



Journey of Excellence

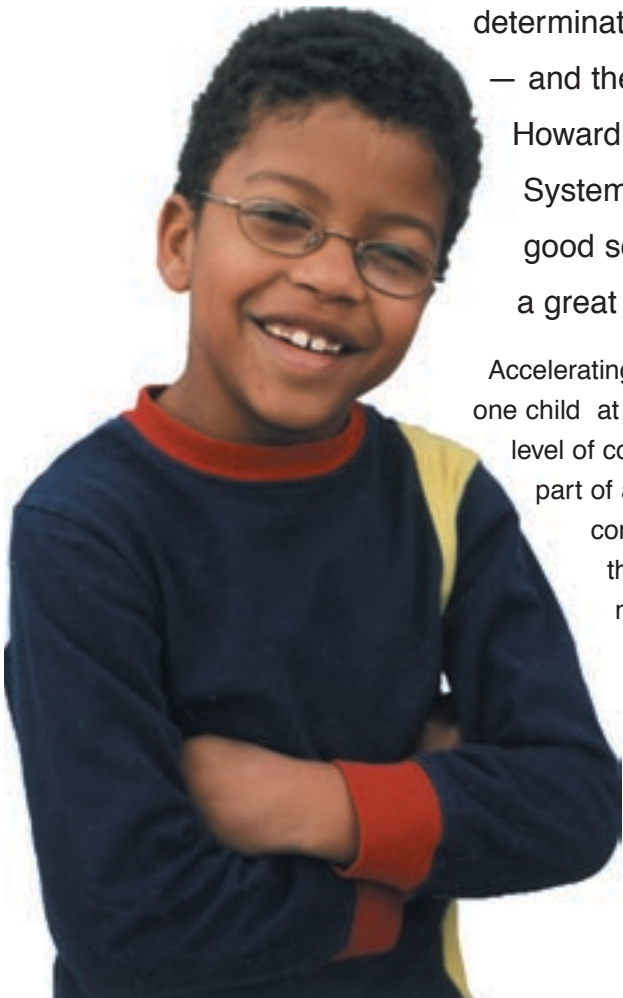
**BRIDGE TO EXCELLENCE
MASTER PLAN UPDATE
JANUARY 2006**

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Howard County Public School System continues its standing as the top-performing district in the State of Maryland. While overall performance is important, the true measure of a school system is the academic achievement of each and every child. Therefore, the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and HCPSS teachers and staff, have embarked on a “**journey of excellence**” to ensure each child meets rigorous academic standards. Meeting that challenge demands

determination and perseverance — and the will to take the Howard County Public School System from being a very good school system to being a great one.

Accelerating student achievement one child at a time requires a deep level of commitment on the part of all involved. That commitment is reflected in the school system’s mission to ensure excellence in teaching and learning so that each student will participate responsibly in a diverse and changing world; and in the two strategic goals



HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM TARGETS

2005 Target: Each school will meet Adequate Yearly Progress and have 70 percent of students at proficient or advanced on the reading and mathematics Maryland School Assessments.

Status: All HCPSS elementary, middle, and high schools met Adequate Yearly Progress in 2005.

All HCPSS elementary and middle schools met the target in reading; 6 high schools met the reading target on the new English 2 assessment.

Thirty-five of the 38 schools with elementary grades and 14 of the 19 schools with middle grades met the target in mathematics; 5 high schools met the target for geometry.

2007 Target: Each school will meet Adequate Yearly Progress and all student groups will have 70 percent of students at proficient or advanced on the reading and mathematics Maryland School Assessments.

Goal I: Student Performance

Each child, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or socioeconomic status, will meet the rigorous performance standards that have been established. All diploma-bound students will perform on or above grade level in all measured content areas.

Goal II: School Climate

Each school will provide a safe and nurturing school environment that values our diversity and commonality.

A landmark piece of Federal legislation enacted in 2002, known as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, triggered many changes in the way public schools do business. Fortunately, many of the changes, including data-driven decision making, were already well established in the Howard County Public School System.

Four years ago, the school system established the acceleration of student performance and the elimination of achievement gaps as its top priority. Data at that time showed:

- The school system continued to experience rapid enrollment growth and was enrolling an increasingly diverse student population.
- A gap in academic achievement existed among student groups.
- School improvement processes were not consistent from school to school.
- Six schools were designated by the Maryland State Department of Education as "Schools In Improvement."



- There was a lack of varied instructional practices to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Processes that once worked well for the majority of students proved insufficient for the growing number of English language learners, children from poverty, and students from diverse backgrounds.
- Provided differentiated resources such as reading and math support teachers to provide on-the-job professional development to classroom teachers.
- Intensified academic support for students performing below grade level in reading and math during and after school, and in the summer.

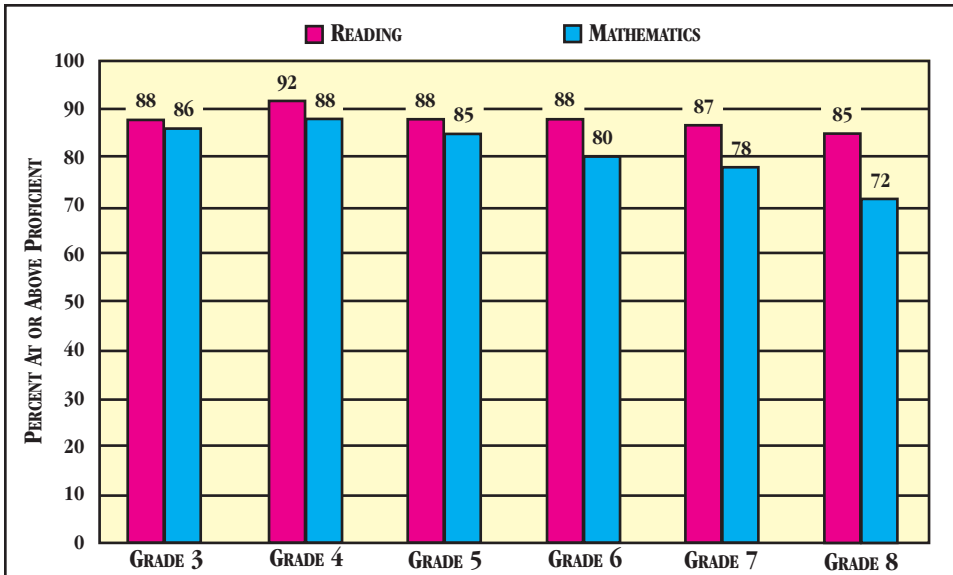
Howard County's local academic achievement targets were intentionally designed to be higher and more rigorous than the state's accountability targets in order to set high expectations and promote excellence.

In response, the school system adjusted its approach to positively affect and accelerate academic achievement for all students. To address these challenges, HCPSS staff:

- Provided comprehensive support to schools with greater numbers of students performing below grade level so they could improve teaching and accelerate student achievement.

- Instituted local accountability standards to monitor school improvement efforts.
- Aligned systemwide processes, including curriculum and assessments, school improvement processes and professional development.

2005 MSA Proficiency Results



Maryland’s accountability system for Adequate Yearly Progress monitors each school’s performance overall and for every student group. In 2005, all Howard County elementary, middle, and high schools made AYP.

Howard County’s local academic achievement targets were intentionally designed to be higher and more rigorous than the state’s accountability targets in order to set high expectations and promote excellence. For example, the HCPSS expects 70 percent of HCPSS students to perform at proficient or above on the Maryland School Assessment in reading and mathematics. The state’s target varied from 36 percent to 58 percent, depending on the content area and school level. While the HCPSS 2005 target was for overall performance, the 2007 target is for 70 percent of every student group to achieve proficient or above.

As noted, four years ago, six Howard County public schools could not meet the state’s target, but now:

- At every grade level systemwide, 70 percent of HCPSS students achieved proficient or above in both mathematics and reading in 2005.

- All elementary and middle schools met the target in reading.
- Six of our high schools met the reading target on a new English 2 assessment.

Excellence is not a destination, but a journey.

- All schools with elementary grades and 13 out of 19 schools with Grades 6-8 met the target in mathematics.
- Five high schools met the math target for Geometry.

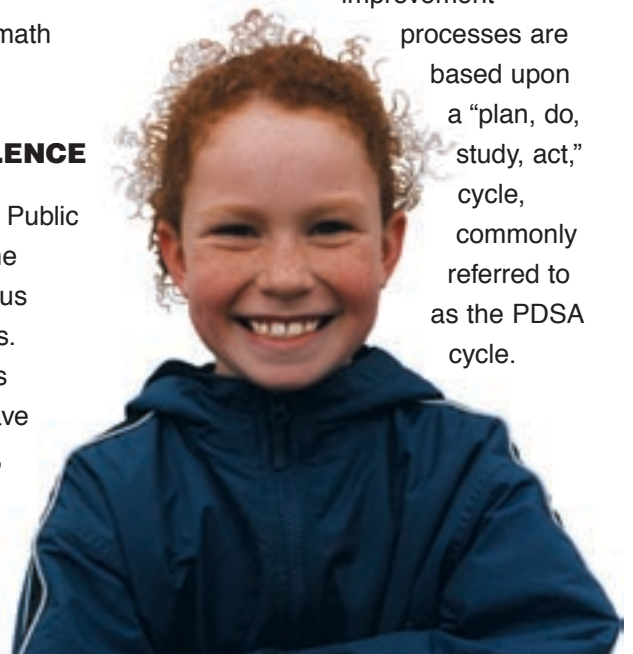
JOURNEY OF EXCELLENCE

Early on, the Howard County Public School System recognized the importance of using continuous improvement to achieve goals. During the past four years, as Howard County educators have worked and learned together, an effective process for improvement has evolved. This system-wide thinking process guides system efforts,

ensures actions are aligned, and focuses energies on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

Continuous improvement happens in two important ways in the school system—through the school improvement process and the program improvement process. These

processes are based upon a “plan, do, study, act,” cycle, commonly referred to as the PDSA cycle.





PDSA is a total quality business model that incorporates an ongoing cycle of data-driven improvement. It is used at the system, school, classroom and even the individual student level to identify targets, align resources, and determine appropriate actions. It can be used to examine a lesson, a special initiative, a curricular program, or the overall performance of the system. The cycle involves four stages:

Plan: The road map is drawn during the planning stage. Data are used to determine current status and to set objectives. The latest educational research provides solid strategies for reaching an identified destination.

Do: Action is the focus of the “do” stage. Available resources are used to implement strategies, provide instruction, and conduct professional development to improve the performance of students, classes, schools, and ultimately the system.

Study: Throughout the journey, the course is checked and rechecked through the careful review of data. Purposeful and reflective study enables staff to identify the strengths and weaknesses of what has been done.

Act: During the “act” stage of the cycle, decisions are made to continue or modify the course based on the study of results. The cycle then repeats itself.

Each step moves closer to the goal and at the same time leads back to more planning. The cycle continuously repeats, ensuring ongoing improvement. Excellence is not a destination, but a journey.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

The school system’s local accountability system includes indicators to monitor system progress and performance. Both trend data and disaggregated data for each of these indicators are used to determine what has worked well and areas that need improvement. Data from a variety of additional sources are used to evaluate overall effectiveness and to determine if the resources and support provided have made a difference.

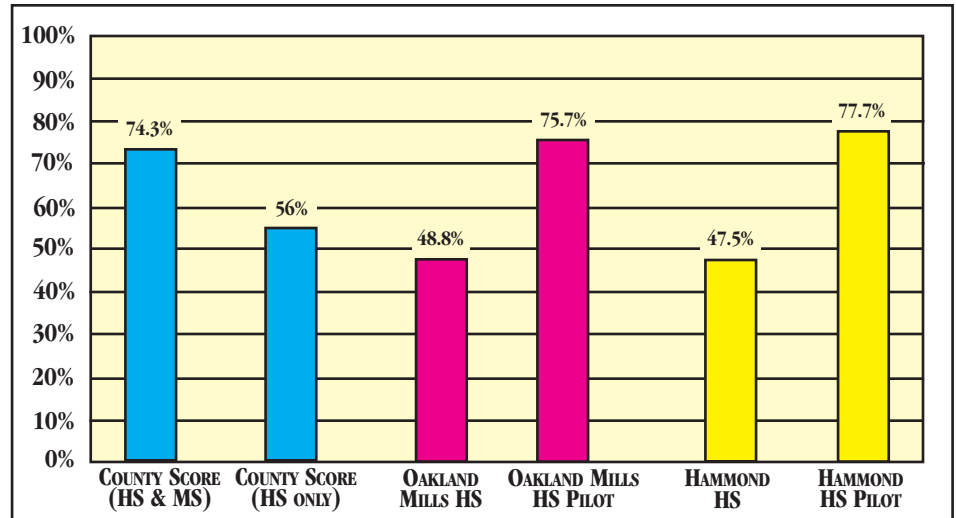
For example...

Several indicators focus on participation in Gifted and Talented classes or advanced level coursework because a system strategy is to encourage all students to pursue more challenging coursework and aim for excellence. Additional GT staffing at many small elementary schools enabled our elementary schools to focus on talent development and ultimately to exceed the established standard for all students and to show significant progress for all student groups. The growth for African American and Hispanic students from 2004 to 2005 was strong and both are now near the 15 percent standard, so efforts for improvement will continue. At the high school level, every student group achieved the 40 percent standard for participation in GT/honors/AP courses.

Data are collected beyond the indicators in the school system’s *Bridge to Excellence* report. These data include student performance, observation of implementation, and anecdotal evidence from participants related to specific strategies that have been implemented.



Pass Rate of Students on Algebra HSA Co-Teaching Pilot versus Students in Regular Instruction



One of the strategies monitored this past year is the co-teaching model piloted at several high schools. The graph above shows the percent of students in the pilot who passed the Algebra HSA in 2005—evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy to prepare students for a crucial, high stakes assessment.

This type of data analysis is used at the school, program, and system levels. In the summer of 2005, staff from the Division of Instruction, who form the School Support Team, engaged in an extensive data analysis process. The team examined not only systemwide data, but data for every school. These data included test scores, observations gathered from working with schools, reports generated for Maryland State Department of Education, and feedback from administrators and teachers.

The School Support Team identified areas that will continue to need

emphasis in order to drive improvement. Performance in these areas will be monitored throughout the year as part of the ongoing “study” component of the cycle. The team also began to explore ways to support the unique needs of each school in these areas, in preparation to “act.”

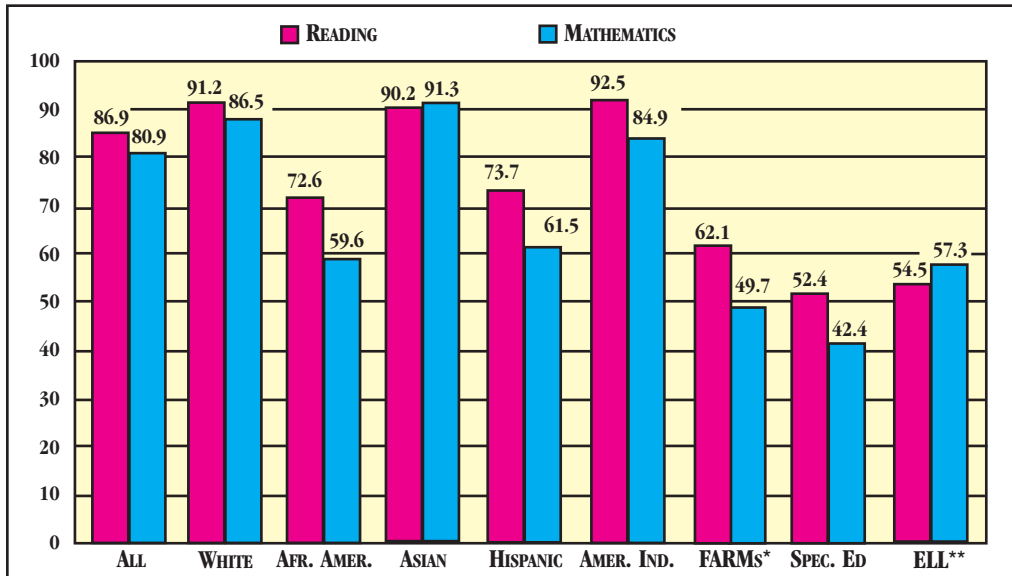
LESSONS LEARNED

The power of working collaboratively as a Professional Learning Community was an important lesson learned from this process. As a result, staff from the Division of Instruction and high school principals now meet regularly to study what has worked and to modify plans for the future to ensure that all students pass the High School Assessments. Discussion centers on various models of intervention and support to address common challenges and also what type of flexibility is needed for each school to effectively address the unique needs of its student population.

For example, to ensure that all students meet or exceed rigorous performance standards and that all students graduate, every student is challenged to achieve at the highest possible level. Data show that efforts must intensify with all student groups, especially with African American males, Hispanic students, and students receiving special education, or services for English language learners.

To accomplish this, professional development and resources are provided to all schools where there is an identified need. In the past, schools were targeted for improvement because of overall performance and additional resources were directed to those schools. Today, targeted support is provided to each school based on their specific and unique needs.

2005 MSA Performance of Howard County Public School Students by Student Group



Data show that efforts must intensify with all student groups, especially with African American males, Hispanic students, and students receiving special education services or services for English language learners.

* Students that receive Free and Reduced Meals

** English Language Learners

IN CONCLUSION...

To move the school system from good to great, takes courage – courage to ask the hard questions, to continually examine practices, and to try new ways of educating children. The Howard County Public School System has identified a process that works. The progress made and the results presented in this report confirm that the school system is on the right track.

While this success is attributable in part to the PDSA process, it is the human energy and creativity within this learning community that have truly made the difference.

The Howard County Public School System is fortunate to employ very talented, committed people who refuse to give up on any child; who demonstrate through perseverance and dedication that they truly BELIEVE every single child can attain a high level of achievement.



Journey of Excellence

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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