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The District Management Council (DMC) has at your request compiled an overview of the documents delivered to the district. We conducted a Special Education Opportunities Review on behalf of the Howard County Public School System. The review focused equally on the academic achievement of students and on the cost effective use of limited financial resources. The study was conducted under the framework of the continuous improvement model. It does not try to determine what is good or bad, but rather creates a road map to help move a district to the next level of performance. This process acknowledges that all systems can improve and that opportunities for improvement are built upon the district's current strengths, history, structure, and resources.

The review compared current practice in the district to best practices drawn from similar systems around the country. It also incorporates a number of well-tested analytical tools and national benchmarking. The review looked equally at general education services for struggling students as well as special education services.

The review respects the reality that school districts are complex organizations tasked with a multitude of expectations, unfunded mandates, priorities, and responsibilities. Although a large variety of thoughtful ideas for improvement are possible, a short, targeted plan is more beneficial than a long laundry list of observations, options, and possible actions. To that end, a small number of high-potential, high-impact opportunities were recommended.

The research for this project included extensive in-person interviews, an online parent survey, a deep look at hard data, classroom visits, benchmarking against best practices and like communities, and other research.

The following roles were interviewed in the fall of 2014, typically with approximately 6-10 representatives in each focus group:

- Elementary special education teachers
- Secondary special education teachers
- Speech and language pathologists
- Occupational therapists
- Physical therapists
- Psychologists and social workers
- Instructional facilitators
- Elementary general education teachers
- Secondary general education teachers
- Special education co-teachers

- Parents
- Elementary paraprofessionals
- Secondary paraprofessionals
- Reading and math specialists
- Elementary principals
- Elementary assistant principals
- Secondary principals
- Secondary assistant principals

Additionally, the following leadership roles were interviewed during this process:

- High school instructional team leaders
- Middle school instructional team leaders
- Elementary instructional team leaders
- Curriculum directors
- Elementary curriculum coordinators
- Secondary curriculum coordinators
- Chief of Accountability
- Special education and student services leadership
- Administrative directors
- Deputy superintendent
- Superintendent
- Executive director of special education and student services
- Chief finance officer and staff

A unique feature of the review was our scheduling sharing technology. This allowed nearly every special educator, paraprofessional, related service provider and others to share a week's schedule with us via an online tool.

After the initial research, we provided in October 2014 an internal working draft for district leaders to provide feedback, identify any data errors and clarify any outstanding questions and allow district leaders to conduct further internal study. This was approximately 34 pages long.

In January of 2015 we presented our findings to the district leadership and the school board. The district also presented work plans and formed working groups to begin addressing the opportunities.

In the Spring of 2015 the final report was provided. This was a summary of key findings somewhat less than 30 pages long. You have asked about the existence of a more comprehensive bound report, but no such report was ever prepared by DMC or shared with the district. DMC believes shorter more focused reports have more impact.

In October of 2016 DMC presented a list of answers to questions raised by a stakeholder.

Finally, under a separate contract, we conducted a facilities, maintenance and grounds review and provided a report in April 2015.

As with all of our work with districts across the country, we study a topic very broadly and deeply but then summarize just the key finding and opportunities. We believe this creates focus and enhances implementation. No district has the capacity to implement dozens of recommendations. We do not share the raw data, meeting notes, or background analysis as a standard practice.

I hope this summary is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Levenson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nathan Levenson  
President