



Together we will **BE GREAT!**

**Strategic Plan
2024-2029**



Letter from the Superintendent

DEAR HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM COMMUNITY,

As I began my tenure as the HCPSS Superintendent, my highest priority was to ensure we are preparing every student to realize success and fulfill their dreams. **Our students are our highest priority, and we put them at the top of our organizational structure.** This paradigm shift can only be accomplished when staff and collaborative partnerships exist with parents/guardians and community members to ensure our staff and students are successful. I believe we are not a great school system until we are great for all.

To achieve this ambitious goal, we embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process. Students, staff, families, and community partners were engaged to gather their values, insights, and aspirations. Through a survey, interviews, and community input sessions, we listened to all voices and incorporated this feedback into the plan.

This strategic plan is more than just a document — it’s a five-year roadmap for reimagining education in the Howard County Public School System, challenging the status quo, and creating a great and robust learning experience for all. **We cannot do this alone.** We need the collective effort of our entire community to make this vision a reality.

Together, we will ground ourselves in the following commitments to make progress toward being a great system for every individual:

- We will ensure each student has **equitable** access to high-quality instruction and support services.
- We will embrace cutting-edge ideas and **innovative** practices.
- We will nurture a culture of **belonging** by creating welcoming, safe, affirming, and supportive environments for all.

Each year, we will measure progress made toward meeting each goal included in this plan. We will provide public reports so all members of the community can evaluate our success in a fully transparent way that ensures accountability and shines a light on areas that require additional attention or a change in direction.

Ultimately, it is my goal that, during my tenure as Superintendent, we will move much closer to being a great school system for every member of our learning community.

Together, we will build a legacy of excellence that benefits generations to come. Let’s fearlessly pursue our dreams and together we will BE GREAT!

William J. Barnes, Superintendent

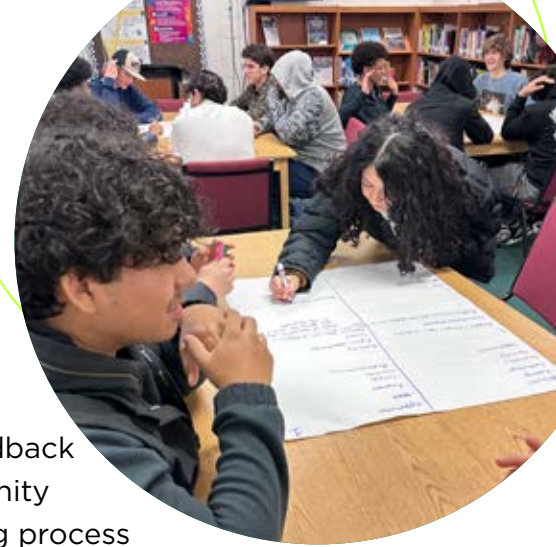




How We Built This Plan

Community Voices

This strategic plan is a reflection of the collective voice of our community. We engaged thousands of community members through a survey, interviews, personal engagements and input sessions. Staff listened to, read, and absorbed each piece of feedback to capture the voices of our students, families, staff, and community members. Our work does not end here. We embrace the ongoing process of improving and refining this plan. We believe that together, we will BE GREAT!



12,467 Survey Responses

from students, staff, families, and community members

225 Personal Engagements

with parents/guardians, Board of Education members, and the County Executive

28 Input-Giving Groups

including students, school-based and central office staff, community groups, and external readers

1 Advisory Committee

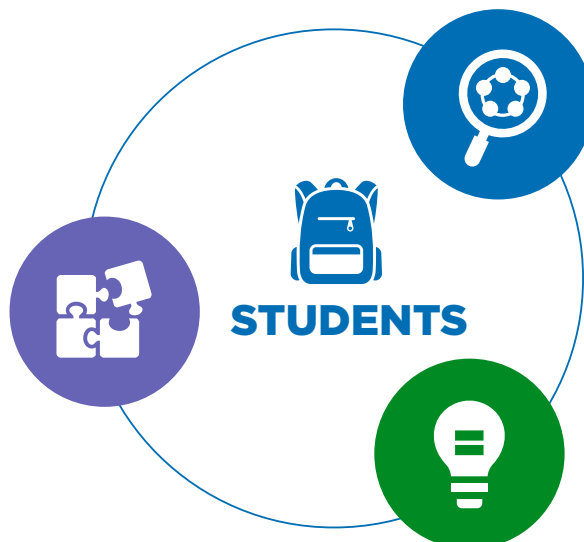
including students, staff, and community leaders

Foundational Components

This strategic plan is grounded in a commitment to put our students as our highest priority. It is anchored in the core values identified by our community and aligned with our Educational Equity Framework, Maryland's Commitments based on the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and the foundational Five Focus Areas established by the Board of Education. Our strategies are rooted in the four elements of the Educational Equity Framework and guided by the requirements under Maryland's Educational Blueprint Commitments. Success is measured through the Five Focus Areas.

Maryland's Educational Blueprint Commitments

Strategy connections — early childhood, excellent staff, career pathways, customized instruction, accountable operations



Five Focus Areas

Student-centered measures of success — attendance, proficiency in math, reading by grade 3, college and career ready, effective discipline practices

Educational Equity Framework

A foundation of Belonging, Opportunity & Access, Instructional Excellence, Engaged & Inspired Learners



Values Shape Our Vision & Mission



Vision

Our Vision

We are a great school system that inspires **Growth, Well-Being, and Excellence** for all.



Our Mission

HCPSS creates an **innovative and accountable** learning community where we expand **opportunities and access**, remove barriers, and foster an **inclusive environment**.



Mission



Theory of Change

HOW DOES OUR MISSION HELP US REALIZE OUR VISION?

IF HCPSS creates an **innovative and accountable learning** community where **we expand opportunities and access, remove barriers, and foster an inclusive environment...**

THEN HCPSS students will experience **growth, well-being, and excellence** within a great school system.



INNOVATIVE & ACCOUNTABLE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Expand opportunities & access and remove barriers



Foster an inclusive environment



Growth, well-being, excellence



Vision & Mission in Action

Our priorities and strategies are grounded in the following commitments in order to provide an excellent instructional experience for all students:

- 1.** Ensuring equitable opportunities and access.
- 2.** Creating innovative learning and working environments.
- 3.** Nurturing an inclusive culture of belonging.





Together, we will BE GREAT!

BE GREAT through **B**elonging, **E**quity, **G**rowth, **R**eimagination, **E**xcellence, **A**ccountability, and **T**eamwork — Together. **We can BE GREAT when we work as a team.**

BELONGING

Feeling socially connected, supported, and valued and experiencing appreciation, validation, and affirmation.

EQUITY

Creating a just environment where everyone has access to the opportunities and resources they need to be successful.

GROWTH

Increasing in knowledge, skills, and personal and social development, through learning, practice, mistakes, and persistence toward goals.

REIMAGINATION

Problem solving collaboratively to find innovative solutions and alternate pathways to meet the diverse and changing needs of all.

EXCELLENCE

Being outstanding within a culture of support that encourages high expectations and values personal effort.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Demonstrating trustworthiness through words and actions and taking responsibility for both, in order to meet high standards.

TEAMWORK

Highlighting the importance of everyone's active contributions and recognizing that great accomplishments do not happen alone.



Future-Ready Skills

HOW SHOULD STUDENTS BE PREPARED FOR LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

Students must be equipped with skills that help them innovate, apply knowledge, collaborate, persevere, and communicate effectively. We asked our community what skills students should have when they leave HCPSS.



We heard...

“Making sure we learn skills that we would need for the future as times change.”
- Middle school student

“The most important thing for me as a parent is that my son becomes interested in learning and more engaged in the classroom setting so that they may be successful in the future.”
- Parent/Guardian

HCPSS students will possess these future-ready skills through a great academic experience:

Communication

Effective Information Sharing: Express ideas and share well-informed opinions for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Global Citizenship: Understand how to contribute to and benefit from diverse perspectives in a variety of situations, in school and beyond.

Critical Thinking

Analytical Reasoning: Gather information, weigh evidence, evaluate arguments and sources, and utilize multiple perspectives to find solutions.

Curious Mindset: Ask questions, grapple with ideas, and critically analyze practices to improve and innovate.

Perseverance

Self-Awareness & Discipline: Recognize one’s identity and strengths, stay adaptable, and continue efforts to achieve, despite setbacks.

Goal-Setting: Identify and persistently work toward achieving meaningful short- and long-term goals.

Problem-Solving

Troubleshooting: Identify components of the concern, set goals, and generate ideas for solutions and equitable outcomes.

Conflict Resolution: Apply strategies that value diverse perspectives to overcome disagreements and work toward mutually-beneficial outcomes.

Teamwork

Collaborative Learning: Recognize that multiple perspectives and skill sets result in deeper and fuller understanding.

Leadership Development: Gain experience in different team roles to understand how to effectively apply skills and strengths in various situations.





Priorities

TO BE A GREAT SCHOOL SYSTEM FOR ALL, WE WILL TRANSLATE OUR MISSION AND COMMITMENTS INTO STRATEGIES AND GOALS THAT ARE ALIGNED WITH THESE FIVE PRIORITY AREAS.



Priority 1: Strengthen Learning & Instruction

To create equitable learning environments, each student's experience is grounded in high expectations aligned to standards, guided by their needs, assets, and aspirations, and backed by necessary supports to prepare them for future endeavors.



Priority 2: Cultivate Student Belonging & Well-Being

To inspire growth and engagement, each student thrives in a safe and supportive environment where their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met, and has equitable opportunities to co-create and shape their experiences.



Priority 3: Foster Staff Growth & Engagement

To promote excellence and well-being, each employee is viewed as a valued member of a learning and working community where their expertise is valued and professional growth is prioritized.



Priority 4: Enhance Systemic Planning & Procedures

To be innovative and accountable, dynamic systems are built to plan, allocate, and monitor resources, striving for safe and healthy environments that prioritize need and advance equitable outcomes.



Priority 5: Partner with Families & Community

To strengthen belonging and access for all students, family engagement opportunities and community partnerships are established to extend learning and supports for students within and beyond the classroom.



Priority 1

STRENGTHEN LEARNING & INSTRUCTION

To create equitable learning environments, each student's experience is grounded in high expectations aligned to standards, guided by their needs, assets, and aspirations, and backed by necessary supports to prepare them for future endeavors.

Key Strategies

Provide effective instruction: Implement well-planned, evidence-based classroom instruction that uses high-quality materials, technology, and student voice to improve all students' progress and achievement.

Redesign special education: Re-evaluate staffing and personalize instructional practices to ensure students receiving specially-designed instruction have their needs fully addressed.

Tailor evidence-based interventions: Identify students who require additional supports, implement those supports, and monitor their progress toward meeting standards.

Reimagine time: Embed staff collaborative planning, maximize instructional time, and provide opportunities for student enrichment activities such as art, music, and leadership in the school day.

Expand early childhood experiences: Expand access to early learning opportunities to prepare students and families for kindergarten and beyond.



Goals

1. Increase the percent of students **reading proficiently** by the end of Grade 3 and minimize disparities across student groups.
2. Increase the percent of students **proficient in mathematics** by the end of middle school and minimize disparities across student groups.
3. Increase the percent of students who are **college and career ready** by the end of Grade 10 and minimize disparities across student groups.
4. Increase the percent of **professional learning experiences** that lead to **better teaching**.



"Add things to the curriculum that will actively help with research, communication, organization, personal financial management and healthy habits."

- High school student

"Add courses that can prepare you for all different kinds of jobs even starting from middle school."

- Middle school student

"Make math and reading fun because if they don't have a fun time they won't learn."

- Elementary school student





Priority 2



Goals

1. Reduce student **chronic absenteeism** rates and minimize disparities across student groups.
2. Increase percent of students participating in advanced programs including **college and career ready pathways** and challenging courses and minimize disparities across student groups.
3. Reduce disproportionate **suspension rates**.
4. Improve **school climate** survey ratings.



“Making sure the school doesn’t just talk about physical safety, but mental. A lot of the conflicts and hurt feelings come from intimidation and bullying, not physical bullying.”
- Middle school student

“Distribute monthly surveys to allow students to provide constructive criticism of the school system so unknown issues can be brought to light.”
- High school student

CULTIVATE STUDENT BELONGING & WELL-BEING

To inspire growth and engagement, each student thrives in a safe and supportive environment where their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met, and has equitable opportunities to co-create and shape their experiences.

Key Strategies

Foster instructional belonging:

- Promote student voice and self-advocacy by partnering with students to co-create learning.
- Support students’ social-emotional needs and create a restorative, safe, and supportive learning environment.

Focus on behavioral health: Ensure students have access to behavioral health services through school-based problem-solving teams, direct services, and partnerships with community providers.

Expand access to advanced-level courses: Remove barriers and increase access to and success in rigorous college and career ready coursework.

Amplify student voice: Support students’ leadership and creativity in ways that honor student dignity and affirm identity.

Ensure fair and clear expectations: Prepare staff to co-create classroom community norms with students and consistently implement the Student Code of Conduct to eliminate disproportionality.





Priority 3

FOSTER STAFF GROWTH & ENGAGEMENT

To promote excellence and well-being, each employee is viewed as a valued member of a learning and working community where their expertise is valued and professional growth is prioritized.

Key Strategies

Enhance recruitment practices: Implement targeted recruitment and retention initiatives such as affinity groups, growing our own educators, and partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other higher education institutions to focus on unfilled vacancies and staff diversity.

Retain excellent staff: Enhance onboarding, new staff mentoring that includes a focus on conditionally licensed staff, and professional learning to reduce turnover.

Support engagement and well-being:

- Create structures to solicit feedback and promote shared decision making.
- Create a welcoming and inclusive work environment that values staff.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to support staff well-being.

Rethink professional learning:

- Value staff time while providing access to effective professional learning that is role specific.
- Implement a system calendar and evaluate professional learning offerings.

Foster staff advancement: Provide staff with opportunities and support toward career advancement including understanding the career ladder and accessing job shadowing.



Goals

1. Increase the number of **racially/ethnically diverse** members of the workforce.
2. Decrease the percentage of unfilled **school-based vacancies**, with a focus on **special education** staff.
3. Increase the number of educators pursuing **National Board Certification** to improve instructional practices.
4. Increase **staff engagement** survey ratings.



“We should be provided differentiated professional learning that meets our needs, just as we provide for students.”
- Elementary school staff

“Hire teachers who are more representative of diverse students and teachers who are excellent at connecting with students through relationship building and classroom management/engagement practices.”
- ARL teacher

“Empower staff at all levels to contribute ideas and suggestions before decisions are made.”
- Instructional facilitator



Priority 4



Goals

1. Foster a **culture of continuous improvement** in which schools, offices, and departments monitor and report progress toward strategies and goals and make adjustments in a timely manner.
2. Enhance **school and campus** security through security assessments.
3. Ensure **equitable distribution of resources** to schools to better meet student needs.
4. Improve **operational responsiveness** survey ratings.



“Transparent decision-making and clear communication about policies and procedures.”
- Parent/Guardian

“Make sure everyone feels safe when they walk into the building.”
- Middle school student

ENHANCE SYSTEMIC PLANNING & PROCEDURES

To be innovative and accountable, dynamic systems are built to plan, allocate, and monitor resources, striving for safe and healthy environments that prioritize need and advance equitable outcomes.

Key Strategies

Strengthen security: Assess the physical and cyber security of each school and campus regularly, allocate resources based on needs, and implement proactive security measures.

Utilize metrics and standards to enhance facilities: Establish clear performance standards and metrics for facility maintenance and operations and use that data for distribution of resources.

Align staffing: Assess staff roles and responsibilities and refine staffing guidelines to connect with funding and student needs.

Improve funding allocation and accountability: Implement needs assessments to inform short-and-long-term resource allocation and incorporate controls to support financial accuracy and accountability.

Expand the use of systemic processes and procedures: Establish consistent use of project charters, standard operating procedures, and after-action reviews.





Priority 5

PARTNER WITH FAMILIES & COMMUNITY

To strengthen belonging and access for all students, family engagement opportunities and community partnerships are established to extend learning and supports for students within and beyond the classroom.

Key Strategies

Enhance family engagement:

- Create a welcoming and inclusive school environment that values families.
- Solicit and incorporate feedback to shape HCPSS processes and decisions.
- Implement a comprehensive family engagement plan that includes families in the design and implementation of community events including family academies.

Enhance communication channels and processes:

Develop community messaging best practices for schools and offices that incorporate accessibility, concise messaging, and translation services.

Collaborate with community partners:

- Continue to explore opportunities with partners to increase awareness of and access to supports.
- Collaborate with local businesses to expand student opportunities to volunteer, work, and learn skills.
- Establish and continue collaborating with diverse committees and advisory groups.



Goals

1. Expand **opportunities for family-school partnerships** to extend classroom learning beyond the school day.
2. Increase access to **work-based learning options**, such as internships and apprenticeships.
3. Enhance the impact of **community partnerships** to advance system academic and well-being initiatives.
4. Increase family and community participation in **committees, advisories, and workgroups**.



“Make all the opportunities that are available to students known. Some students don’t know [about] them.”
– High school student



“Parents should receive more frequent feedback about the students’ academic performance and behavior.”
– Parent/Guardian



Acknowledgments

A heartfelt thank you to all who so generously shared your time, thoughts, lived experience, and passion for students and the school system throughout this strategic planning process. This plan is where it is now as a result of your interviews, survey comments, reflections on drafts, and honest sharing.

WE CANNOT DO THIS WORK ALONE AND YOUR ENGAGEMENT IS PROOF OF HOW GREAT WE CAN BE, TOGETHER.

Strategic Plan Advisory

Mary Klyap, Ph.D.

Co-Chair, Coordinator,
Data Literacy and Coaching

Charlene Allen, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Coordinator,
Leadership Development

Erin Alistar

Student, Howard County Association
of Student Councils

Taylor Allen

Student, High School

Ursula Appau

Student, High School

Catherine Carter

PTA Council of Howard County

Kelly Clark, Ed.D.

Howard County Library System

Allen Cosentino

Principal, Middle School

Ivan Croft, Ph.D.

Instructional Facilitator,
Office of Psychological Services

Eric Fagan

Teacher, High School

Elizabeth Hammon

Community Advisory Council

James Hollywood III

Howard County Resident

Quiana Holmes

The Council of Elders of Howard County

La'Chonde Martin-Barwick

Special Educator, Middle School

Nicole Meyerson

Assistant Principal, Elementary School

Sorsha Mulroe

Teacher, Elementary School;
Asian American Educators of Howard County

Glenda Robertson

American Federation of State,
County and Municipal Employees

Seema Sabnani

Howard County Resident

Benjamin Schmitt

Howard County Education Association

Karim Shortridge, Ed.D.

Howard County Association
of Supervisors and Administrators

Jeri Somerville

Assistant Principal, High School

Wilmer Velasquez Quintanilla

Student, Middle School

Darría Wise

Special Education Citizen
Advisory Committee

Research Support

Eva Yiu, Ph.D.

Coordinator, Research and Program Evaluation



Leadership

Board of Education of Howard County

Jolene Mosley
Chair

Linfeng Chen, Ph.D.
Vice Chair

Andrea Chamblee

Jennifer Swickard Mallo

Jacquelin “Jacky” McCoy

James Obasiolu
Student Member

Meg Ricks

Antonia Watts

Superintendent

William J. Barnes
Superintendent of Schools

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Deputy Superintendent

Cornell Brown, Jr.
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Terrell Savage, Ed.D.
Chief Academic Officer

Caroline Walker, Ph.D.
Chief Equity and Innovation Officer

Brian Bassett
Director of Communications and Engagement

T. Michael Carson
Human Resources Executive Officer

J. Stephen Cowles, Esq.
General Counsel

Great Together



