

VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to educate each student to his or her full potential.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We, the members of the Board of Education of Wicomico County and the Superintendent of Schools, believe the following:

- All students can learn.
- Each student should be challenged to reach his or her full potential.
- The diversity of each individual, including his or her unique and innate characteristics, should be respected.
- Students should be exposed to a wide array of academic, co-curricular and extracurricular experiences.
- Students should experience rigorous content and achieve high standards.
- Each student should acquire a core body of knowledge and a set of definable skills prior to graduation.
- Community-based values should be reinforced.
- Parents or guardians should be intimately involved in the education of their child(ren).
- Schools should welcome and encourage parental and community involvement.
- Students benefit when those closest to the action are involved in the decision-making process.

- Continual evaluations of the school system should be made to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of high quality public education.
- Public education should be governed by local boards of education.
- The Maryland State Board of Education, the Maryland State Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education should be supportive of the local boards of education.

Master Plan Development, Implementation and Oversight

Under the direction of the Superintendent of Schools, the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Curriculum and the School Improvement Coordinator, served as co-conveners of a 23-member Master Plan Steering Committee, charged with overseeing the development of the Master Plan. The Steering Committee established nine workgroups around key issues to be addressed by the Master Plan – Reading, Mathematics, English Language Learners, Highly Qualified Workforce, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Dropout Prevention, Pre-K and Kindergarten, Technology and Facilities, Title I, and Budget/Impact. The workgroups brought together a broad-based group of over 180 teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members, business leaders, and local government officials to: discuss goals and objectives, assess needs, evaluate current strategies being used to address those needs, identify other research-based strategies to replace those which are not successful, develop an action plan to meet goals and objectives, identify indicators to measure progress, estimate the resources (financial, personnel, other) needed, and create a management plan for implementation and evaluation.

On a regular basis, workgroup recommendations were reported back to the Steering Committee, to the Leadership Team, to the Board of Education and to School Improvement Teams to insure widespread involvement of stakeholders in this process. Input from all of these entities contributed to the final plan, approved by the Board of Education of Wicomico County on September 9, 2003.

Executive Summary

During the development of the Master Plan, open lines of communication were established with the County Council to facilitate understanding of the Plan requirements. Three members of the Council were participants on Plan workgroups.

The resulting Master Plan includes strategies and activities that incorporate research-based best practices including: effective parent involvement and community collaboration, the use of proven standards-based instructional practices to meet the needs of all students, the infusion of technology to support and enhance the learning process, on-going systematic professional development to develop and sustain a high quality workforce, the use of data in the decision-making process, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs, and providing a safe learning environment.

Wicomico County Public Schools recognizes the potential of its Master Plan, in eliminating the achievement gap and improving learning for all students in a safe environment, can only be realized with careful attention to the quality and integrity with which the Plan is implemented. Accountability to the school community and stakeholders plays an integral role in the management and oversight components of the Master Plan. Organizational structures and responsibilities have been created and/or assigned to provide for on-going management of individual action steps, overall Plan management and Plan oversight.

At the highest level, the Superintendent of Schools and the Wicomico County Board of Education will monitor the school system's progress in meeting the goals and objectives of the Master Plan. The Superintendent of Schools will inform members of the Board of the status of Plan implementation and results, presenting recommendations for adjustments as indicated. Using input from the Master Plan Oversight and Steering Committees, the Board of Education will make the final determination of whether the Plan is successfully improving learning for all students or needs to be modified.

The *Master Plan Oversight Committee* will be a broad-based stakeholder group charged with the oversight of the Master Plan to include both strategy/action step and fiscal components. The Oversight Committee will review reports prepared by the Master Plan Steering Committee

including reports on Plan implementation status, fiscal status, progress in meeting stated goals and objectives, and recommendations for adjustments as indicated. The Oversight Committee will be asked to affirm the Steering Committee's recommendations and/or suggest alternative approaches so as to accelerate attainment of the school system's goals and objectives.

A **Master Plan Steering Committee**, composed of internal stakeholders, will be charged with the on-going review of the implementation of the Master Plan, focusing on the quality with which action steps are executed, alignment and integration with various educational initiatives, stakeholder communication and collaboration, and overall Plan management including fiscal components. The Steering Committee will use multiple sources of data to assess progress in meeting stated goals and objectives and to make judgments regarding program effectiveness.

Needs Assessment

Internal and External Assessments

The Wicomico County Public School System has undergone a number of internal and external assessments in recent years to improve student achievement and staff and systems effectiveness and efficiency. These studies include an *Administrative and Organizational Study* by Hendricks & Associates (1999); a *Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness* by the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) (2000); a *Wicomico County Public School System Feedback Report* by the University of Maryland Center for Quality and Productivity using the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (2001); an *Operational Review of Selected Programs and Functions of the County Government and Board of Education* by Parsons Asset Management (2002); and *Parent, Student and Teacher Survey Results* (2002). Additional reports focused on facilities management that were utilized include the *Seidel Commission Report on Facility Planning* (1988) and the *Report to the Wicomico County Board of Education from the Committee on Efficiency and Facilities Management* (Downes, 1991). The Report of the Superintendent's Facilities Task Force on Long Range Planning and Operations (1998) assessed facility conditions and evaluated the system's progress with regard to the implementation of the Downes and Seidel reports.

Student Performance Assessments

In addition to internal and external assessments, student performance data from the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), Maryland Functional Reading Test (MFRT), Maryland Functional Mathematics Test (MFMT), Maryland Writing Test (MWT), Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR), Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), SAT, and assessments of English proficiency have been collected and analyzed as has school district data on attendance, disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and dropouts.

Community Input

Wicomico County Public Schools seeks community and parent participation and input through various means including: School Improvement Teams, advisory committees, Parent Teacher Association, Master Plan Steering Committee and Work Groups, and Community Input Nights. Additionally, the school system has initiated the use of biannual surveys of teachers, parents, and students to gather input and measure satisfaction.

Summary of Needs

1. Certain groups of students, including students eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (FARM), students with disabilities, English Language Learners, African American students, and Hispanic students, are lagging well behind the general student population in reading and math, and are in need of urgent, targeted action to bring them to proficient levels of achievement.
2. Significant achievement gaps, ranging from 25 to 35 points on measures including CTBS, MSPAP, and MSA exist when comparing African American and Hispanic students with white and Asian students in reading and mathematics.
3. The data indicate that Free and Reduced-Priced Meal (FARM) students are 20 to 25 points below non-FARM students on the CTBS reading and math tests over the last three years.
4. Trend data for reading and mathematics reveals that the longer all students attend Wicomico County schools, the lower their performance on CTBS and MSPAP when compared to other Maryland students and students across the nation.

Executive Summary

5. Students with disabilities consistently score lower than students without disabilities on almost all assessments of reading at all grade levels. A similar gap, in the 25-35 point range, also exists in math assessment results.
6. Approximately half of all students entering kindergarten in Wicomico County do not have the necessary skills to begin to learn at the level of expectation.
7. Over the last four years, there has been a 56% increase in the number of English Language Learners served by the school system, representing 21 different languages spoken.
8. Minority students are significantly under-represented in magnet, Certificate of Merit, Advanced Placement, and talented and gifted programs while significantly over-represented in student behavior categories (e.g., office referrals, suspensions).
9. The attendance rates for all middle and high school subgroups, except Hispanics, continue to be below the satisfactory level.
10. The dropout rate in Wicomico County decreased from 5.88% in 2002 to 4.65% in 2003, yet remains considerably above the state satisfactory level of 3%.
11. Not all teachers are expert in the application of scientifically-based instructional strategies, speaking to a need for professional development.
12. Some curriculum guides are not aligned with the Maryland Content Standards.
13. There is a lack of individual assessment data to make on-going informed decisions concerning student learning, except for state or national exams.
14. The number of office referrals increased by more than one-third over the last three years.
15. Wicomico County Public Schools needs an effective system of feedback from stakeholders.
16. An enhanced internal system of feedback is needed to obtain the satisfaction levels of faculty and staff.
17. The school system lacks an effective mechanism for gathering and integrating data from all sources to support daily operations and organizational and instructional decision-making.
18. Wicomico County has one of the lowest cost per pupil ratios in Maryland. It also has one of the lowest administrative costs per student in the state and several administrative

functions are not met. (Wicomico County ranks 10th in the state for both statistics, falling below the state average for each.)

19. There is a need to improve communication and collaboration with parents, community and others.

Research and Best Practices

Administrators, teachers, and instructional supervisors in the Wicomico County Public Schools made a concerted effort in the 2002-2003 school year to research best practices in education. They conducted reviews of the literature, networked with colleagues, attended presentations and conferences, explored the Internet, visited successful programs, and tested new initiatives. The Superintendent of Schools held weekly meetings with key school district personnel, designated as the Triple A Council (Achievement, Attendance, Accountability), to discuss best practice models. The results of this endeavor can be found in many of the action steps of the five-year Master Plan. These action steps incorporate research-based strategies and best practices, to be implemented over the next five years to eliminate achievement gaps and improve education for Wicomico County students. Research-based strategies and best practices forming the foundation of the action plan include: standards-based curriculum and instruction; differentiated instruction; increased time for reading and mathematics instruction; smaller class size; small group and one-on-one instruction for low-performing students; hands-on/experiential learning; full-day kindergarten; pre-kindergarten programs; Comprehensive School Reform models (Success for All, Lightspan, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound); Soar to Success/Early Success; Children's Literacy Initiative; formative and summative assessment; integration of technology as an instructional tool; Destination ImagiNation; Primary Talent Development; mentoring; Instructional Consultation Team model; Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; after-school programs; summer school programs; administrators as instructional leaders; professional development/professional development coaches; teacher induction program/new teacher mentors; cultural awareness/multicultural teacher training; collaborative instructional planning; and, family involvement/parenting seminars.

Strategic Priorities / Goals / Indicators

The Master Plan, organized around Wicomico County Public Schools' three strategic priorities of High Student Achievement, Safe Learning Environment, and Effective and Efficient Operations, provides the foundation for the school system's FY2004 budget and allocation of resources. Goals and indicators of achievement have been developed for each strategic priority and will form the basis to evaluate the success of the Master Plan.

Strategic Priority: High Student Achievement

Goal 1: By 2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.

Indicator 1.1 The percentage of students, in the aggregate and for each subgroup, who are at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the state's assessment.

Indicator 1.2 The percentage of students, in the aggregate and in each subgroup, who are at or above the proficient level in mathematics on the state's assessment.

Goal 2: All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.

Indicator 2.1 The percentage of limited English proficient students, determined by cohort, who have attained English proficiency by the end of the school year.

Indicator 2.2 The percentage of limited English proficient students who are at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the state's assessment, as reported for performance indicator 1.1.

Executive Summary

Indicator 2.3 The percentage of limited English proficient students who are at or above the proficient level in mathematics on the state's assessment, as reported for performance indicator 1.2.

Goal 3: By 2007-2008, provide pre-kindergarten programs for all economically disadvantaged students and full day kindergarten programs for all students.

Indicator 3.1 The number of eligible students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs.

Indicator 3.2 The percentage of students enrolled in kindergarten programs.

Strategic Priority: Safe Learning Environment

Goal 4: All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.

Indicator 4.1 The number of persistently dangerous schools, as defined by the state.

Goal 5: All students will graduate from high school.

Indicator 5.1 The percentage of students who graduate from high school each year with a regular diploma disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged.

Indicator 5.2 The percentage of students who drop out of school, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged.

Indicator 5.3 The number and percentage of schools achieving the state standard of 94% average daily attendance.

Strategic Priority: Effective and Efficient Operations

Goal 6: By 2005-2006, all students will be taught by “highly qualified” teachers.

Indicator 6.1 The percentage of classes being taught by "highly qualified" teachers, in the aggregate and in “high-poverty” schools.

Indicator 6.2 The percentage of teachers receiving "high-quality" professional development.

Indicator 6.3 The percentage of paraprofessionals (excluding those with sole duties as translators and parental involvement assistants) who are qualified.

Goal 7: School- and Central Office-based personnel will have access to, and utilize, high performance technology to meet instructional and administrative needs aligned with the Maryland Plan for Technology in Education.

Indicator 7.1 The number and percentage of schools with universal access to high performance technology.

Indicator 7.2 The percentage of educators who are highly knowledgeable, skilled and capable of effectively using technology tools and digital content.

Indicator 7.3 The percentage of classes regularly using technology tools and digital content in instruction.

Indicator 7.4 The percentage of users reporting satisfaction with available technology to improve school administrative functions and operational processes.

Goal 8: Maintain cost efficient management systems and institute effective practices to improve operations and support to instruction.

Indicator 8.1 Amount of cost savings in energy, procurement, and related operational activities.

Indicator 8.2 Findings of annual Audit Report and Report on Compliance and Internal Control Over Financial Reporting.

Indicator 8.3 Amount of revenue and resources raised from foundations, corporations, state and federal grants, and individual donations.

Action Plan Organization

The five-year Action Plan is organized around Wicomico County Public Schools' three strategic priorities of High Student Achievement, Safe Learning Environment, and Effective and Efficient Operations. It includes strategies and action steps that incorporate research-based best practices including: effective parent involvement and community collaboration, the use of proven standards-based instructional practices to meet the needs of all students, the infusion of technology to support and enhance the learning process, on-going systematic professional development to develop and sustain a high quality workforce, the use of data in the decision-making process, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs, and providing a safe learning environment.

Strategic Priority: High Student Achievement

- Strategy 1: Modify the pre-K to 12 curriculum to assure alignment with the new content standards and Voluntary State Curriculum.
- Strategy 2: Promote the system-wide, consistent use of proven instructional practices.
- Strategy 3: Accelerate the learning of low-performing students through proven intervention initiatives to eliminate achievement gaps.
- Strategy 4: Analyze student performance to evaluate program effectiveness and identify learning needs.
- Strategy 5: Expand challenging educational opportunities for highly-able and gifted and talented students.
- Strategy 6: Sustain and expand collaborative relationships and communication between the school system and all stakeholders in support of student learning.

Strategic Priority: Safe Learning Environment

- Strategy 7: Sustain and expand programs and policies to reduce disruptive unsafe and unhealthy student behavior.
- Strategy 8: Continue to reinforce students' positive connections to school.
- Strategy 9: Extend programs and ensure effective policies that motivate and support students to attend school and graduate from high school.
- Strategy 10: Provide safe and healthful facilities to support student learning.

Strategic Priority: Effective and Efficient Operations

- Strategy 11: Increase the percentage of classes taught by “highly qualified” teachers.
- Strategy 12: Increase the percentage of paraprofessionals who are qualified.
- Strategy 13: Increase the percentage of teachers receiving “high quality” professional development.
- Strategy 14: Upgrade technology infrastructure and increase access to high performance technology for instructional and administrative processes.
- Strategy 15: Improve effective use of technology for instructional and administrative processes.

- Strategy 16: Improve efficiency and effectiveness of operations by aligning actions and reducing costs through internal and collaborative initiatives.

Conclusion

The fundamental purpose of the Board of Education of Wicomico County's *Bridge to Excellence* Master Plan is to increase student achievement for all students in all schools. The Master Plan includes strategies and action steps that incorporate research-based best practices including: effective parent involvement and community collaboration, the use of proven standards-based instructional practices to meet the needs of all students, the infusion of technology to support and enhance the learning process, on-going systematic professional development to develop and sustain a high quality workforce, the use of data in the decision-making process, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs, and providing a safe learning environment. Decisions about the allocation of resources are linked directly and centrally to decisions about improving student learning and ensuring that all children receive an adequate education. The Board of Education of Wicomico County's *Bridge to Excellence* Master Plan, developed with broad-based community input, promotes academic excellence for all students.