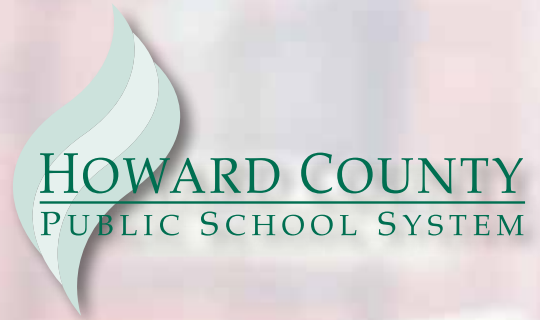


March 2013



Superintendent's Entry Plan
PROGRESS REPORT

RENEE A. FOOSE, Ed.D

Board of Education of Howard County 2012-2013



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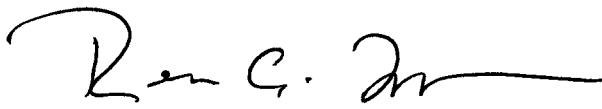
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Introductory Letter from Dr. Foose

Upon entering the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) as the Superintendent in July 2012, I developed an entry plan designed to address the themes that emerged during the Superintendent search process and to set broad objectives and initial entry actions that I would pursue as Superintendent. The five objectives are:

- **Objective 1: Ensure a world class education for every child.**
- **Objective 2: Build stakeholder trust and confidence through open and transparent communication.**
- **Objective 3: Engender a culture of collaborative governance and workforce engagement with the community.**
- **Objective 4: Leverage technology innovations for efficient operation and effective teaching and learning practices.**
- **Objective 5: Align organizational structures and resources with system priorities.**

These objectives served to prioritize the work of central office well into my first year. Eight months into my tenure as Superintendent, I am writing this report to the community to inform you about all of the efforts underway in the school system intended to address these objectives.





Objective 1: Ensure a world class education for every child.

The Howard County Public School System enjoys a national reputation for excellence. Our students consistently rank among the best in the nation in measures of academic performance. Our graduation rate is well above the national average, and nearly all of our graduates go on to college, the military or livable-wage careers.

While these results are satisfying, we are capable of so much more. Our system truly has the potential to become a world leader in K-12 education. A world class system prepares every child with a foundation for success in their choice of college or career, and to discover, and reach, their true potential.

Most of our students already reach achievement targets, and many are learning at rates well beyond their grade level. But we must do more to prepare them to thrive in a rapidly evolving, technologically advanced, global environment. With additional challenges and learning opportunities, these students will discover new interests and develop their strengths, and be inspired to reach even higher.

We must also be resourceful in reaching students whose academic performance lags behind that of their peers. Because achievement remains high for the majority of our students, our challenges are often masked. But we have persistent achievement gaps, especially among students impacted by poverty, and African-American and Hispanic students. The proportion of these groups among our student body has grown rapidly. Often, students at risk begin falling behind in the early grades and never catch up.

Our system, like others nationwide, has focused resources for many years in an effort to close these gaps. Yet despite our best efforts, these gaps persist. So we are actively seeking innovative ways to reach these students, and reach them earlier, to break these patterns and give them equal access to opportunities to pursue their dreams.

We have already made substantial progress in using data and advanced technologies to give us the information and tools to finally crack the code of learning disparity.

“A world class system prepares every child with a foundation for success in their choice of college or career, and to discover, and reach, their true potential.”

Unlocking Achievement Barriers

A partnership with the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University is helping us uncover the underlying factors that affect student achievement. A new staff research team, including two Harvard fellows, is researching data to determine what students in each grade need to learn so they stay on track to the advanced learning opportunities that lead to college readiness. The team is also conducting special research projects into other factors that may influence student achievement, including a comprehensive research study on the impact of school start times.

We have acquired detailed data from the National Student Clearinghouse on the college participation patterns for our high school graduates. We are examining this data by school, economic and ethnic group and other strata, and have begun the process of uncovering factors that result in not starting or dropping out of college. We are now translating this information into strategies to prepare all students for success from the earliest grades.



Progress on State Reforms

I entered HCPSS halfway through implementation of reforms driven by Maryland's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative. RTTT was a competitive federal grant that challenged states to pursue innovative reforms on a rapid timeline from 2010 through 2014. The reforms are designed to ensure that every student is prepared with the requisite skills to succeed in college or in a livable-wage career. Maryland is using its \$250 million grant, in part, to fund development of a new curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards and a teacher evaluation model that incorporates student growth, as measured in part by state test results.

The Common Core State Standards are rigorous K-12 expectations in English language arts and mathematics that were developed collaboratively among the states and have since been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. The Common Core, if implemented well, will raise the level of rigor for all students.

We have made substantial progress in adapting our instructional program to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills they need to succeed in college or high wage careers. We began phasing in the Common Core curriculum last year and will complete full implementation during the 2013-2014 school year. This new curriculum will give students deeper mastery of math and reading and is closely aligned to the skills students need to be well prepared upon high school graduation.

In HCPSS, we are moving away from heavy reliance on high-stakes end-of-course tests, and instead infusing ongoing assessments into the instructional program to give teachers timely information on what students have learned. Ongoing assessment reduces the pressure on students and enables teachers to provide students with meaningful feedback and adjust instruction to meet students' needs. We are piloting the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments, which measure student academic growth at three points during the school year as well as from year to year. We also have discontinued the Grade 2 SAT 10 assessment, which was designed to prepare Grade 2 students for the high stakes Maryland State Assessment program beginning in Grade 3. The assessment was not aligned to our instructional program, placed an undue burden on teachers, and gave little useful information to help further students' learning.

“The Common Core, if implemented well, will raise the level of rigor for all students.”



Many of our leading educators are taking an active role in developing a new assessment tool, aligned with the Common Core curriculum, which will ultimately take the place of the Maryland State Assessments (MSA). These PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments will provide clear, current information on each student's instructional progress from the earliest grades through graduation. The PARCC will measure higher-order skills such as critical thinking, communications, and problem solving, and is expected to do a much better job in providing current, individual feedback on how each student is learning. This information will allow teachers to adjust instruction quickly to adapt to student needs.

As we shift to this more rigorous curriculum and meaningful assessment program, Maryland's RTTT grant also requires that teacher evaluations now include measures of student academic growth in addition to the traditional measures that focus on the professional growth of teachers. With input provided by hundreds of teachers, principals, and other staff, the HCPSS evaluation was designed to support professional growth as teachers implement the Common Core curriculum and prepare all students to be college and career ready. Ten schools are piloting the evaluation on a volunteer basis this year, and have already provided valuable feedback.



To complement our teacher evaluation model, Howard County is studying use of the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) process, in which expert teachers evaluate and coach new teachers and underperforming veterans. PAR shows real promise for supporting teachers in their professional growth.

Beyond State Reforms: Focus on Student Engagement for a World Class Education

While Maryland's reform initiatives are moving the state toward ensuring college and career readiness for every student, in HCPSS, we are striving to ensure that every student has a positive experience in school while receiving a truly world class education.



We have begun to look at innovative approaches to teaching and learning that elevate the level of rigor for every child. We are studying effective domestic and international models that could potentially add value to the instructional program here in the HCPSS. This year, we have hosted educational delegations from South Korea and Thailand, and sent delegations to South Korea and China. We have looked at models for personalizing education, providing alternative scheduling through digital and virtual experiences, enriching the world language program, and offering internationally recognized credentials such as International Baccalaureate diplomas.

No educational delivery model can be truly successful unless students are engaged in learning. We have partnered with the Gallup research organization to assess our students' engagement, hope, and well-being – factors that have been shown to influence students' grades, achievement scores, retention and future employment. The Gallup Student Poll was administered to most of our Grade 5-12 students in the fall. We have begun to analyze the results, which vary by school and grade but in general reflect levels of engagement seen among students throughout the nation. This information will inform our overarching strategy for ensuring students are engaged and ready to learn.

Objective 2: Build stakeholder trust and confidence through open and transparent communication.

Building the Foundation for Effective Communications

In July, I established a Department of Communications, combining all communications functions (Public Information, Web, TV/Video and Print services). This reorganization allows the system to be much more nimble and customer-focused in sharing information with stakeholders and taking advantage of new communications technologies.

The Department of Communications has since systematically assessed the current state and needs of our communications infrastructure, and gathered input through stakeholder focus groups to inform a comprehensive communications strategy. The department also has commissioned the Communications Department at Loyola University Maryland to conduct a comprehensive publications audit for all centrally produced publications. Staff responsibilities have been realigned, and the school system's first web developer has been hired to help develop a consistent content management strategy for all school system websites.

The Board of Education and the community now receive timely, transparent reports on student performance and other data, especially in areas where our results have not yet reached our targets, such as achievement gaps. The Board also receives frequent updates on critical incidents affecting schools, students and staff.

The school system is in the process of developing a social media policy, which the Board intends to adopt for the upcoming school year. The policy is designed to allow social media usage in safe and secure environments to enrich the educational experience, support professional collaboration, and increase opportunities to share and access information. As a first step into using social media to increase system communications, Twitter is now used for emergency communications.



Getting to Know the Community

Part of establishing open and transparent communication is getting to know the many people vested in our school system, and I have spent much of my first eight months doing just that. I set out to visit every school at least once during the school day in my first six months. These visits enabled me to witness our programming in action – to see teachers teaching and students learning. Through these visits, I have spent valuable time communicating with administrators, teachers, staff, and students.



I also launched a series of Listen & Learn sessions as a way of hearing from the community about their experiences, hopes, and aspirations for the school system. This series has enabled me to engage in two-way communication in smaller forums with many members of our school system community. I have shared my vision for our students, and I have learned about the priorities of many of our staff, students, and parents.

- General public – Three sessions were held at Hammond, Marriotts Ridge, and Wilde Lake high schools.
- School and central office staff – Six sessions were held at Hammond, Marriotts Ridge, and Wilde Lake high schools.
- Elementary students – Student-led sessions were held for fifth grade classes at Clemens Crossing, Forest Ridge, Rockburn, and Veterans elementary schools.
- Middle school students – Student-led sessions were held for eighth grade classes at Bonnie Branch, Burleigh Manor, Harper's Choice, and Murray Hill middle schools.
- High school students – Student-led sessions were held for classes at Atholton, Long Reach, Mt. Hebron, and Reservoir high schools.
- School system leaders and emerging leaders – Separate sessions were held for school principals, school assistant principals, and Division of Instruction leaders. A session also was held for emerging leaders enrolled in the HCPSS Leadership Academy.



- Staff – Separate sessions were held for the custodial staff and Division of Finance and Operations staff. Sessions have also been held for secondary math and science teachers, technology teachers, secondary language arts teachers, and middle school math and reading support teachers. Additional sessions are planned for other groups of teachers throughout the spring.
- PTAs – Four regional Listen & Learn sessions are planned for all of the school system's PTAs throughout the spring.

The Listen & Learn sessions have proven to be an excellent forum for sharing school system priorities, identifying concerns and gathering ideas for improving education. This series has been so instructive for me that I intend to continue holding these sessions.

Objective 3: Engender a culture of collaborative governance and workforce engagement with the community.

Effectively leveraging the collective ideas and talents of all stakeholders – parents, students, staff and the community – will accelerate our progress to world class status. Significant progress has been made in fostering a culture of collaboration, where fresh ideas are welcomed and a passion for improvement energizes our staff, students and community.

Community Partnerships

The HCPSS is extremely fortunate to have the support of a multitude of community partners. More than 1,000 businesses, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and countless volunteers generously share their time, expertise and resources. They work with students, advise our staff, and assist in many other ways to help keep our educational system among the best anywhere. I have met with many of these partners over the last several months, both formally and informally, to share common values and system priorities. Thus far, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with the following organizations invested in the well-being and success of our students:

- A-OK Mentoring - Tutoring, Inc.
- African American Roundtable
- Alpha Foundation of Howard County
- American Heart Association
- Association of Community Services of Howard County
- Bright Minds Foundation
- Children's Cancer Foundation
- Chinese Language School of Columbia
- Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts
- Columbia Festival of the Arts
- Community Action Council
- Community Advisory Council
- Conexiones, Inc.
- The Council of Elders
- Glenwood Lions Club
- The Horizon Foundation
- Howard County Chamber of Commerce
- Howard County Economic Development Authority
- Howard County Muslim Council
- Howard County Real Estate Million Dollar Club, Inc.
- International Baccalureate
- Leadership Howard County
- Maryland Business Roundtable for Education
- Maryland Turkish American Inhabitants
- NAACP
- PTA Council of Howard County
- Science Advisory Committee
- Special Education Community Advisory Committee (SECAC)
- St. John Baptist Church
- United Way of Central Maryland





Collaborating to Ensure School Safety

Ensuring a safe learning environment is the highest priority and most urgent mandate shared by the school system, the county government and the entire community. The recent school tragedy in Connecticut, and an escalation in reports of violence at other schools around the nation, has heightened community interest and concern regarding school safety. In response to these concerns, the County Executive and I created a joint task force charged with reviewing current school safety practices and recommending improvements, including strengthened alignment between the HCPSS and our safety partners. Task force members include representatives from county government, public safety, public health, parents, students, and staff from schools and the central office.

In January, the task force invited the community to participate in two School Safety Focus Groups. The response was overwhelming, with hundreds of parents, students, teachers, business owners and others sharing ideas about what already works well and what we can do to improve school security. Task force members are actively assessing these suggestions and preparing plans to ensure a safe and nurturing environment for all students and staff. The plans will be presented to the Board of Education and County Executive in March.

Objective 4: Leverage technology innovations for efficient operation and effective teaching and learning practices.

Technology costs the school system millions of dollars each year. The right investments in technology can enhance both educational practices and operational efficiencies. Technology tools can provide teachers with the time and access they need to innovate instruction and better engage students, and will ultimately unlock the keys to bridging longstanding student achievement gaps. Online access can link students to information and learning experiences in the larger world that connect to their interests and future careers. Business operations can be improved significantly through technology that automates manual processes, synthesizes data, and reduces redundancy.

We are conducting a comprehensive audit to assess the current state of our technology infrastructure. Our goal is to ensure that the necessary hardware is in place throughout the system to facilitate effective classroom instruction and supports, and that our technology is aligned to meet both current and future needs.

Data Governance

Successful improvement efforts hinge on access to timely and accurate data. To date, information on student performance has been stored in multiple systems that are often outdated and redundant. We have contracted an external group to conduct a comprehensive audit of our data systems, projected for completion this summer. The audit report will identify where all existing information is housed and include recommendations for enhancing the efficiency, quality and security of our data collection, processing and reporting methods.

We are also in the process of reviewing our computer replacement plan to find less expensive options, and converting email communications to the industry standard, Microsoft Exchange.

Advanced Media

iPads are being evaluated for instructional use in a pilot project currently underway at the middle school level. This technology – which students are already accustomed to using in their personal lives – offers great potential to enhance instruction. Feedback from both students and teachers has been very positive.

The social media policy now in development will set the groundwork for responsible use of these communications tools in the learning environment, and for greater engagement and interaction with parents and other stakeholders.

We are also collaborating with Howard County Government in the One Maryland Broadband Initiative. This federally-funded program will equip all schools with broadband network access. We'll be able to open the walls of the classroom by bringing in exciting new technologies, and collaborating with schools, businesses and other partners. Broadband will also enable closer collaboration between the HCPSS and county agencies to improve operational efficiencies and emergency coordination.



Objective 5: Align organizational structures and resources with system priorities.

Progress is underway to ensure alignment of system priorities with systemic structures, resources, and position allocation.

Strategic Planning

The school system has engaged the community in a strategic visioning process this year with the intention of putting a five-year strategic plan in place effective July 1, 2013. The strategic plan will align our practices and resource allocation with our vision, mission, and core values, and serve as a guide to prioritize our work as we move forward. It will map out how we intend to become a truly world class organization – both in business practices and educational outcomes – over a five year period.

The strategic planning process began with the Listen & Learn sessions this fall, followed by more targeted stakeholder input sessions held in January and February. Nearly 900 people participated in ten focus groups held for staff members, parents, students and community members. Additional input was gathered online from those who were not able to attend a focus group. All input received centered around seven critical areas:

- Teaching and Learning
- Safe and Nurturing Environment
- Communication
- Family and Community Partnerships
- Technology
- Business and Organizational Practices
- Staffing and Leadership Development

The third phase in the strategic planning process is currently underway. The Strategic Planning Committee, comprising seven Design Teams, is analyzing all data collected to develop a vision for what the school system will look like by June of 2018 in each of the seven areas. The committee is also identifying strategies and initiatives that will help us realize the vision, including those already in place and others that should be implemented over the next five years. Criteria for success will be identified for each initiative so that progress can be monitored and reported.



Strategic Plan Process Timeline

January - February	Focus Groups
February - March	Design Teams Develop Key Outcomes, Strategies and Criteria for Success
March - May	Core Team Integrates all Design Team Findings into a Comprehensive Plan
May or June	Presentation of Plan to the Board of Education
July 1, 2013	Go Live!



Organizational Realignment

The system's organizational structure was realigned to streamline central services and resources to support student achievement, while maximizing operational efficiencies.

The new structure is intended to enhance the school system's capacity to institute cost-effective world class business practices. Additional emphasis has been placed on developing our in-house capacity to institute continuous improvement practices that increase both effectiveness and efficiency. This includes deepening our capacity to conduct applied research and program evaluations to inform systemic decisions, and developing both technology and communications infrastructure to improve the flow and accessibility of information.

A Chief Accountability Officer now oversees student assessment, program evaluation, applied research, continuous improvement, internal auditing operations, and student data management. The new structure facilitates the use of technology to support continuous improvement efforts, both in operations and instruction, and eases employee access to timely and relevant information to guide decision-making.

A new Continuous Improvement Coordinator is leading system efforts to enhance efficiencies and improve processes throughout the organization, leading to a organizational culture of continuous improvement. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all investments, in both time and capital, directly support teaching and learning.

The recently consolidated Department of Communications enhances our ability to communicate timely information in multiple formats to various stakeholder groups.



Within the Division of Instruction, the offices of special education and student services were consolidated into a single Office of Special Education and Student Services (OSESS). This realignment enhances centralized monitoring and support services in order to raise student achievement and ensure a safe and nurturing environment for every child.

The Human Resources office has been incorporated into the Division of Organizational Support Services, improving alignment with other staff support functions.

The school system has shifted its delivery model for legal service to rely solely on outside counsel for all legal matters. Previously, in-house counsel was augmented by contracted outside legal consultation for specialized matters. This change allows the system to seek support from experts in different aspects of the law on a case-by-case basis, and builds staff capacity to resolve administrative matters that do not require specialized legal support.

With the speed at which technology has changed over the past decade, much of the organization is still structured with inefficient and manual processes. Additional organizational realignment is currently under consideration with the intent of automating laborious and inefficient business processes and streamlining information flow.

Resource Allocation

The school system has hired a consultant to analyze our current processes for allocating resources and develop recommendations for moving forward. His initial analysis revealed that under the current framework, funding decisions for programs and initiatives are often guided by history rather than by strategic priorities. The new strategic plan that will go into effect July 1, 2013 will guide our work. The current budget process will be modified to support this new model for prioritizing programs and initiatives.

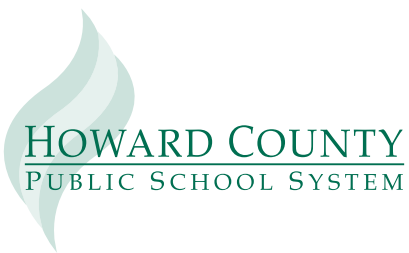
To accomplish this goal, we have begun initial planning for a shift to Zero-Based Budgeting, projected for implementation in FY15. This is an approach to planning and fiscal decision-making that examines every annual expenditure area from a “zero” starting point based on its relation to strategic goals, rather than the traditional method of evaluating incremental changes to an existing budget. When fully and effectively implemented, Zero-Based Budgeting has the potential to identify savings, prioritize higher-value investments, and increase budget transparency.

Next Steps

Efforts underway are driving our transformation into a truly world class school system. The data management, technology, and publications audits will lead to additional efficiencies throughout our organization. Applied research in the areas of student engagement and college and career readiness will help enrich our programming. Instruction will become more robust as we implement the Common Core curriculum and pilot innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The new strategic plan will guide the school system’s work over the next five years. This plan, coupled with a shift to a more proactive budget process, will give us the tools we need to effectively prioritize our resources and fund strategies and initiatives to realize our goals.

“Efforts underway are driving our transformation into a truly world class school system.”





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