Preparing leaders who help shape the future of a rapidly changing world.

The Strategic Plan for Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Preparing leaders who help shape the future of a rapidly changing world.
At Anne Arundel County Public Schools, our Goal is simply stated:

“To ensure that every student meets or exceeds standards as achievement gaps are eliminated.”

How do we get there?

This Strategic Plan encapsulates our aspirations for students in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. It defines the work of our organization over the next five years and provides direction to guide, while not limiting, future opportunities. This plan should serve to align strategies with financial and human resources and provide a mechanism to continually review and ensure excellence in our work.
A Message to Students, Parents, Employees, and Community Members

In 2007, we launched our Strategic Plan known as The Journey to Greatness. In the ensuing five years, we have made great progress on our journey. The Strategic Plan that follows represents the next phase in our continuing journey.

A Changing World
The world has changed in the past five years and Anne Arundel County has changed accordingly. We now serve a larger, more diverse student population. Demographic changes, economic challenges, and globalization have had a profound impact on our county and its citizens. Federal and state priorities for education continue to unfold and, as technology advances, the very nature of teaching and learning continues to evolve. This plan reflects our need for future-oriented, collaborative and innovative approaches to help our students excel in this rapidly changing world.

This Strategic Plan provides a foundation and focus for the efforts of all AACPS employees as we strive to meet the needs of all students and the expectations of all of our stakeholders. Among these expectations is that we will provide, for every student, college and career readiness skills. Our graduates need to be independent, knowledgeable, persistent, evaluative, reflective, and technologically literate. In order to achieve these characteristics, all students must have the opportunity to pursue a rigorous pathway as they progress through our schools. Our Great 8: Essential Guideposts for the Journey to Greatness provides, for parents, students and educators, information about the skills and knowledge that will ensure college and career readiness from the childhood years through grade twelve.

Working Together
In any large organization, it is imperative to align all initiatives. This plan ensures that AACPS’ organizational elements — our resources, our structures and systems, our culture, our environment — are managed in a way that is coherent with our vision, mission, values and goal. In order to improve teaching and learning in every classroom, in every school, and for every student, each stakeholder must understand and act upon the strategies set forth in this document.

Next Steps
The goal, indicators, and strategic initiatives set forth in this plan have been carefully designed to take the next steps in our Journey to Greatness. We hope you take the opportunity to review them, to celebrate the accomplishments of our students and to embrace the challenges that we face. While we have made great strides, the road ahead is arduous. We believe to our core that through the hard work of our students, employees, and community and business partners, we can move into the future confident that we have the tools, skills, knowledge, and motivation to live our mission and achieve our vision.

Patricia R. Nalley
President, Board of Education

Kevin M. Maxwell, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Executive Summary

The Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) Strategic Plan 2012–2017 is an extension of our 2007–2012 “Journey to Greatness” and represents the work of a diverse group committed to the education of our students. Educators, parents, students, community members, and business partners have come together to identify our school system’s strengths and needs and to articulate strategic priorities which will allow us to continue to provide the best education for each student in Anne Arundel County. As we celebrate our achievements over the past five years and look forward to another five years of growth and innovation, this Strategic Plan will serve as a guide and a beacon for all who are concerned for our young people and their future.

The heart of any organization lies in its mission, vision, values, and goals. These statements form the foundation that supports the organization and give direction to the people within it. When used properly, the mission, vision, values, and goals determine the ways in which an organization allocates resources, identifies priorities and, in simple language, behaves. The mission reminds us of our purpose; the vision creates our desired future; and the values are an expression of what we believe about ourselves and our students. The sole goal for this Strategic Plan is purposeful. Student success is at the core of everything we do and we recognize that all of our efforts, whether in the areas of safety, workforce quality, community engagement, or business practices, must align around that core. If what any one of us is doing does not contribute to student success, we should stop doing it.

If what any one of us is doing does not contribute to student success, we should stop doing it.

Our Mission (Why we are here)
It is the mission of Anne Arundel County Public Schools to educate all of our students to be well-prepared for college and the workforce and to empower them to create a better quality of life for themselves, their communities, and the next generation.

Our Vision (How we see the future)
Our students will graduate with the skills necessary to read, write, compute, and communicate effectively; think critically and creatively; work independently and collaboratively with others from diverse backgrounds; and engage in innovative interdisciplinary analysis and complex problem solving.

Our Values (What’s important to us)
We value:
• Leadership
• Innovation
• Compassion and social responsibility
• Environmental stewardship

Our Goal (What we want to accomplish)
To ensure that every student meets or exceeds standards as achievement gaps are eliminated.

Developing the Plan
The first step in the development of our plan was to gather input from both internal and external stakeholders for our mission, vision, and values. This input fell directly into several readily-identifiable themes:
• Project-based Learning
• Partnerships
• Early Literacy and Numeracy

Project-based Learning
First and foremost, educators and non-educators alike want to see students involved in hands-on, relevant, collaborative, interdisciplinary, project-based learning. They envision an end to rote memorization and activities that are devoid of real meaning for children and a continuing move toward classrooms in which all students are engaged in applying their knowledge and skills to work that is tied to their own aspirations. The increasing infusion of instructional technology to support students’ research and explorations is an important part of this vision. Additionally, students need to be prepared for a future we can only imagine, since change has taken on such a rapid pace in today’s world.

Partnerships
One way to support this kind of classroom is to increase our partnerships with parents, community agencies, higher education, businesses, and faith-based organizations. These partnerships...
can enhance learning, strengthen relationships, and provide opportunities for students to exercise leadership and engage in service. Students can interact online with professors from another country, become interns at a variety of businesses, and work collaboratively with community organizations to solve social and other issues. They can be mentored by a member of the community who can help them see their potential and support them in attaining their goals. Participation in charitable activities can help students gain leadership skills and strengthen their empathy and compassion as they help others.

**Early Literacy and Numeracy**
The community recognizes that the fundamentals of a sound education are laid early in life, thus, the emphasis on early learning. The input indicated a strong desire to make early literacy and numeracy—the understanding of and ability to work with numbers—a priority as we develop the strategies for this plan. A focus on equipping teachers with the skills to teach reading and mathematical practices is key. Additionally, we must continue to find ways to support students who are struggling with these essential skills, so that all students have the capacity to continue to learn at high levels as they matriculate through our schools.

Superintendent Kevin Maxwell captured the importance of eliminating the achievement gap in his address to school system leadership at the June 21, 2011 Leadership Summit, where he said:

“No large school district in this country has eliminated the achievement gap across all of its schools. Somebody is going to be the first. So I ask you: Why not us?

Why can’t the child in the single-parent household who receives free and reduced-price meals and who sees more drug transactions in a week than other kids his age might see in a year reach the same level of success as the child whose parents both hold master’s degrees and whose summer plans usually include a vacation to Europe or the Caribbean? Why can’t the child who comes to this country speaking little or no English and never having stepped foot in a classroom become a National Merit Scholar or their class valedictorian?

The short answer is that they can. And that’s what today is all about. Every employee. Every teacher. Every classroom. Every school. Every day. For every child.

Our job is to organize around that, and to provide children with the support and the opportunities that are necessary to take them from their different starting places and get them to the same finish line.

Children are born believing in their ability to fulfill their dreams. It is society, tragically, through the imposition of artificial ceilings and arbitrary decisions that dash those dreams for some. Across our county every day we see children whose most fervent desire is to see how they can succeed instead of listening to the naysayers who would cast them aside and talk about why they can’t.

When we see our students struggle and our teachers become frustrated when we do not meet our targets, we can fall into the trap of turning back and not persevering on the long road ahead of us. It’s easier to talk about why we can’t instead of figuring out how we can. But that leads not to success, but to catastrophic failure.”
of them says “Why not me?” So we ask: Why not every one of our students—no matter their background, social status, or obstacles—in every one of our schools?

**Why not us?**
During the 2010–2011 school year, AACPS instituted an Action Management Process. In this process, data are constantly gathered and analyzed, school system needs are identified and prioritized, and projects are defined to address those needs. A group of district leaders, called the Executive Oversight Committee (EOC), acts as a governing body to review strategies, monitor progress, and resolve issues. This management system fosters cross-departmental collaboration, provides a common framework, and helps to create and maintain a quality-oriented organization.

Using this system, Project and Process Managers developed an Action Management Plan based on evidence of best practices in schools and districts that are making progress to eliminate achievement gaps. While no district in the country has yet to achieve this goal, we culled the most promising practices in the literature and from our own practices and developed Action Management Plans to build upon the effective elements currently in place in our district. Through this process we established the critical features necessary to position ourselves to be the first district in the country to achieve this as-yet elusive outcome.

“Our job is to...provide children with the support and the opportunities that are necessary to take them from their different starting places and get them to the same finish line.”

—Kevin M. Maxwell, Superintendent
The Action Management Plans were built around three identified variables to eliminate achievement gaps: *Culture, Leadership, and Structures*. Upon completing the plans, we next set out to identify Action Management Teams comprised of carefully selected leaders in our district representative of every department in our organizational structure. These cross-functional staff members were assigned to six teams. The teams then selected co-chairs to ensure that the various elements of the plans were accomplished within identified timeframes. Reports were made monthly to the Project/Process Managers, and the progress of the work was shared with the Executive Oversight Committee over the course of the year.

This business management approach to accomplish expected outcomes proved highly effective as evidenced by the quality of the tools, initiatives, and professional development resources that were shared with schools in preparation for the 2011–12 school year. These serve as the foundation for our efforts toward the elimination of the achievement gap in each of the areas we measure.

**Working Together**

This Strategic Plan sets forth our goal for the next five years, measures which will help us determine whether we are making progress toward reaching that goal, and the strategies we will employ in the process. This plan highlights programs and initiatives that are the foundation for continuous improvement. All initiatives are aligned so that teachers, principals, support staff, parents, and community members can work together to support student learning. We look forward to the next phase of our *Journey to Greatness*.

“*The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.*” —Oprah Winfrey
Achievements & Challenges

Anne Arundel County Public Schools continues to enhance educational opportunities and achievement for all students across our system.

Blue Ribbon Schools
- In January 2012, we recognized our 15th Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, Crofton Meadows Elementary School. Eleven of our schools have gone on to become National Blue Ribbon schools.

Green Schools
- For the third consecutive year, the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education added 11 Anne Arundel County Public Schools to its list of Maryland Green Schools. In addition, four other county schools earned second, third, or model school certifications. With 52 schools and centers now with green school status, more than 43% of AACPS facilities have completed the challenging process to earn the state’s highest recognition of environmental literacy. In addition, Folger McKinsey Elementary School was named one of the first National Green Ribbon Schools, joining just 77 other schools across the nation.

Scholarship Offers
- Members of the Class of 2012 garnered $109.6 million in scholarship offers, an increase of $10 million over the year before. $15.6 million went to African American students—a 42% increase from the year before. Additionally, five schools earned more than $10 million.

Performance on Assessments
- The percentage of our elementary and middle school students passing state-mandated assessments continues to increase, with more than 90 percent meeting the mark in reading last year and more than 85 percent meeting it in math. Our increases have been particularly notable with special education students, where the percentage of students with passing scores has risen by 17 points in reading and 12 points in math since the 2007 school year.
- Also since 2007, the number of students scoring advanced on state assessments is up more than 14 percentage points in reading and more than 8 points in math. At the high school level, the percentage of seniors passing high school assessments has risen more than 24 points in Algebra, nearly 21 points in Biology, and nearly 20 points in English over the same time period. With regard to African-American students, the increases have been nearly 40 points in Algebra, more than 31 points in Biology, and nearly 30 points in English.

Advanced Coursework
- In the last five years, the percentage of students taking an Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or Honors course is up nearly 13 points, allowing us to meet the 80 percent goal in our 2007 Strategic Plan a year early. The number of students taking an AP or IB exam in that time is up nearly 17 percentage points, and the percentage of African-American students taking AP or IB exams, for instance, is up nearly 30 points.

Programs of Choice
- This year we created even more avenues of public school choice for parents and students with the opening of the Biomedical Allied Health program at Glen Burnie High School and our second Performing and Visual Arts program at Brooklyn Park Middle School. Magnet programs now exist at 13 of our schools, with the Performing and Visual Arts magnet at Annapolis and Broadneck high schools set to open this year.
- Interest in magnet programs is growing dramatically. Applications for the 2012–13 school year were up 17 percent compared to the year before, with more than 1,600 students submitting more than 2,100 applications for approximately 1,250 seats. By next fall, approximately 25 percent of our secondary students in comprehensive schools, from every cluster in the county, will be enrolled in a magnet program.
- We have introduced the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) at five schools: Germantown, Hebron-Harmon, Manor View, South Shore, and Southgate elementary schools. This initiative puts the earliest phase of the IB program in what will ultimately be 12 PYP schools.

Early Education
- In August, 2011, we opened the West Meade Early Education Center, our county’s second such facility that provides more focused instruction for some of our youngest students.
Administrative Performance
- The administrative performance of our school system continues to garner state and national recognition. That can be seen vividly in honors like the 2011 Agency Certification Award won by our Purchasing Office for sound business practices that resulted in the savings of taxpayer money. It can also be seen in the Association of School Business Officials’ Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting, which our school system received for the 30th consecutive year for its superior accounting practices and reporting procedures.

Cultural Proficiency
- Since 2008, all central office and school administrators, student services personnel, and AVID teachers have experienced at least two days of Cultural Proficiency professional development. In addition, all secretaries, several hundred school-based staff, and all school bus drivers have engaged in similar experiences, and all schools have staff designated as Equity Liaisons to ensure a school-wide focus on equity.

Quality Instructors
- In 2011, 41 more teachers achieved National Board Certification, the nation’s highest teaching credential. That brings the number of teachers who have earned the distinction while leading students in our school system to 314.
- Almost 95 percent of our teachers in core academic subjects and nearly 86 percent of our teaching assistants are now designated as Highly Qualified.

Partnerships
- All schools have reached out to their communities, holding meetings, celebrations, and parent engagement activities to encourage meaningful partnerships with parents, businesses, and community organizations to support student achievement.

Fiscal Constraints
- The continued fiscal constraints have not enabled our school system to expand our teacher workforce to meet growing enrollment demands. We have made difficult decisions, such as declining to add general fund positions to our workforce — except as required by Race to the Top — despite the addition of more than 3,000 students over the last four years. We have reallocated positions to put more employees in the classrooms to help address class sizes, doing what we can to make the best of a difficult situation. The Fiscal Year Operating Budget approved by the County Council and before the Board of Education at its June 20, 2012 meeting provides for 128 additional school-based positions to assist in reducing class sizes and other student needs. 62 of these positions are funded through school system savings due to permanent turnover and other measures. Of these positions, approximately 75 will be used to reduce the most critical class size issues across the county.

Challenging Populations
- The number of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals in our school system continues to rise, and is up 47 percent since the 2006–07 school year. In 2011–12, nearly 29 percent of our students were eligible for free and reduced-price meals.
- The number of English Language Learners also continues to rise. In 2011–12, four percent of our students met this criterion, a 100 percent increase from 2006–07. Additionally, a growing number of parents primarily speak a language other than English.

Equity Issues
- While the number of minority students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes has increased exponentially, there is a need to increase the percentage of minority students taking AP exams.
- As evidenced by the recent NAACP’s Office of Civil Rights complaint, AACPS is challenged by “racially disparate outcomes in disciplinary actions, [which are]... attenuated by the racial make-up of the teacher population [and] racial and cultural differences.”

“ I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can’t accept not trying.” —Michael Jordan
Anne Arundel County Public Schools’ ultimate goal is to ensure that every student meets or exceeds standards as achievement gaps are eliminated. The indicators of success are measures that we use to determine our progress toward our goal. Since we are focused on eliminating achievement gaps, it is vital that, while attending to the achievement of all students, we tenaciously monitor the progress of our student groups whose performance is farthest away from our standards. To that end, all indicators of student success will be monitored for all students and by student group.

Common Core Standards
The Common Core State Standards provide a foundation for this Strategic Plan. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is using these standards as it develops the assessments that Maryland will be moving toward during the life of this Strategic Plan. PARCC is a “consortium of states working together to develop a common set of K–12 assessments in English and math anchored in what it takes to be ready for college and careers. These new K–12 assessments will build a pathway to college and career readiness by the end of high school, mark students’ progress toward this goal from third grade up, and provide teachers with timely information to inform instruction and provide student support. The PARCC assessments will be ready for states to administer during the 2014–2015 school year.”

These new, computer-based assessments (which are currently under development) will enable schools to measure student growth and provide timely information to teachers so that they can intervene when appropriate (either to provide additional assistance to struggling students or to help high-achieving students extend their learning). Since these assessments are intended to provide that pathway to college and career readiness, higher education systems and institutions in all PARCC states, nearly 200 in total, have signed up to help develop the new high school tests. The goal is for those institutions, and the nearly 1,000 campuses they represent, to honor the results of the new assessments as an indicator of students’ readiness to take first year college credit-bearing courses. AACPS particularly looks forward to partnering with the Anne Arundel Community College as we move toward this goal.

Clearly, this major shift in the way in which we assess students and the standards that are being assessed have a variety of implications for this Strategic Plan, not the least of which revolves around our indicators of success. As we move toward implementation of the PARCC assessments (and the Common Core State Standards), we will be laying the groundwork through our curricula, professional development, technology acquisition and utilization, and partnerships with higher education. When we reach full implementation of the assessments (in 2014–2015), we will need to examine our indicators of success and revise them as appropriate. Until that time, the measures identified on the next page will serve us well as we monitor our students’ performance and adjust our supports to schools, teachers, and students.

For more information on The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), visit www.parcconline.org

"Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren’t used to an environment where excellence is expected" —Steve Jobs
Our Goal

To ensure that every student meets or exceeds standards as achievement gaps are eliminated.

Indicators of Success

All indicators of student success will be monitored for all students and by student group.

By the end of the 2016–2017 school year:

1. 80% of kindergarten and first grade students will reach Core as indicated by their spring DIBELS composite score.

2. 50% of all students in each student group in grades 3–8 will be performing at the Advanced level on the Maryland standardized tests in Reading and Math.

3. 80% of all students in each student group will have completed at least one World and Classical Language course by the end of their eighth grade year.

4. 80% of all diploma-bound high school seniors in each student group will have completed at least one AP/IB or Honors course.

5. 100% of all diploma-bound high school seniors in each student group who have been enrolled in at least one AP/IB course will have taken an AP/IB examination.

6. 75% of all diploma-bound high school seniors in each student group who have taken an AP or IB examination will have earned 3 or better on an AP examination or 4 or better on an IB examination.

7. 75% of all diploma-bound high school seniors in each student group, in each high school, will take the SAT, ACT, or a Maryland Industry Certification.

8. 80% of all secondary students in each student group will receive fewer than two referrals.

9. 95% of all secondary students in each student group will receive fewer than six referrals.

10. 90% of all secondary students in each student group will not be suspended from school.

11. 85% of new teachers hired will be retained for the next school year.

12. Each school will have at least one teacher who is Nationally Board Certified.

Beginning in 2012–2013 and continuing every year through the life of this Strategic Plan:

13. 100% of schools will host a minimum of two activities, meetings, parent-teacher conferences, etc. in their communities.

After the third year of this Strategic Plan:

14. 85% of parents will indicate that they are satisfied with the academic preparation of their child(ren), and by the final year of this Strategic Plan, 90% of parents will indicate that they are satisfied with the academic preparation of their child(ren).

Everything in this plan was created with a singular effort in mind—to help every one of our students meet or exceed our standards, and fulfill their individual potential.

*Earned by taking an examination in a particular career area (e.g. Cosmetology, Oracle Certification)
Strategic Initiatives

Strategy is the pattern of organizational moves used to achieve an organization’s vision, mission and goals. To that end, AACPS has identified a core of Strategic Initiatives, which describe the long-range activities we have chosen to pursue. These strategic initiatives in the areas of—
- Academic Achievement;
- Safe and Supportive Learning Environment;
- Diverse, Highly Qualified Workforce;
- Community Engagements; and
- Sound, Efficient, and Effective Business Practices
—are described in this section of our Strategic Plan. Equity is infused throughout.

Academic Achievement

Teaching & Learning Cycle

Programs of Choice

Partnerships

Common Core State Standards

Support for English Learners

Special Education Services

Literacy

Environmental Literacy

World and Classical Languages

Arts Integration in the Curriculum

The Fine Arts

Continuous Learning

Data & Decision Making

Research

Monitoring Student Performance

Safe & Supportive Learning Environment

Wellness

Social Climate

Prevention

Monitoring Discipline Data

Alternative Education

Security

Diverse, Highly Qualified Workforce

Recruitment

Supportive Work Environment

Leadership Succession

National Board Certification

Community Engagement

Community Partnerships

Parent Involvement

Community Collaboration

Home Visits

Sound, Efficient, & Effective Business Practices

Stewardship Management

Public Communication

Resource Allocation

Academic Achievement

Teaching & Learning Cycle

Research has consistently shown that, of all of the things that schools control, it is the quality of the art and science of teaching that most directly and powerfully affects student learning. The Teaching and Learning Cycle defines the non-negotiables for the delivery of instruction — rigor, relevance, and/or the quality learning environment. Increasing the quality of student learning — and, therefore, increasing achievement for all students — is central to the mission of AACPS.

Our Teaching and Learning Cycle provides: clarity of district expectations for teaching and learning; a common language and vocabulary for teaching and learning; a definition of the components of 21st century learning; identified strategies to ensure equity in the classroom; frameworks for lesson planning, observation and rating instruments; and professional development. As part of the Teaching and Learning Cycle, a new evaluation tool will be piloted in 2012–2013. Our Teaching and Learning Cycle has become the vehicle through which all instructional decisions are made.

Programs of Choice

Programs of Choice are focused on opening doors to rigorous and relevant study for students. Students and their families are able to make

Programs of Choice have been a key factor in AACPS' efforts to eliminate the achievement gap.
choices regarding individual educational pathways based on opportunities offered through the Advanced Studies and Programs Office. Magnet and Signature programs, Arts Integration, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and advanced co-curricular programs and clubs are all housed within our Programs of Choice. Programs of Choice have been a key factor in AACPS’ efforts to eliminate the achievement gap.

Magnet and Signature Programs
Magnet and Signature programs lead our Programs of Choice offerings. These programs are designed to engage our students in problem-based, hands-on, interdisciplinary, and exciting learning challenges within the classroom walls and outside in the local and global society. Students are able to soar as they learn alongside their teachers, community members, industry leaders, artists, and government officials. Traditional isolated learning is transformed into student-centered, collaborative, community-based, high-energy engagement. Teachers and community partners set high expectations and students reach and surpass the goals set for them.

Our Signature Programs — workforce-related thematic programs offered at the high school level — are designed, developed, and implemented by collaborative community-based teams. Our high schools work with their communities to identify and select an appropriate workforce-related Signature theme for their school. Unlike the magnets where a limited number of students can participate, Signatures are designed to engage all interested students at each high school to take part in Signature-themed coursework, field trips, internships, and co-curricular programs.

Arts Integration
Arts Integration, infused throughout all of the AACPS Programs of Choice, provides a stimulating, intensive and nurturing climate to enable all students to reach their fullest academic and artistic potential. Teachers in magnet schools identify natural connections between the content standards of the Core Arts (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Theatre) and the content standards of the Core Academic subjects (English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies).

Arts integrated lessons allow for the strategy of teaching the arts and core academic standards simultaneously, thus increasing student engagement, collaboration, critical and creative thinking, risk taking, and achievement.

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)
AVID is an academic program designed to provide support to students who are in the “academic middle.” The program’s purpose includes moving students from average-level classes to more rigorous college-preparatory coursework while providing academic support. This elective is currently being offered to students in grades 6 through 12 across the county. AVID has and will continue to offer excellent guidance and support to thousands of students looking to prepare for college and careers.

Co-curricular Offerings
Students can avail themselves of Programs of Choice offerings not only within school, but also outside the school day through participation in our advanced co-curricular offerings. These club and competition-based offerings are available to K–12 students in the areas of science, mathematics, engineering, social sciences, humanities, interdisciplinary studies, and the arts. Over 5,000 students choose to engage annually in these co-curricular experiences.

Programs of Choice are significant vehicles for positive educational change. Choice is an important key to success for students in these programs. When we offer choice to students and families, we are also offering ownership, more community engagement, greater teacher pride, significant school and student recognition, and more funding and support to continue to build and implement similar programs for all students in our county.

Partnerships to Support Academic Achievement
AACPS has been making concerted efforts to develop partnerships to support our students as they engage in real-world learning experiences, and our businesses and community members have been more than generous in contributing time, talent, and resources to our schools. From tutoring students, to hosting field trips, to providing internship opportunities, our business and community partners have become a vital asset in our efforts to provide students with a means of extending and applying the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to different situations and settings. Building on our solid foundation, we will continue to strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ones, so that as many students as possible are able to learn from practitioners who are actively engaged in the kind of career in which they are interested. We see these business and community partnerships as an essential part of our instructional program.

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” —Malcolm X
Early Literacy
It is recognized that the foundations for reading proficiency and literacy success are formed long before a child reaches first grade. It is our belief that parents, guardians, and other caregivers can give children, starting at infancy, a strong base of language concepts, cognitive skills related to print, and a love of books. AACPS has partnered with the Early Childhood Coalition, the Anne Arundel County Public Library, First Book, and Franklin Toys to ensure that parents of newborns receive a “Baby Learns to Read” bag as part of an early literacy initiative that recognizes that the first teacher of a child is the parent. We look forward to growing these partnerships to extend even more early literacy learning opportunities to all children in our community.

We agree with the Maryland State Department of Education values that: every child is entitled to a “world class” education; teachers and leaders impact every child’s achievement; collaboration promotes stakeholder investment; and building capacity at all levels sustains improvement. In order to serve these values, AACPS has formed the Early-Literacy Cross-functional Action Management Team.

This team, comprised of personnel from a variety of central offices, schools, and community partners, has developed a comprehensive Action Management Plan to accelerate early literacy/learning for all students in Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

This plan, based on research, educational literature, and input from a broad base of stakeholders, addresses the essential components of a balanced, comprehensive literacy program to teach reading in the primary grades with appropriate academic interventions so that students will demonstrate proficient reading skills. It addresses what causes some students to learn to read proficiently and what inhibits others from doing so. Our Action Management Plan is key to ensuring that all students attain the skills necessary to support reading at a high level early in their academic careers so that they can progress through school on a pathway toward college and career readiness.

Common Core State Standards
The Common Core State Standards will provide an array of opportunities for all students to participate in instruction that is relevant, rigorous, interdisciplinary, and project-based and content that is challenging. Students will be expected to work collaboratively, think critically and creatively, and communicate their knowledge effectively. With the ultimate goal being that all students will graduate ready to enter college or a career, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will take AACPS further in our Journey to Greatness.

In order to prepare for full implementation of the standards, we have created Transition Teams, whose task is to develop plans to ensure that we are positioned to embrace the opportunities afforded by the standards. AACPS is fortunate to have access to Race to the Top funds to support implementation of the Common Core, curriculum
AACPS will integrate the Common Core State Standards across all grade levels and course curricula in order to establish common goals and expectations for students. This will ensure that all students have access to the same rigorous, high-quality education while eliminating gaps in student achievement.

To accomplish this transition, it will be essential to engage a full range of stakeholders in the following actions:

- provide school-based and central office professional development to transition to the Common Core State Standards;
- provide informational sessions to parents and the community regarding the transition to the new standards;
- create a four year plan to align all printed and online materials to Common Core State Standards; and
- develop a four year plan to expand distance learning and e-Learning opportunities for all students.

These actions will enable classroom teachers to improve the achievement of all students by providing better opportunities to help each child independently process, learn, and evaluate relevant information.

Assessments
High quality formative and summative assessments are critical to analyzing and evaluating student work and student achievement.

“Learning is not a spectator sport.” —D. Blocher
and curricular redesigns we will help teachers move beyond traditional tests by focusing on interdisciplinary instruction and creating performance, or project-based, assessments, while at the same time increasing rigor and relevance for all students.

Over the next five years, the Office of Curriculum and Instruction will work with teachers and schools to create assessments in all content areas that can be used with students, and as models teachers can use for creating their own classroom assessments. Assessments at the elementary and middle school level will capitalize on the interdisciplinary opportunities that are naturally embedded within school structures. We will also explore opportunities to use interdisciplinary assessments as appropriate at the high school level, especially within signature and magnet programs.

Through professional development and collaborative planning we will provide support to teachers, teams, and schools to continue to align standards, assessments, and instruction as well as use data to make curricular and instructional decisions. We will also continue to help teachers and schools analyze data to ensure that students have the content knowledge and skills to continue to perform at high levels on traditional national college preparation exams such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, as well as certification exams in our technological and other career programs.

**Online Instructional Toolkit**
The AACPS Online Instructional Toolkit is an essential component of Race to the Top. We will design an online toolkit that incorporates instructional strategies aligned to each content area in the new online curriculum design. A large number of the Common Core State Standards require the integration of technology in instruction.

**Our Online Instructional Toolkit**
Many—but not all—of the strategies and initiatives include:
- literacy strategies;
- multi-cultural strategies;
- the Teaching and Learning Cycle; Cultural Proficiency;
- Thinking Maps;
- Environmental Literacy;
- Classroom Management;
- Differentiated Instruction;
- Project-Based Learning,
- Arts Integration;
- Technology Standards for teachers, students and administrators;
- The Fine Arts;
- Connections to the MSDE Online Instructional Toolkit; and
- content specific electronic resources.

**Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)**
Supported in part by Race to the Top funding, AACPS provides STEM academic and co-curricular offerings for pre K–12 students during the academic year and summer months to enrich and enhance learning, build STEM career awareness, and engage students in challenging STEM-related projects and events. We have built a rich pre K–12 STEM learning environment for Anne Arundel County youth to substantially increase the numbers of young people who see real value and reward in studying and working in the STEM discipline areas. By increasing the pool of engaged student participants, especially those from backgrounds traditionally under-represented in the STEM pipeline, we can help secure the future supply of high school graduates to meet local, regional, state, and national needs and ensure the sustainability of flowing STEM career pathways over the longer term.

**Support for English Learners**
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is focused on providing the instruction and support necessary to ensure: full proficiency in English for all English learners; academic achievement for all English learners; active participation of English learner families and their communities in their children’s education; and professional development for ESOL and other AACPS staff focused on achievement for English learners.

**Instructional Programs**
In elementary schools, the ESOL instructional program is delivered to active English learners in kindergarten through Grade 5. Instructional programs are delivered through a variety of methods, including pull-out,
push-in, co-teaching, and consultation. In middle schools, ESOL instruction is delivered to active English learners. Additionally, there are three middle schools where eligible English learners are clustered for instruction. In high schools, ESOL instruction is delivered to active English learners who attend the four International Academies at facilities where eligible English learners are clustered for instruction.

**Supplementary Programs:**
**Extended Day/Extended Year**
In order to support both English proficiency and overall academic achievement, AACPS supplements instructional programs and ESOL courses through a variety of extended-day and extended-year programs. School-based teams plan and deliver programs that are funded through federal grant funds. Additionally, AACPS provide Summer Academies for English learners K through 9 focused on building academic language.

**Supplementary Programs:**
**Family and Community Outreach**
AACPS provides timely communication between the school and our English learner families. The Family and Community Outreach Office provides communication through bilingual facilitators who serve Spanish-speaking students and families (who comprise the majority of English learners) and Korean-speaking students and families. Bilingual facilitators and interpreters are utilized daily during parent conferences and both school-based and system-wide activities. In addition to bilingual facilitators, trained interpreters and/or an agency that specializes in providing a trained interpreter via telephone, are available.

To provide families access to system-wide documents, AACPS
Our goal is that our [special education] students acquire the academic, vocational, and social/emotional skills needed to transition to adulthood with conviction, self-confidence, and competence.

**Methods of Direct Service Delivery**

**Within the General Education Setting**

Special education instruction is delivered within the least restrictive environment of the general education classroom through team teaching and collaborative instructional models. Support is directed for individual students by the special education teacher or instructional assistant who make adaptations or modifications to the general education curriculum and assessments.

**Outside the General Education Setting**

Intensive or multi-sensory instruction, utilizing specialized strategies and techniques, is delivered in a small group, self-contained environment with an alternative curriculum when necessary. This instruction provides specific skill training in remediation of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral areas.

**Combined Settings**

Students may receive direct service in both the general education and special education classrooms. This is a team decision based on individual student need.

**Regional Options/ Separate Day Facility**

A limited number of students may need a regional program within a comprehensive school or a separate day facility. Based on the unique needs of the student, the local school or central office teams determine the appropriate placement.
Approved Nonpublic School
For those students whose educational needs require services beyond those of the county’s regional or separate day facilities, AACPS utilizes MSDE approved nonpublic schools. The nature and severity of the student’s disability may necessitate more intensive resources and may require a more therapeutic setting in order for a student to receive an appropriate educational program.

Literacy
Literacy describes a person’s ability to read, write, and use language effectively. In a world of electronic communication and instant access to vast amounts of information, literacy is even more critical than ever. Literacy is not just knowing how to read, it is knowing how to read a wide variety of materials independently and critically. Literacy is also the ability to communicate well orally and in writing. To increase our efforts to reach these goals for all students, we will be implementing a transition plan to align all English/Language Arts curriculum with the Common Core State Standards and the Maryland State Curriculum Framework.

However, literacy is not limited to English/Language Arts. All content areas will be implementing the Common Core Literacy Standards to improve the specific literacy skills students need in each discipline. Curriculum revision will include embedding opportunities for cross-curricular connections that enable students to see how literacy skills are related to all areas of study. Achieving the goal of increasing literacy for all students will require professional development for teachers and administrators to increase their ability to implement the curriculum and to use instructional strategies that develop literacy skills. The ability to read, write, and use language well prepares students for the rigors of college, the demands of careers, and life in the 21st century.

Environmental Literacy
AACPS strives to graduate environmentally literate students who possess the knowledge, intellectual skills, attitudes, experiences, and motivation to make and act upon responsible environmental decisions. In order to accomplish this, a system-wide program is being implemented at each grade level to provide outdoor and environmental experiences. Through these experiences, students will apply knowledge and skills from all content areas to investigate and analyze local environmental issues, and develop and implement a local action project.

It is important that students understand that learning... does not end when they finish high school.

that protects, sustains, or enhances the natural environment.

Content specialists are working together from all curriculum areas to design a program which supports the integration of the environmental literacy skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in college and the workforce. This model will increase academic achievement for all students by providing the context for real world application of skills in a motivational setting, while creating conscientious stewards of the environment.

World and Classical Languages
World and Classical Languages educate students about other languages and cultures and lead students to communicate effectively in another language. While preparing World Language students to meet the increasing demands for 21st century global communication skills, our mission is to foster respect among all peoples in the world; to encourage active, global citizenship; and to develop within our students the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As students’ awareness of diverse cultures develops, students gain valuable global community skills.

The Office of World and Classical Languages focuses on: integration of technology in the classroom, differentiating instruction, increasing emphasis on oral and written communication, limiting the use of English in the classroom, and encouraging common planning.

Through grant funds, the Office of World and Classical Languages provides language learning experiences for students outside of the school day and throughout the summer. These include: the Maryland Summer Centers for Gifted and Talented Students, STARTALK Arabic and Chinese programs held in the Fort Meade corridor, and after-school language study in Chinese and Arabic at selected elementary schools. The Office of World and Classical Languages has enjoyed a strong collaborative relationship with the Title I Office to help ensure that economically-disadvantaged students may attend these programs through joint, collaborative funding efforts. We also offer ten online distance learning World Language courses throughout the district. We will continue to maintain, enhance, and increase partnerships at both the local and national level to continue to build sustainable World Language programs and world-class opportunities for our students.

Arts Integration in the Curriculum
Arts Integration (as defined in Pro grams of Choice, page 14) has become an essential strategy for AACPS in connecting 21st century learners to
rigorous, relevant, engaging coursework. As part of a five-year plan of implementation at the elementary and middle level, curricula will be enhanced through Arts Integration strategies and techniques. We will provide structures such as professional development, artists-in-residence, materials of instruction, collaborative planning, and 21st century skills development to support Arts Integration initiatives at all schools. Finally, we will maintain and enhance partnerships with local, state, and national arts organizations to further build critical community connections through and across the arts for our students.

The Core Arts
The Core Arts are courses offered throughout our school system that enable students to develop their passion, creativity, and talent in the arts from an early age and throughout their school years. The arts are an effective means to close the achievement gap by teaching children global skills necessary to succeed in life. These include: solving problems and making decisions, thinking creatively and acting innovatively, building confidence and self-discipline, articulating a vision, developing the ability to imagine what might be, and accepting responsibility to complete tasks from start to finish.

As part of AACPS’ five-year Strategic Plan, the arts will continue to support Common Core standards and practices through rigorous, relevant, and engaging arts curricula. We will provide updated and varied professional development, including online opportunities to support teachers’ needs. We will continue to support arts programs in our International Baccalaureate Programme, STEM magnet schools, Biomedical Allied Health magnet school, Performing and Visual Arts (PVA) middle and high school magnets, and our signature schools.

Our future plans include expanding accessibility to PVA magnet school programs, continuing our work to hire and support high quality arts instructors, and increasing performance and exhibit opportunities for artistic success by all of our students.

We will maintain and enhance mutually supportive partnerships with educational organizations and institutions which will assist students in meeting and exceeding the fine arts standards. Finally, we will continue to advocate for the arts to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the ever changing landscape of knowledge and skills to keep pace with local, state, and national changes in education.

Continuous Learning
It is important that students understand that learning is continuous and does not end when they finish high school. Every student needs to develop skills for effective academic and career planning, beginning in elementary school and continuing through post-secondary education and into the world of work.

The Academic Plan, begun in elementary school and revisited annually as mandated by Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), provides a framework for this focus on continuous learning — articulated from school to school and level to level. In order to excel, all students must become master learners and develop the skills to plan, persevere, innovate, and continuously learn throughout their lifespan.

Schools engage in a process of articulation that teaches students the skills of goal-setting, decision-making, and self-evaluation. The continuous articulation that occurs within schools and across levels provides students with multiple opportunities for acceleration, as school staff use data to identify and encourage students from all student groups to pursue rigorous and engaging courses of study that support their future plans.

Data & Decision Making
The Division of Accountability, Assessment and Research collaborates with the Division of Technology to provide schools with timely access to student performance, discipline, attendance, and community engagement data to enable them to make instructional decisions, shape their intervention plans, and develop outreach programs.

These two divisions partner to develop reports from a variety of student data systems (including Chancery SMS, our student data base) that enable personnel at the school and the district level to determine trends and act upon them.

AACPS has created a Student Dashboard (a robust system that enables schools to examine all existing data about a student in order to ensure that he or she is being appropriately challenged and supported). The divisions of Accountability, Assessment and Research and Technology work together to keep this valuable tool current and will continue to do so as Maryland schools make the transition from our current assessment structure to the PARCC assessments.

Professional development is provided, as appropriate, so that school system personnel are able to efficiently gather these data and accurately interpret them. At the district level, Accountability, Assessment and Research and Technology collaborate to
join AACPS’ student data base with Maryland’s Longitudinal Data System, an important element of our participation in Race to the Top.

Research
In order to effectively allocate school system resources, it is vital that we provide a mechanism for program evaluation. The Division of Accountability, Assessment and Research engages in data analysis to determine the efficacy of various programs in AACPS. This division engages in an exciting and productive partnership with the University of Maryland, College Park which enables us to use the services of its faculty to conduct evaluations of existing instructional programs in our schools. We look forward to continuing this mutually-beneficial partnership.

Monitoring Student Performance
Our vision is that our students will graduate with the skills necessary to read, write, compute, and communicate effectively; think critically and creatively; work independently and collaboratively; and engage in innovative interdisciplinary analysis and complex problem solving. In order to achieve this vision, it is critical that we have in place a systematic set of procedures to monitor the performance of every student in every school with an eye to ensuring that we are increasing achievement for all students and eliminating gaps (to high academic standards) among all of our student groups. Classroom teachers, Leadership Teams, administrators, and district leaders monitor student performance on benchmark assessments by examining data by these groups: all students, each of nine racial/ethnic groups, and students receiving special education, Limited English Proficient, and Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMS) services.

Examing the data and adjusting instruction based on individual student needs ensures that each student’s needs are appropriately met. Schools and classroom teachers utilize a variety of tools and strategies to monitor student performance, including collaborative planning, Leadership Team meetings, and analysis of student work—supported by professional development. At the district level, content specialists and Executive Team members study student performance by drilling down to root causes and developing plans to assist schools in addressing them.

Safe & Supportive Learning Environment

Wellness
The physical, emotional, and mental health of our students and staff is essential for the academic success of our students. The AACPS Wellness Committee’s mission is to affect the culture of our school system and to change lives in the process. We have done much work in the area of wellness, yet there is still much to be accomplished. To meet our challenges, partnerships groomed within our county and outside the county have become essential for the work to get done.

The school system’s closest ally in this regard is the Anne Arundel County Department of Health—a side-by-side supporter of all things wellness. Our relationship with parent teacher organizations is strong, and we welcome members of PTA to serve on the Wellness Committee and be a voice from the home. The School Health Advisory Council is a parallel partner seeking to promote similar initiatives to improve the Health and Wellness of Anne Arundel County.

Through our member benefits offices in Human Resources, Anne Arundel County Public Schools has cultivated outstanding community relationships with many health clubs and nearly 20 businesses and seeks to expand its number on a regular basis. The Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks and the Annapolis Recreation Department are also partners of the Wellness Committee’s efforts. Both agencies provide the space and opportunity for our school system to be outside, active, and working toward improvement of our health. The Wellness Committee looks forward to continuing to partner with other
A dream becomes a goal when action is taken toward its achievement.

—Bob Bennett
agencies to ensure that all students and staff members come to school every day ready to learn at high levels.

**Social Climate**

**Social and Emotional Supports**

When students’ social and emotional needs are supported in schools, a sense of belonging creates higher engagement in learning, responsible choices, and the freedom to take healthy academic risks. It is important to have systematic structures in place to teach resilience as students navigate social, emotional, and academic challenges. Student services professionals work with administrators, teachers, and other school staff to integrate social and emotional learning throughout the school day through direct instruction, modeling, and creation of targeted interventions for students who need a higher level of support. Focusing on resilience reduces behaviors related to bullying and electronic aggression and supports a climate where students can practice skills to deal with threatening situations.

Additionally, student service professionals maintain a focus on mental wellness and provide access to resources to deal with trauma, grief, depression, mental health issues, death, and suicide. Specific identification and tracking of homeless students and families provides them with access to material needs and support services, ensuring stability within which to experience academic success and the capability to control their own destinies.

Using tools such as surveys and tracking of critical incidents, school staff members are able to identify specific areas of need and target direct and indirect interventions to meet them.

AACPS is among the 25 largest school systems with the most military-connected students in the United States and is home to approximately 8,000 military-connected children, most of whom are being educated in our school system. One of the key issues facing military families is the frequent transitioning from one installation to the next. For these children to have an equal opportunity for academic success, it is important that our educators understand the unique situations experienced by the children of our service members. To this end, AACPS implements the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, to which the State of Maryland is a signatory, to ensure that school personnel (particularly school counselors, high school registrars, and those responsible for registration at elementary and middle schools) are aware of, and able to respond appropriately to common concerns that affect military-connected children as a result of frequent moves and deployments.

**Equity and Culture**

AACPS is committed to Cultural Proficiency and culturally responsive teaching. Cultural proficiency is “a way of being” that allows individuals and organizations to interact effectively with people who differ from them. It is an approach that can be applied to organizational practices and individual behaviors. It is a model for shifting the culture of the classroom and for individual transformation. When school leaders, teachers, and support staff are committed to creating an inclusive community, classrooms and schools are transformed.

One indicator that a teacher is culturally proficient is the use of culturally responsive teaching. A teacher who teaches to and through the strengths of students, incorporating multicultural information and students’ prior experiences, affects students’ attitudes and approaches to learning. Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate the importance of academic achievement while maintaining cultural identity and heritage.

A culturally responsive classroom is an environment that encourages collective effort, academic excellence with support for achievements, and high expectations for every student. Skills are taught, varied strategies and resources are utilized, and interpersonal relations are exhibited. Displays in the classroom portray positive images of different races, ethnicities, genders, abilities, and roles. The classroom environment is student-centered, and the teacher facilitates learning, manages behavior, and promotes cooperation and collaboration among students of different skill levels, genders, physical abilities, races, and ethnic groups. Additionally, the teacher assists students in their social development and leadership skills, and interacts with students in a variety of interpersonal exchanges.

**Safe Learning Environments**

We believe that all students deserve a safe, supportive, and orderly environment in which to learn. We encourage appropriate behaviors by teaching, guiding, directing, and providing opportunities for new learning to occur. We create opportunities for students to practice and succeed in making responsible choices in order to reach their academic potential and contribute to their community.

In order to realize these beliefs and to ensure a more positive learning environment, we implement a three-tiered prevention/intervention approach to student behaviors and learning. At the prevention or Tier 1

—Julius Erving
level, data-based decision making is used to develop school-wide efforts through Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and similar programs to teach and acknowledge appropriate behaviors. School leadership teams analyze data for all student groups, looking at the types, location, and time of behaviors to guide school-based professional development and adjustments to school-based systems and practices. Professional development is designed to increase behavioral management strategies in an effective and efficient manner. At the Tier 2 level, schools are provided with additional professional development in early intervention models for students with more intensive behavioral management needs, and with resources, such as Learning Labs, Alternative One teachers, Check-In/Check-Out, and Check & Connect. At the Tier 3 level, data-based decision making informs child-centered problem-solving teams to support students with intensive needs, through wrap around supports in a systems of care framework.

Prevention
As noted earlier in this plan, AACPS’ workforce does not reflect the diversity of its students. In order to provide our teachers with the tools they need to work effectively with students from a variety of backgrounds, we will provide extensive professional development. Many factors need to be in place in order for students to succeed, not the least of which is a set of positive relationships among administrators, teachers, and students in order to ensure an environment free from the kind of behaviors that interfere with learning. AACPS will conduct countywide professional development for administrators and teachers. For administrators, the sessions will focus on providing strategies that equip them with greater skill in how to communicate with teachers, and how to create a climate of collaboration with the expressed purpose of encouraging teachers to use a variety of interventions, including equity practices, to address cultural differences, rather than resorting to discipline referrals which remove students from the learning environment.

Dovetailing on the professional development for administrators will be a time devoted to teachers. Teachers will be introduced to a variety of modules (facilitated by their colleagues) all with a similar theme in mind — the necessity for teachers to build positive relationships with students, which set the stage for teaching and learning. Schools are expected to build from this by extending the content presented to be reflected in professional development throughout the school year. The implementation of strategies gained through this year-long professional development focus will be monitored by school-based and central office administrators as we move through the life of this Strategic Plan.

Monitoring Discipline Data
In addition to providing administrators and teachers with the strategies and skills they need to build positive relationships with all students, it is important that we know where remaining disciplinary challenges reside and which students continue to be removed from the learning environment for disciplinary reasons.

The Offices of the Deputy Superintendent and Safe and Orderly Schools support schools through regular monitoring of discipline data. Schools are provided with accurate, up-to-date discipline data (showing any disparities among student groups) and the training to analyze these data. Schools focus primarily on reviewing the patterns of offenses like insubordination, classroom disruption, and disrespect, which comprise a large percentage of our overall referrals and suspensions. These offenses are the ones that we can impact by providing professional development and ensuring consistency among administrators and teachers in how to respond to them.

As schools are analyzing their data to determine what offenses are prevalent, where they are taking place, what students are involved, and what gaps exist among student groups, central office staff members are conducting similar analysis at the district level. A clear understanding of the trends leads to the identification of the causes of the disciplinary actions, which, in turn, provides information as to how to intervene to decrease disruptions to student learning and to eliminate discipline disparities among student groups.

Alternative Education
Fundamental to the work of providing safe, supportive, and orderly learning environments for all students is a shared agenda in the development and implementation of Alternative Education programs. Families, schools, mental health systems, and other youth serving community agencies are working together to build a continuum of programs which supports students in both the comprehensive schools and in alternative programs preK–12. Such programs reflect strategies to promote student academic and behavioral outcomes, while reducing barriers to learning.
The new Phoenix Center at the former Germantown Elementary School site and our partnership with community mental health programs in our schools, reflect our vision for braiding community resources into the school environment. In the current climate of limited resources and increased student exposure to risk factors, the new Phoenix Center will provide a structured, systematic framework for collaborative supports and interventions for students requiring a non-traditional path to high school graduation. Our expanded school-based mental health services will provide the necessary mental health prevention and intervention supports needed by children and families within the comprehensive school environment. This agenda, shared by our diverse community stakeholders, will provide the breadth and depth needed to promote learning, positive behavior, and mental health for all students both in their home school and in alternative education programs along a continuum of traditional and nontraditional pathways.

Security
A primary focus for AACPS is that all students and staff will work and be educated in an environment that is free from fear and harm. Steps are delineated and broadly communicated to ensure staff and student safety while in the school or work setting. Specifically, coursework will be developed and delivered to all supervisors, instructional and support, to give them training in workplace threat assessment (a process that allows a person to determine the level of threat presented to a person or organization from a set of statements, actions, or conditions) and mitigation regarding employees they supervise and others with whom they come into contact.

With any organization the size of AACPS, the possibility of a disgruntled employee or someone with a personal issue that could lead to violence exists. Additionally, emergency plans will be completed for all non-instructional facilities. This will enable us to prepare for a variety of emergency situations that may occur in non-instructional facilities in the same way that we prepare our schools. Finally, video surveillance systems will be completed in all secondary schools and begun in targeted elementary schools and non-instructional facilities in order to increase the level of security and investigate untoward influences.

Diverse, Highly Qualified Workforce
AACPS is committed to recruiting, retaining, and promoting a diverse, highly-qualified workforce. To that end, we employ a variety of strategies to increase our diversity.

Recruitment
AACPS makes a concerted effort to include diversity language in all new job descriptions, which underscores our desire to hire employees who can work with diverse groups and managers who can foster environments where diversity is encouraged.

Our Workforce Monitoring Team, composed of senior leaders, regularly monitors hiring data and develops additional strategies that can assist with achieving our goals. Recruiters visit Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic-serving Institutions, attending campus seminars, hosting informational receptions, and meeting with education majors in their sophomore and junior years. Web-based advertising includes career sites that serve diverse groups and we have reached out to local community groups to share some of our goals and to encourage the referral of diverse candidates. We also

Diverse, Highly Qualified Workforce | Alternative Programs, continued

Safe & Supportive Learning Environment | Alternative Programs, continued
utilize a data base of community groups and alumni associations from diverse colleges that we use to share information on job opportunities.

Our Diversity and Inclusion webpage includes information on our commitment to diversity and provides information on programs and resources provided for new teachers and career changers. And, our Teacher Diversity Recruitment Weekend — the first of its kind in the state of Maryland — is designed to provide prospective highly qualified candidates with an opportunity to explore our school system and community. Our outreach to veterans is twofold. We partner with Troops to Teachers and have established a relationship with the Veteran’s Liaison for Anne Arundel One Stop Career Centers.

Our recent reorganization of the Division of Human Resources expands our Workforce Diversity Team to provide support to new, diverse employees and to develop strategies to increase recruitment of underrepresented groups.

Supportive Work Environment

Employee retention is a goal for AACPS. Although staff members leave employment for a variety of reasons, some staff members leave AACPS because they never felt welcome or did not understand their role as a part of the larger organization; this is particularly true for our diverse employees. The reorganization of the Division of Human Resources shifts additional resources to support workforce diversity. We will provide year-round support to diverse employees who join our system through the assignment of a staff member who will follow up on their progress throughout the year and work to provide employees with supports needed to succeed. By providing this constant support, we will reduce the number of controllable separations.

Turnover of any kind results in the need to rehire, orient, and train new employees, which all cost the organization in terms of staff, time, and resources. While certain employee separations are uncontrollable, others are the result of employees’ workplace environment. A thoughtful new employee hiring process, as well as creating a welcoming and professionally rewarding environment at the specific work location, can help employees succeed, leading to success for the organization. Results of a comprehensive exit survey will help AACPS understand the reasons why employees leave the school system. It will also inform our practices to strengthen partnerships among work location leaders and the Divisions of Human Resources and Professional Growth and Development. The result will be a more effective and welcoming new hire orientation and support program that is critical in the first years of employment. In addition, employees should be informed about options or procedures to address workplace concerns. An increase in retention rates will positively impact our students’ success.

Leadership Succession

For AACPS to achieve its goals and meet the needs of its stakeholders, it is important to create leadership capacity within the existing employee ranks. The AACPS Leadership Succession Plan provides a comprehensive model for defining, developing, and supporting leaders for the future of Anne Arundel County Public Schools. In accordance with this plan, interested employees have opportunities to participate in activities to develop their skills which may better prepare them for future leadership roles.

The Division of Human Resources assists schools in developing awareness of the Leadership Succession Plan and existing leadership opportunities and routinely provides updated information to principals about the employees in their worksites who have attained various degrees and certifications. The Division pays particular attention to cultivating the leadership skills of our minority teachers in AACPS’ continuing goal of ensuring that the demographics of our system leaders more closely mirror our student population. Additionally, AACPS partners with the Anne Arundel Alliance of Black School Educators to provide support for our diverse candidates as they prepare to pursue leadership positions.

A partnership with the 21st Century Education Foundation sponsors the Leadership Development Institute which provides talented individuals in the education and business sectors to take part in an integrated, collaborative leadership development program. This program enhances leadership capacity through the exploration of leadership principles that specifically relate to AACPS and Anne Arundel County, and contributes to addressing key issues facing AACPS through experiential learning and group projects.
National Board Certification
National Board Certification continues to grow in importance across the country. National Board Certification raises the standards for the profession and provides an opportunity for teachers to take greater responsibility for their own learning. Teachers must reflectively seek out resources to address their strengths and areas in need of improvement. Those areas are identified when they examine their own performance and measure that against the high and rigorous standards described in their certificate area of expertise. Teachers embrace the opportunity to examine their practice against the profession’s highest standards, and the teachers who achieve National Board Certification have met high standards through study, expert evaluation, self-assessment, and peer review. Furthermore, countywide assessment results demonstrate greater growth percentiles among students taught by National Board Certified Teachers.

Community Engagement
The responsibility for student achievement, school preparation, social skill development, and readiness for colleges and careers lies with the school system, families, and the larger community. The community engagement strategies ensure deliberate actions that involve schools with the entire school community to support student success. It takes educators reaching out into the community and parents and community members coming to schools to create structures and cultures that assist students in achieving in school and in preparing for life.

Community Partnerships
AACPS builds strong, sustainable, and effective partnerships with community partners to support and celebrate the academic achievement and social skill development of all students. This is accomplished by engaging key community stakeholders in collaboration with the schools to create, implement, and measure solutions that address improved student achievement.

Business and community partners, will be surveyed to assess whether, from their perspectives, students are prepared for colleges and careers as a result of the community partnerships in their schools. Businesses and community organizations will be encouraged to partner with schools in each cluster to sponsor or co-sponsor one or more events to celebrate, honor, or support student achievement. The results of both of these efforts will illustrate the strength and value of the partnerships established in collaboration with our schools.

Parent Involvement
AACPS engages and sustains partnerships with parents at all levels to support and improve academic and social skill development for all students. Schools will be guided in developing and conducting parent empowerment training to assist parents in overseeing their children’s education.

At least twice over the life of this Strategic Plan, parents will be asked to assess their satisfaction with their children’s success. We want to learn from them if the schools their children attend are preparing them for college and careers. To promote increased parent involvement, AACPS sponsors varied opportunities across the district for parents to get information, engage in activities, and learn and practice techniques and strategies that will assist them to advocate for their children.

Community Collaboration
While we can meet the needs of many parents through traditional outreach efforts, there are some parents who, for a variety of reasons, are uncomfortable in the school environment and uncertain of their rights as parents. To address the needs of these parents, AACPS will partner with community organizations to examine promising practices in providing traditionally-underserved parents with the assistance they need to become advocates for their children. Through working with AACPS personnel, community organization members will develop a strategy to support, empower, and engage these...
parents. We will work together to build on and create initiatives in areas of greatest need, to establish mentors, tutors, and advocates who will provide assistance to parents, teachers, and administrators, and to work in more coordinated ways to help each child meet his or her potential.

Home Visits
It is recognized that education is a joint venture between school and home. Head Start schools have long made it a practice for teachers to visit the homes of their students in order to establish relationships with families. For many years, teachers in school districts such as Mason County, Kentucky; White Pines, Nevada; and St. Louis, Missouri (among others) have been conducting informal visits to all of their incoming students. Such visits have yielded great dividends. AACPS will explore the possibility of such a pattern of home visits for our school system, beginning in Title I schools and expanding as appropriate.

The purpose of these visits would be for teachers to acquaint the parents or guardians with the instructional methodology of the teacher’s class, to provide and receive key contact information to facilitate communication with the school and school system, to encourage parental involvement in their child’s education at home and at school, and to make an assessment of any student or family needs. The teacher, upon returning from such visits, would make appropriate referrals to other professionals or agencies for services as indicated.

Through these visits, we would establish firm and long-lasting partnerships between school and home; thus, increasing the likelihood of success for all of our students.

Sound, Efficient, & Effective Business Practices

Stewardship Management
AACPS strives to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and staff. Facilities must be conducive to furthering the educational mission of the school district. The Educational Facilities Master Plan comprehensively governs the activities that support this endeavor. Educational Specifications, the Capital Improvement Program, and the Comprehensive Maintenance Plan support the systemic direction outlined in the Master Plan. Centralized management of facilities and infrastructure provides full life-cycle stewardship of district resources, from design and construction, to maintenance and operation. A full spectrum of support services keeps the school district running efficiently and cost-effectively. Best-in-class management practices enable us to meet our educational obligation and facilitate programmatic success and mission execution.

Public Communication
Community engagement remains a primary objective of AACPS as we strive to fulfill our mission and vision. Proactive outreach efforts and a thorough public communication plan are key elements of our strategy to inform, educate, and engage various stakeholder groups and the community at large. Such outreach and communication activities span across every level of the school system. A multitude of means and methods are employed in the fulfillment of this objective. Schools can employ strategies such as general or focused meetings and events, newsletters, a web presence, and telephone communication. At the district level, strategies include community meetings, press releases, and a robust web presence. Timeliness and transparency will remain at the forefront of all such communication efforts.

Resource Allocation
The budget development process strives to properly align and allocate the resources of AACPS with our mission and vision. Fiscal accountability is ensured through the use of integrated finance and budget services. Proper fiscal stewardship is confirmed through a rigorous auditing process. Best practice financial and budget systems work with integrated supply chain management practices to promote efficiencies and reduce costs. Public input and transparency will continue to be infused throughout each activity.
Alignment to National, State, & Local Initiatives

This Strategic Plan is aligned with important federal and state legislation and with national initiatives in education.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), enacted in 2002, is a re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). NCLB was designed to help all students meet high performance standards and requires each state to administer yearly assessments to measure student achievement in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. Annually, the performance of students, student groups (by race, socio-economic condition, native language, or handicapping condition), and schools is analyzed. Schools, districts, and states that do not make sufficient progress toward proficiency for all students are identified for assistance.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), signed into law in 2009, is designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. ARRA lays the foundation for education reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies to improve results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness. ARRA provides $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top (RTTT) Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform. In August 2010, Maryland was awarded Race to the Top funds in the amount of $250 million over four years, of which AACPS received $6 million. The funds support improving student achievement, reducing gaps in achievement among student groups, turning around struggling schools, and improving the teaching profession.

A part of the national movement to increase the rigor of American education, the Common Core State Standards’ mission is to “provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.” The Standards, developed under the joint direction of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, were written by teachers, administrators, and educational experts. They were released in June 2010, and have been adopted by 45 states, including Maryland, and several territories.

The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2002, restructured Maryland’s public school finance system and increased districts’ accountability for ensuring that resources are allocated equitably among all schools. Like NCLB, this act expects schools and school districts to see that all students can meet high performance standards. The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act sets performance goals in the following areas: student performance in reading and mathematics; performance of limited English proficient students; workforce quality; safe, drug-free and healthy schools; attendance; and high school graduation.

For more information, see:
No Child Left Behind
www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml
American Recovery & Reinvestment Act
www.recovery.gov/About/Pages/The_Act.aspx
Common Core State Standards
www.corestandards.org/
Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools
mlis.state.md.us/other/education/public_school_facilities/Presentation_091802.pdf

"The best way to predict the future is to create it." — Peter Drucker
In this age of rapid change, our school system needs to be positioned to respond to many demands from internal and external stakeholders, some of which are:

- the imperative to eliminate achievement gaps while raising student achievement for all students;
- the globalization of society and increasing competition for jobs from other countries;
- the changing face of technology and how it will affect delivery of instruction;
- the new accountability systems dictated by the federal Race to the Top initiative; and
- the potential for a reauthorization (with new regulations) of No Child Left Behind.

An effective strategic plan:

- provides a clear understanding of what we need to do in order to achieve our vision;
- guides us in making and prioritizing decisions;
- allows us to focus finite resources on the actions that will benefit our work the most;
- furnishes a context to the larger framework — global, national and local;
- provides a tool to help us communicate our intentions to others; and
- provides a coherent guide for day-to-day implementation.

Getting Input

It is very important to consider input from a broad range of stakeholders as an organization considers developing goals, defining strategies and articulating the actions it will take to implement those strategies. To that end, AACPS took, as its first step in developing this Strategic Plan, the opportunity to gather input to help us to envision our future through a vision, to define our mission, to articulate our values, and to refine our goal. As we gathered that input, we were engaged in a continuous process of examining our performance data to assess our needs.

Determining Strategies & Initiatives

Once our vision, mission, values, and goal were in place and we were satisfied that we had a clear sense of our strengths and challenges, we began to examine current strategic initiatives and identify areas to refine and/or add to those initiatives for this Strategic Plan. Concurrently, we began to identify the indicators of success (measures that we use to determine progress toward our goal).

Developing the Plan

Once strategic initiatives and indicators of success were identified, we were in a position to complete a draft of the plan. This draft was shared with the Board of Education and our internal and external stakeholders (via the internet) with a request for feedback. Through a process of incorporating feedback received and seeking additional feedback, we developed a final draft which was approved by the Board of Education and will be imple-
Monitoring the Strategic Plan

Implement Strategies → Examine Student Data → Are we Meeting Targets?

Yes → Re-evaluate and Revise Strategies → Adjust School Improvement Plans → Redirect Resources

No → Periodic Reports to Board of Education and to the Public

Monitoring the Plan

An important component of any strategic plan is its monitoring procedures. Monitoring is the systematic collection and analysis of data as a plan is implemented. It is based on targets set and activities contemplated during the planning phases of work. It helps keep the work on track, and can let leadership know when circumstances (either internal or external to the organization) change, and adjustments in planning are necessary. Additionally, monitoring helps an organization to determine whether the resources it has available are sufficient and being effectively used, whether the capacity it has is sufficient and appropriate, and whether it is doing what it said it planned to do.

Throughout the life of this strategic plan, AACPS staff will provide periodic updates to the Board of Education on areas of the strategic plan for which we are seeing success and in which we are challenged. As of the 2013 – 2014 school year, these updates will be the result of monitoring progress toward the goal via the indicators of success. These updates will be presented in several formats and will be available to the public.

If, in the course of monitoring this strategic plan, it becomes apparent that adjustments need to be made, those adjustments may take place at various levels. In some cases, adjustments will be made at the school or office level, through revising office, department, and School Improvement plans. In other cases, resources will be redirected to address opportunities for improvement. If it becomes necessary to adjust any of the strategies described in this strategic plan, a broad base of stakeholders will be included in determining what those adjustments will be and how they will be included in revisions to this plan.
The Journey to Greatness
Aligning strategies with financial and human resources to ensure excellence in our work.

Endnotes
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