

# Executive Summary to the 2008 Annual Update

## *Continuous Improvement: Everyone; Every Way; Every Day.*

Cecil County has set three main goals within the Strategic Plan for Student Success:

1. **All students will meet or exceed high academic standards.**
2. **All students will learn in safe, secure and inviting environments.**
3. **All students will benefit from effective and efficient support and services provided by a learning organization.**

This annual update of the county's progress toward these goals includes two (2) major parts: (A) The 2008 Bridge to Excellence Annual Update Part I is prepared and presented here for review by the Maryland State Department of Education. (B) We have reviewed and reprinted our major strategies. These are contained in the Appendix document titled "Working Toward Success." This list of strategies with responsibilities and timelines assigned to various components was first developed in 2003 and has been reviewed annually since its inception. We are currently in the midst of a review and revision process in which a new format of strategic plan will emerge. The basic strategies are included here and the major components of each strategy will likely remain in the revision which is due for completion in March 2009. Applications for federal and state grants, such as the Federal "Title" programs and the state Arts' Initiative have been submitted separately and earlier as Bridge to Excellence 2008 Update Part II.

**Budget Narrative**  
One reason behind the success we enjoy is the positive relationship we enjoy with local government funding sources. We have historically enjoyed annual increases in our allocations along with very stable student growth. By setting and adhering to our priority spending needs, these funds allow us to retain our valued staff with a competitive salary and benefit package, while expanding programs to meet increased graduation requirements and the demands of high stakes accountability testing. Our financial resources are being applied to meet the needs of our students, to the satisfaction of our community. Current financial conditions will provide a significant challenge to meeting our priority goals, but certain cost containment steps have been undertaken now to help set aside funds for the "lean" years ahead.

The 2008 Update provides details of the revenues and expenditures in Fiscal Year 2008 and our plans for 2009. FY 08 revenues totaled \$171,897,000 and this was very close to all anticipated funding. Federal sources yielded approximately \$1 million additional dollars from adjusted allocations, carryover funds and competitive awards subsequent to budget production. Expenditures were very much on target, with just a few notable variations. We were delighted to see over half a million dollars of savings in student transportation, due largely to efficiently rerouting buses. Fewer miles with fewer bus stops resulted in fewer hours and miles paid to contractors and better fuel economy. We also were able to meet our speech and physical therapy needs without hiring 2 FTE positions. Other details are included in the full 2008 Update.

## Goal Progress      Maryland School Assessments/High School Assessments

Getting better is hard work. Cecil County Public Schools has much good news to share in this annual update of our Strategic Plan for Student Success. Of our 50+ indicators of progress that we maintain, a vast majority of indicators show growth and progress, while we continue to work on relatively few indicators that show less growth than we expected or even slight declines. .

We have performance metrics about which we are justifiably proud, while acknowledging that we face significant challenges in other areas. Some of our notable results and strategies are listed below:

- **Elementary and middle school reading** scores show satisfactory progress over the last 5 years. These current performances seen below include All Time Bests in those areas with underlined scores. The success is due in large part to the curriculum guidance provided in the unit resource binders prepared to accompany each instructional unit. The binder includes lesson plans that integrate technology into the classroom programs. Performance at the primary grades that precede the MSA year is monitored with county unit exams and through individuals' performance on the DIBELS scales.

### Cecil County Reading MSA/HSA 2008 Percent Proficient or Advanced

	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Gr 8	HSA-English 2
All Students	84.6	89.4	84.4	75.5	86.7	74.9	83.1
Amer. Ind	*	100	*	*	*	*	100
Asian	95.0	93.3	100	69.2	88.9	44.4	100
Afr. Amer.	73.7	84.3	69.9	65.7	72.0	65.1	65.4
White	85.7	90.2	86.4	76.9	83.0	76.5	84.2
Hispanic	87.5	83.6	75.0	76.3	74.4	67.6	94.7
Spec Ed	67.6	78.7	71.0	40.3	41.1	25.7	34.7
FARM	76.0	84.3	82.1	69.4	74.6	62.9	70.5
LEP	81.8	76.9	*	*	*	*	--

- **Mathematics** scores are still strong across all grade levels, with some challenges emerging as our AMO targets increase over the years approaching the NCLB target date of 2014, Special education students experience the greatest challenges in middle school and HSA Algebra, though we recognize that this phenomenon also occurs throughout the state

During the 2007-08 school year, we conducted pilot textbook reviews at the high school and elementary schools. At the high school I level, this change comes at the conclusion of a thorough program review conducted by our contracted partners at UMBC. We are following their recommendation to utilize a more traditional sequence of Algebra-Geometry-Algebra II in exchange for our previous integrated math program. We have selected new textbooks at each level and more than \$700,000 has been invested in new texts and supplementary materials. The roll out of the new text series will be the driving force for yearlong professional development for all of the teachers involved. In order to bridge the elementary and secondary programs, the middle schools are now involved in a text pilot review during the 2008-09 year. This will result in a new text selection for 2009-10 use.

Our primary challenge is that the special education subgroup scores dip during middle school, and then make a significant jump for HSA. We need to continue to expect the level of rigor and quality of concept-based instruction for all students, and especially for these students. With these expectation comes a required level of support and intervention.

We continue to focus on hiring new middle school mathematics teachers who are either secondary certified or who have at least 18 hours of college level mathematics including Calculus I and Calculus II.

**Cecil County Math MSA/HAS 2008%**  
**% Proficient and Advanced**

	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Gr 8	HSA-Alg
All Students	82.1	86.1	79.5	76.1	72.6	70.6	88.1
Amer. Ind	*	100	*	*	*	*	100
Asian	85	93.3	100	76.9	75	70	71.4
Afr. Amer.	66.9	74.4	62.4	61.4	63.2	54	69.1
White	84.7	88	81.8	78	74	72.7	89.8
Hispanic	73.5	73.2	69.4	78.9	50	64.9	89.5
Spec Ed	61.5	61.2	52.2	33.3	25.3	23	49.5
FARM	75	79.3	74.5	69.9	62.6	57.9	82.5
LEP	61.5	76.9	*	*	*	*	--

- **MSA Science** is still a rather new assessment. With just the second year of data in hand, we are reviewing patterns in our scores to identify domains which warrant a revised curriculum or additional attention. Our first analysis shows that the hands-on, constructivist curriculum we have used for several years will need continued work to align more closely with the voluntary state curriculum. We are prepared to make the changes necessary to assure student and system success. Committees of teachers work within the school year and throughout the summer to revise our curriculum documents. This written curriculum is supported by the best textbooks that we can identify.

**Cecil County Science MSA 2008**  
**% Proficient and Advanced**

	Gr 5	Gr 8
All Students	60.7	71.8
Amer. Ind	*	50.0
Asian	72.2	50.0
Afr. Amer.	39.7	49.6
White	63.9	75.0
Hispanic	46.2	58.3
Spec Ed	37.2	25.4
FARM	53.6	61.1
LEP	0	*

At the high school level, we are entering our third year of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) growth. Our county offers an enhanced sequence of courses to interested and qualified students that will lead to college credits upon high school graduation and advanced preparation for college study in STEM related content.

- **HSA Government** is one of the stronger high school assessment subjects. We enjoy passing rates as high as 95% in at least one school. Last year was year 2 of changes made to our program for grade 9 students. These changes included the 9th grade academy at Bohemia Manor HS as well as Perryville High School, grouping repeat grade 9 students in sections that did not include any first time 9th graders, grouping students according to ability so that students considered at risk were placed in year-long programs while advanced students were generally placed in semester courses. We are pleased with the results of these efforts.

Our department also implemented phase 3 of our strategic plan which focused on an interdisciplinary approach to teaching content reading and writing. This included focused and repeated instruction on the basics of effective reading and writing skills. Teachers, continually evaluated student reading comprehension and writing skills. Students were encouraged to utilize a variety of reading strategies as well as re-writing at least once almost all of their submitted writings before receiving a final grade.

- The current senior class (of 2009) is the first graduating class to face the requirement that all HSA tests must be passed for graduation. We are using an interesting approach to **Appropriate Assistance**. Students who have not met their HSA graduation requirements are enrolled in a course specifically to prepare them for subsequent HSA testing. Students participate in instruction via the online MSDE courses. Teachers work from home as an additional duty task to check student work, line up instructional activities and provide individualized feedback to work posted by the students. After an appropriate period of study, students attempt the HSA exam. Second semester will see many students beginning Bridge Projects for Academic Validation. Over 90% of our current 12<sup>th</sup> graders have taken all tests and have fulfilled their testing requirements. Our goal is that no student will fail to graduate on the basis of HSA status alone.
- **Attendance** rates have remained rather static at all three grade spans. Our attendance policy allows a generous amount of parent discretion over their children's school attendance. There is current discussion in the county to ascertain what impact our policy has in the relatively flat performance trend that has left our elementary attendance hovering at 94.8% while the middle and high schools see rates of 92.9% and 90.6% respectively. The Pupil Personnel Workers aggressively pursue chronically truant students, while school staff members address less drastic cases with phone calls, parent conferences and personal contracting with students through our Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies efforts.
- **Graduation rate** for all students is 82.25%. Special education, African American and Free/Reduced Meal subgroups scores are 5-12% lower and those scores concern us. We address this through individual counseling, guidance and academic support in tutoring programs. Additionally, we have reviewed our course offerings in high schools and we have found ways for students to earn more credits toward our challenging local graduation requirement of 26 credits. When students elect to leave school, we conduct exit interviews to determine what forces led them to this unfortunate decision. Most often, students cite frustration with course credit attainment. When a student completes his sophomore year with perhaps as few as 10 credits, he does not see an attainable pathway to graduation in two years. Previously, math lab courses that accompany Algebra, for example, did not count at all toward graduation. Now, this course, Strategic Reading, and READ 180 are allowed as elective courses, though they do not satisfy the annual math or English credit requirements.

- **Drop Out rate** is relatively high for all students (4.43%) and particularly high for specific subgroups (Free/Reduced Meals 7.31% and Sp Ed 6.57%) The efforts to improve this metric are linked to those above aimed at increasing graduation rates and these are discussed in the body of the update. Given the economic demands and the academic frustrations that these particular audiences face, their decision to withdraw from school is understandable, if not supportable. The Exploratory Trade Skills Experience program in career education is one example of our dropout prevention efforts. We also contract with Youth Services Association to provide alternative placements with embedded counseling to our at risk students.

## Limited English Proficient Students

For a small county, we have an active ESOL program that employs a staff of 7 to serve 123 English Language Learners distributed in 24 of our 29 schools. The school year began with 55 new ESOL students who required initial screening and assessments to plan their appropriate instructional program. Over 15 different languages are represented in this pool of students.

Cecil County Public Schools have met all three LEP goals. Eighty-six percent (86%) of our ESOL students have made the targeted progress on the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) when the state target was set at 40% (AMAO I). 76% of our ESOL students demonstrated grade level proficiency on that same LAS instrument. (AMAO II). Finally, the county as a whole achieved its Adequate Yearly Progress for this subgroup of students (AMAO III).

## Adequate Yearly Progress

Cecil 2008 AYP	Number of Schools	Number meeting AYP
Elementary Schools	17	17
Middle Schools	6	5
High Schools	5	5

All 17 elementary schools have met AYP expectations, as have 5 of 6 middle schools and all 5 of our high schools.[\[embargoed at delivery time\]](#) Last year, at this date, we faced seven (7) schools who had not met the 2007 AYP goal. By attending to the needs of specific students and by providing appropriate intervention, that list was reduced to just one (1) school which did not make AYP. Rising Sun Middle School actually met the criterion score for Safe Harbor in their special education reading subgroup, but the attendance of this one subgroup was literally 3 tenths of a percentage too low to allow the Safe Harbor path to AYP. The full Bridge to Excellence 2008 Update has an extensive treatment of the school improvement plans in place for each of these schools and the supports that will be provided by central office support staff.

## Highly Qualified Teachers

We are making progress toward the goal of having each class section taught by highly qualified teachers. Our most recent staffing “snapshot” showed that 93.1% of all classes were taught by HQ teachers, (Elementary 98.6%; Middle 90.5% High 93%) We anticipate that the 2008 numbers will exceed 95% across the board. Our challenges are in the middle school where teachers were previously well qualified with an elementary certification, but those teachers now need a content specialty. Also, in the high schools, we are forced still to ask teachers to teach on or two courses in which they are knowledgeable, if not certificated or Highly Qualified.

The best curriculum and textbook purchases are powerless in the hands of ill-prepared teachers, so our professional development efforts have been aligned with the Maryland Standards for High Quality Staff Development. We understand that our in-service topics have to give our teachers the skills they need to assess student knowledge and to base their instruction on the data they derive from those assessments. Teachers need support and follow-up training to become effective with new strategies or materials. This can only be accomplished with embedded staff development in which we utilize peer coaches and knowledgeable subject area specialists.

## Professional Staff Development

Our Bridge to Excellence 2008 Update addresses the professional staff development plan for North East High School, a school that did not meet AYP in 2006 or 2007, although they did meet the standard in 2008. Under the leadership of a new principal since September 2008, our staff development specialist is working closely with the school throughout this year to revise its improvement plan, to identify promising practices to include in school-based staff development efforts, to select effective strategies to implement across curricular areas, and to establish a procedure for monitoring the implementation and progress of the full plan. Key features of the effort include regular data review, team meetings to share effective strategies and to evaluate student work with common expectations, and the direct involvement of central office support staff.

## Safe Schools

Again, for the sixth year in a row, **no** schools are identified as “persistently dangerous. The number of students suspended out of school went down slightly while the new requirements regarding in-school suspension have elevated those numbers. In-school suspension discipline actions previously were not counted in this way, so a significant increase in this area is in large part an anomaly of the reporting procedures. We support Positive Behavior Intervention Strategy (PBIS) programs in 10 schools and we have identified the next 4 schools to join the program. Those schools with 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year programs report fewer office referral, fewer suspensions and better attendance.

## Specific Student Groups

Our **Career and Technical Education** program has worked to improve our course offerings in three specific ways:

- We have trade advisory groups for every program.
- We awarded 209 industry certifications for 16 programs.
- We have articulation agreements with 13 institutions where students can earn post secondary credits upon enrollment, based upon their work in our classes. Examples include Cecil College, Delaware Technical College and Baltimore International College, and University of Maryland Baltimore County.

We analyze community employment needs, enrollment patterns and national industry predictions to ascertain each year which programs to continue, expand or curtail. As a result of this analysis, we recently dropped Print Technologies and added BioMedical Technologies to reflect industry needs in the area.

We have broken ground on a new \$60,000,000 comprehensive Cecil Technology high school that will accept students from all attendance zones in the county. Approximately 800 students will attend this school, scheduled for completion sometime in 2012. This new program design will replace and improve upon our current shared facility approach in which students attend the School of Technology 80% of each day for two semesters.

Cecil County's **Early Childhood** program continues to move forward. Strategies in the original Master plan have been implemented and revised to meet the changes and challenges of reaching our early childhood goal "*All students will enter school with the school readiness skills necessary to have success in school.*" Our results on the Maryland Model School Readiness inventory indicates that 61% of our kindergarten students did, indeed, arrive at school in 2007 "fully ready." A large part of the credit for this comes from our collaboration with the Judy Hoyer partners and other agencies in the county.

All kindergarten programs went to full day status ahead of the state's deadline and our next goal is to expand access to pre-kindergarten. We now offer Pre-K in 13 of our 17 elementary schools and we have enrollment procedures to allow priority students from any school neighborhood to attend.

As Cecil County Public Schools move toward increasing the performance of all students, the goals and objectives of Cecil County's Strategic Plan continue to guide the **Gifted and Talented Program** (also known as the Challenge Program). Ongoing surveys and stakeholder feedback from 2006 to the present indicate the following 4 broad areas of needs:

- to broaden the identification process to include all subgroups from PreK-12,
- to strengthen services within the classroom,
- to expand the continuum of services, and
- to broaden communication.

In order to do the above and make the Challenge Program more transparent, we continue:

- to expand professional development for Challenge teachers and all staff,
- to develop ways to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders, and
- to use technology to be effective and efficient with processes, services, and communication.

The **special education** inclusion efforts of Cecil County are now in their 6th year. We have successfully rolled out a gradual plan so that all schools are in phase three of our intended sequence toward "full inclusion" status. [Phase 1- Study, Phase 2- Transition Planning, Phase 3- Inclusion Placement] Over 90% of the students with IEPs receive services in general education classrooms for more than 80% of their school day. Throughout the Cecil County Bridge to Excellence 2008 Update, the reader will find references to general and special education teachers collaborating in staff development, in delivery of instruction and in meeting Appropriate Assistance needs of students who have not passed High School Assessments.

CCPS has provided opportunities for special education staff to collaborate with content coordinators in develop training activities that provide information to general and special educators on strategies for differentiation, accommodations and modified instruction and assessment within the content area. After school workshops and collaborative planning sessions are facilitated by special education consulting teachers to enhance general and special educators capacity to modify instruction for students with disabilities.

In addition, the special education department has assigned a staff member to be a liaison with content coordinators in core academic areas to assist in the development of county-wide professional development activities. This partnership ensures that general and special educators are familiar with standards based content as well as differentiated activities that allow access to the general curriculum.

### Cross-Cutting Themes

Our efforts in expanding the county's use of **Educational Technology** are largely seen in three particular initiatives.

- First, after 7 years of awarding laptop computers to teachers who submit successful applications describing how they will use the technology and a laptop initiative in the middle schools (2007-08), nearly 50% of teachers have laptop computers at their immediate, personal use.
- Second, we saw the high cost of technology facing challenges against a shrinking revenue base, so we entered into a series of lease arrangements to meet our needs. At the end of the 4 year lease roll out, we will be back to the full level of funding we last saw in 2006-07, but this agreement will give us time to reach that level gradually while still benefitting from new equipment to meet our expanding needs.
- Finally, we have used the impetus of the Science Technology Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) and Title I funding to purchase nearly 50 SmartBoard interactive whiteboard devices. This equipment is accompanied with staff development to help teachers use it to teach in new ways. The interactive properties of the instruments allow teachers to reach students in a manner not previously seen. Additional STEM and local funds are slated to expand our access to this technology even further through the 08-09 school year.

At some point in the past, our **Education That is Multicultural/Achievement (ETMA)** program was mostly concerned that text books portrayed a diverse collection of images and authors while representing cultural contributions from many ethnicities. While we still follow that criteria in selecting texts and related materials, we also attend to direct instruction about living in a diverse community and we closely monitor the operations of our own organization to assure that committees reflect our community make up and that our policies speak clearly to our interest in not only teaching about diversity, but modeling it daily. The Cecil Equity Committee closely monitors the employment diversity of our district and the performance gaps. We are happy to report the minority-to-white student performance gaps to be shrinking as we move forward.

## Local Goals and Indicators

In Cecil County, we are proud of the progress we have made and we are excited about our ability to address those challenges still ahead. By using a systems' thinking perspective, we are able to look for opportunities for improvement and to plan for the successful implementation of proven strategies to help us achieve our goals. This approach, based on the Baldrige Criteria for Excellence in Education, allows us to use a results oriented, structured problem-solving approach as we plan activities to meet stakeholder expectations. Aside from the academic and student behavioral measures already included here, we use our continuous improvement strategies to monitor and improve our performance all across the organization. As a result, we can report, among other accomplishments:

- More efficient bus transportation
- More meals served at a higher nutritional level
- Fewer manual entries of financial transactions
- More students taking Advanced Placement and Honors courses
- More high end computers and a better students: computer ratio
- Faster attention to repair requests
- A shift toward preventive maintenance over repair orders
- More students meeting University System of Maryland standards for a rigorous preparation.

Our many measures of success and our current performance levels are seen on our website: [www.ccps.org](http://www.ccps.org) following the link to the Strategic Plan.