

CHAPTER III: WHAT DO WE WANT FOR OUR CHILDREN?

As noted in the introductory chapter (CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION), three questions guide district activities. The first—“What do we want for our children?”—provides the basis for this chapter.

The mission of the HCPSS is to ensure excellence in teaching and learning so that each student will participate responsibly in a diverse and changing world. In setting that strategic goal for the school system, a 1994 strategic planning committee envisioned a dynamic learning community in which:

- Education is valued and children are cherished.
- There is a commitment to academic excellence and inspired performance.
- Everyone is united in a common commitment to ensuring success for each child.
- Staff has the resources and support to meet the needs of each child.
- Everyone feels compelled to make an investment in the future of our youth.
- Everyone works together to set and achieve the highest possible standards and to be accountable for results.
- Schools are safe and inspiring places.
- Diversity is valued and enriches our daily lives.
- Families play a vital, active, and responsible role in the education of children.
- Mutual trust and respect exist.
- Everyone is an active learner.
- Learning reaches beyond the classroom into the community and is networked into the world.
- All work together to create a better future for themselves and others.

There is a significant correlation between the five ESEA goals and the HCPSS’s vision. The first of the ESEA goals requires that *all* students reach high standards, as confirmed by the HCPSS’ commitment to “academic excellence and inspired performance.” The ESEA requirements regarding Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students are consistent with *all* of the school system’s specifications regarding a dynamic learning community. The ESEA requirement regarding highly qualified teachers is consistent with the HCPSS’ vision, which will also be discussed in subsequent chapters of this document. The ESEA obligation to provide safe and drug-free environments that are conducive to learning is confirmed by the school system’s belief that schools must be “safe and inspiring places.” Finally, the ESEA requirement that all students must graduate from high school is implicit in all of HCPSS’s belief statements and will also be discussed later in this document.

Owing to the close correlation between the school system's vision and the ESEA goals, it should not be necessary to distinguish between them in the remainder of this document. (Refer to Appendix JJJ for an alignment between the ESEA goals and HCPSS's plan.)

From the school system's vision, as well as the five ESEA goals, flow the two major goals of the HCPSS:

- Each child, regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability or gender, will meet or exceed the rigorous performance standards. All diploma-bound students will perform on or above grade level in all measured content areas; and, the HCPSS has set as a target that each school will meet state standards by 2005 and that all achievement gaps will be closed by 2007.
- The Howard County Public School System will provide a safe and nurturing school environment that values our diversity and commonality.

The specific objectives related to the accomplishment of these two major goals, along with the five-year strategies for their accomplishment, appear in the next several chapters.

The basis of instruction for all students, and the elimination of achievement gaps, is a rigorous essential curriculum. The HCPSS provides families with two documents to support the essential curriculum. A family guide, *What Your Child Will Learn in...*, for Kindergarten through Grade 8 is provided during the school year. At the end of the 2002-2003 school year, families of elementary children were given a summer packet for the grade the children would be entering in the fall, *Staying Sharp in the Summertime*, to promote continuous improvement. (Refer to Appendix Y for a sample of each document.)

Specific performance objectives related to the elimination of achievement gaps and the effective instruction of *all* students are delineated in subsequent chapters, but the need for a comprehensive essential curriculum was recognized very early by the HCPSS, and from the development and implementation of essential curriculum, all other HCPSS programs derive.

When the state MSPAP program was initiated, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) began to develop content standards in all subjects. The HCPSS developed local essential curriculum, as well as local assessments, that paralleled the state content standards. This process will continue as long as the state continues to develop and revise content standards, and as long as local needs continue to change and evolve.

The HCPSS does not, at present, intend to adopt the Maryland Voluntary Curriculum (MVC), for the current HCPSS curriculum is based not only on state content standards

but also on local curriculum needs. The HCPSS will continue to reevaluate the advisability of adopting the MVC.

So, in conclusion, the two pillars upon which all programs of the school system rest (and upon which all subsequent objectives are based), are rigorous performance standards and essential curriculum, and a safe, nurturing environment in which to teach it. These two fundamental goals are the main architectural supports of the school system and of this document.

