



AUGUST 2023



SUPERINTENDENT'S TRANSITION TEAM REPORT

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Transition Team Participants



The transition team was co-chaired by

- **Dr. Douglas Anthony**, *director*, Doctor of Education in School System Leadership, Senior Fellow at the Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement, University of Maryland College Park, and consultant, Principal Pipeline Learning Community, Wallace Foundation
- **Ms. Jill Snell**, *coordinator*, Organizational Development, Baltimore County Public Schools, MSDE (Maryland State Department of Education) Blueprint Expert Review Team Member

Team Members

- **C. Michelle Anderson**, *principal*, Eastern Technical High School, BCPS
- **Nick Argyros**, *president*, Baltimore County Public Schools Organization of Professional Employees, BCPS
- **Elizabeth Becker**, *director*, Facilities Operations and Logistics, BCPS
- **Nicole Bridges**, 2023-2024 BCPS Assistant Principal of the Year and BCPS *assistant principal*, Towson High School
- **Billy Burke**, *executive director*, Council of Administrative and Supervisory Employees (CASE), BCPS
- **Barbara Burnopp**, retired senior executive director of Business Operations, BCPS
- **Adam Carney**, *principal*, Cockeysville Middle School, BCPS
- **Dr. Doug Elmendorf**, *executive director*, Academic Programs and Options, BCPS
- **Bryan Epps**, *president*, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 434, BCPS
- **Beverly Folkoff**, 2023-2024 BCPS Teacher of the Year and *teacher*, Relay Elementary School
- **Rita Fromm**, retired chief of staff, BCPS
- **Douglas Handy**, *executive director*, Equity and Cultural Proficiency, BCPS
- **Gevene Harden**, *bilingual senior communications officer*, BCPS
- **Dr. Donna Hollingshead**, retired associate superintendent for school administration, Montgomery County Public Schools, and adjunct professorial lecturer at American University
- **Engr Johnson**, 2023-2024 BCPS Transportation Service Champion and *dispatcher*, Department of Transportation
- **Dr. Racquel Jones**, *Chief of Schools*, BCPS
- **Sergeant Eric Knox**, *assistant safe schools facilitator*, Baltimore County Police Department
- **Kim Kuhr**, *business manager*, Department of Transportation, BCPS
- **Dr. Sandra Kurtinitis**, *president*, Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)
- **Sam Mustipher**, *executive director of schools*, BCPS
- **Gboyinde Onijala**, *director*, Department of Communications and Community Outreach, BCPS
- **Buddy Parker**, *principal advisor* and retired secondary principal, BCPS
- **Delegate Cheryl Pasteur**, *former vice chair*, Board of Education of Baltimore County, and retired secondary principal, BCPS
- **Deborah Phelps**, *executive director*, The Education Foundation of Baltimore County Public Schools
- **Sandra Reid**, *principal advisor* and retired secondary principal, BCPS
- **Stacy Rodgers**, *chief administrative officer*, Baltimore County Government
- **Jean Satterfield**, BCPS *principal advisor* and retired assistant state superintendent, Maryland State Department of Education
- **Dr. Skipp Sanders**, *retired deputy superintendent*, Maryland State Department of Education
- **Denise Saulsbury**, 2023-2024 BCPS Supervisory Leader of the Year, BCPS *Supervisor*, Academic Programs and Options
- **Cindy Sexton**, *president*, Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO), BCPS
- **Joanna Crandall-Sick**, 2023-2024 BCPS Supporting Services Employee of the Year and *paraeducator*, Relay Elementary School
- **Dr. Jack Smith**, *retired superintendent*, Maryland State Department of Education, Montgomery County Public Schools, and Calvert County Public Schools
- **Lauren Tillman**, *principal*, Scotts Branch Elementary School, BCPS
- **Sue Truesdell**, *principal advisor* and retired executive director of schools, BCPS
- **Melanie Webster**, *director*, Purchasing, BCPS
- **Barry Williams**, *retired Baltimore County Government director* of Recreation and Parks and former BCPS principal
- **Jeannette Young**, *president*, Education Support Professionals of Baltimore County (ESPBC), BCPS



Executive Summary Background

Baltimore County Public Schools, the nation's 22nd largest school system, has more than 20,000 committed staff, strong partners dedicated to investing in our students and supportive families. Baltimore County is rich in history and diversity with students representing more than 138 countries and nearly 150 languages. Each year, BCPS schools, staff and students win numerous local, state, and national awards. While there are great things happening, there is an urgent need to reverse a decade-long trend of declining academic performance, stakeholder perception data and operational efficiency. Previous studies have identified long-standing issues across BCPS. In April 2001 and again in September 2021, organizational reports were commissioned to evaluate the system. The most recent 795-page Operational Efficiency Review yielded 197 recommendations, of which more than 88 percent were implemented.

In June 2023 incoming superintendent Dr. Myriam Rogers (Yarbrough) announced a transition team comprised of educational expert "insiders" and "outsiders" and partners to review prior system improvement efforts, assess the current state of BCPS and provide immediate, focused, steps that would "fast forward" the system's turnaround work.



Executive Summary — The Team, The Charge, The Approach

The Team

Dr. Rogers (Yarbrough) established a 39-member team in June 2023 that included current and retired BCPS educators, staff, and administrators, employee association leaders, higher education administrators, business and community partners, and law enforcement representatives. Members of the transition team represented diverse experiences and perspectives and have a deep understanding of the issues impacting BCPS and public education. As the superintendent works to build a shared vision for the future, the work of the transition team will be instrumental in assisting Dr. Rogers as she assesses areas of strength and opportunity for the system, develops a strategic plan for Baltimore County Public Schools, and specify actionable and measurable goals for the future. By implementing specific recommendations, Dr. Rogers will leverage the strength and innovation of BCPS and accelerate progress.

The Charge

Superintendent Rogers tasked the Transition Team with assessing the school system's current state of teaching and learning, operations, and culture/context. In short, the team was asked to conduct a landscape analysis with consideration to a few important questions: *How do we serve and support schools? What is our purpose and current service in service to schools? What is the current state? What is the desired state? How will we get there?* The team was charged with developing short-term and long-term recommendations for system progress in the following focus areas:



Teaching and Learning



Culture and Climate



Community Engagement
and Communication



Infrastructure








Operations

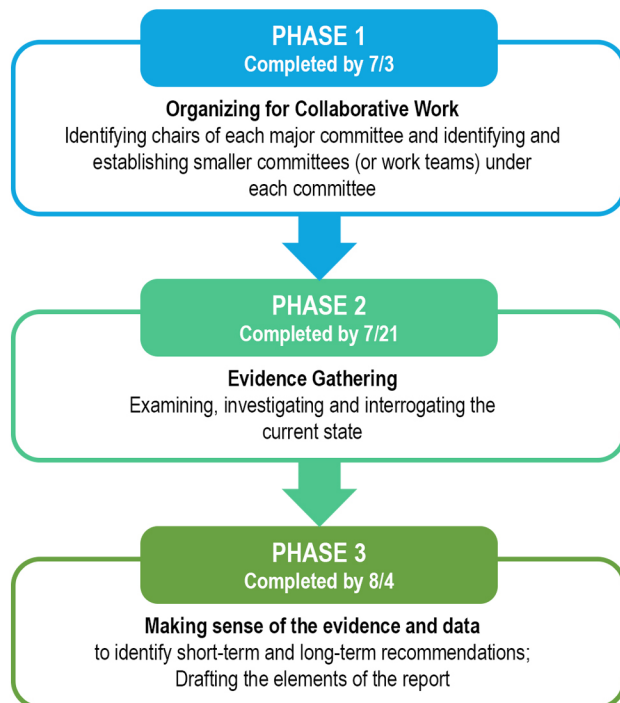


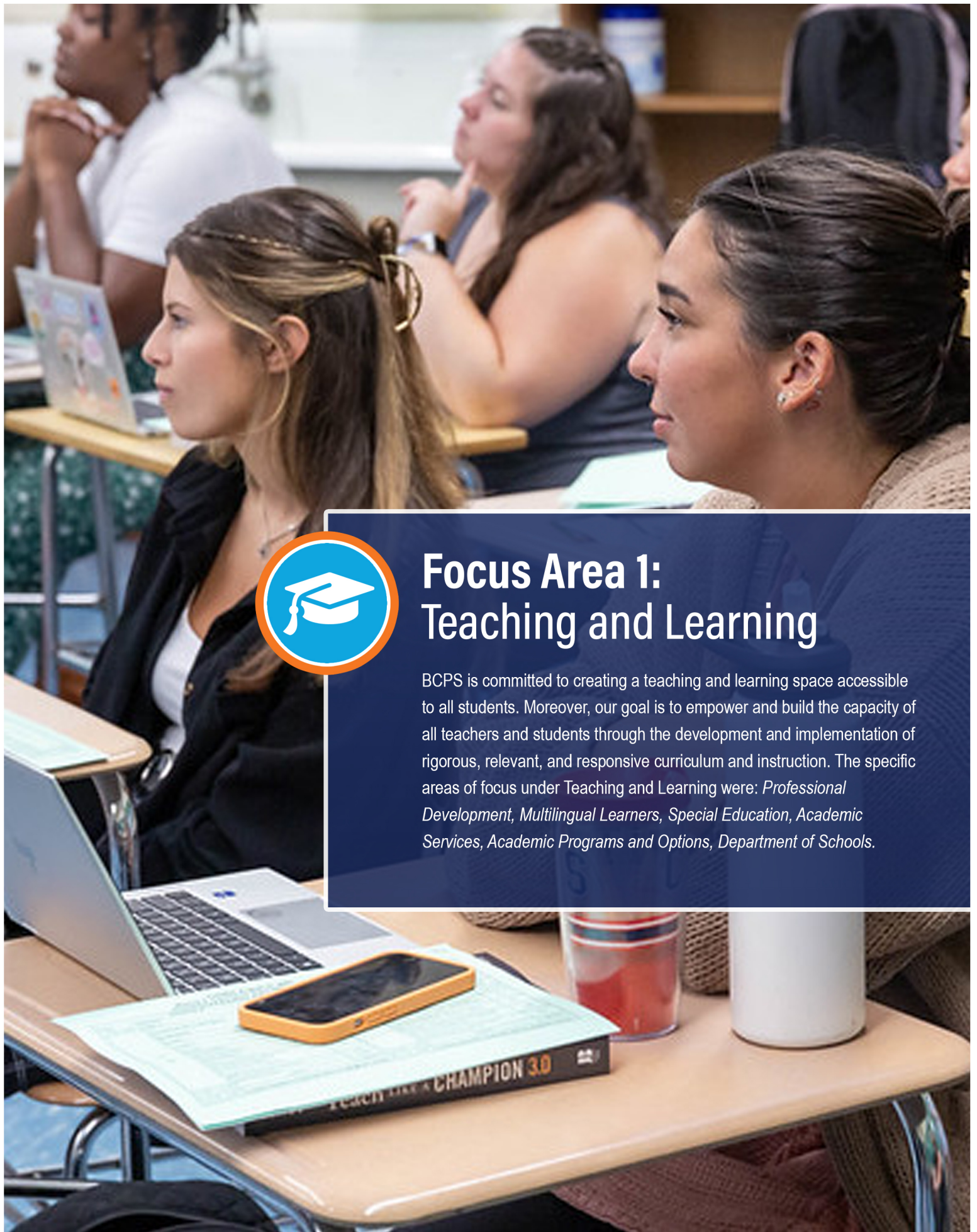
The Approach

Transition Team members conducted an examination of the current state of the system using five components and answering several essential questions. Moreover, leadership interviews and focus groups were held to ensure multiple voices including end-users were heard and incorporated. The focus areas were assessed through the following five components:

-  **Website and documents review**
-  **Contact information for stakeholders**
(how easily do stakeholders navigate the system for support)
-  **Performance indicators and data review**
-  **Leadership Interview(s)**
-  **Focus Group(s)**

Following the three phases described in the graphic below, the transition team developed the following report that includes their findings and strategic recommendations. The report was shared with the Team BCPS community in August 2023.





Focus Area 1: Teaching and Learning

BCPS is committed to creating a teaching and learning space accessible to all students. Moreover, our goal is to empower and build the capacity of all teachers and students through the development and implementation of rigorous, relevant, and responsive curriculum and instruction. The specific areas of focus under Teaching and Learning were: *Professional Development, Multilingual Learners, Special Education, Academic Services, Academic Programs and Options, Department of Schools.*



Focus Area 1: Teaching and Learning

Findings

- Misalignment of professional development or the need for additional professional development across employee groups.
- Performance metrics are mentioned often but are absent or inconsistently monitored and addressed across departments and divisions.
- Inequities in student experiences and access to academic programs exists (e.g., disproportionate suspension rates for Special Education students, underrepresentation of students of color in advanced academic courses and gifted and talented programming, magnet programs).
- Teacher retention rates, particularly for teachers of color, decline after a teacher's first year.
- Inconsistent coordination between and among departments causes gaps in opportunities for support in service to schools.

Recommendations

Short-term

- **Provide consistent professional development throughout the school year** focused on research-based areas of need with measurable outcomes in the following focus areas of Teaching and Learning: Alignment of BCPS theoretical practices and instructional strategies for teacher use, supporting the multilingual learner and increase cultural awareness in the general education setting, special education training to educators and administrators to support students with IEPs in the LRE, Educational options for students in BCPS.
- **Revisit, and where necessary, refine the retention plan to address the area of teacher recruitment* and retention specifically looking at why retention decreases significantly after year one.** Plan should continue to address recruitment strategies, collaboration with local universities and colleges, competitive compensation, examine exit surveys upon teacher separation, clear career paths and opportunities for growth, hiring of diverse teachers and support staff and be accessible and presented to the appropriate stakeholders.
- **Revisit and establish SMART goals that align with the Blueprint* (i.e. CCR/CTE/Magnets)** state and national accountability systems to measure progress and the effectiveness of teaching and learning in English, Math, Science and History. Progress should also indicate the closing of the achievement gap by student group and specific demographics to ensure equitable access to high quality instruction.

Long-term

- **Develop an ongoing plan to improve cultural proficiency and awareness** with metrics and key performance indicators that include system-wide opportunities for the engagement of multilingual families.
- **Create a more cohesive and streamlined approach for monitoring data collection** in order to better plan and align system improvement efforts. The Efficiency Report, The Compass, Stakeholder Survey, Office Progress Plans, etc. all provide BCPS with very useful data, however the document review indicates a need for follow up, tracking, and sufficient monitoring. This is required to ensure improvement and accountability across the school system.

*See Blueprint Pillar 2 - High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders; Pillar 3- Career and College Readiness; Pillar 4-More resources for students to be successful



Focus Area 2: Culture and Climate

BCPS is committed to working collaboratively with school leaders to promote a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment that yields academic excellence and well-rounded, emotionally confident students. Our goal is to ensure every school is a positive and welcoming environment for teaching and learning, while supporting the physical, social and emotional wellness of students, families, communities and staff. The specific areas of focus under Culture and Climate were: *Equity and Cultural Proficiency, Social Emotional Learning, Safety and Climate.*



Focus Area 2: Culture and Climate



Findings

- Not all BCPS students have a sense of belonging.
- Some teachers/families and students feel unsafe and that students are not held accountable.
- Disproportionality exists in some key areas, including diversity of teaching staff, suspension rates for all students, achievement rates for all students, and workload by school etc.
- There is a siloed approach to solving systemic problems around climate and culture.

Recommendations

Short-term

- **Create opportunities (e.g. listening sessions (internal and external), community meetings or town halls) convened by executive leadership** for more diverse stakeholder voices to be heard throughout the system.
- **Hold regular or quarterly meetings between school-based and central-office based staff** in a post-COVID environment to rebuild trust and relationships and foster collaboration.
- **Create system-wide safety supports and protocols to support schools and students** by identifying and unpacking the issues (fighting, assault, student mental health, etc.) that impact multiple schools (e.g. Leverage Health classes to educate and increase conflict resolution opportunities/training for students.).

Long-term

- **Examine current practices and adjust funds in the budget** accordingly to create system-wide programming to disrupt disproportionalities in suspension and achievement data.
- **Study and focus on staff mental health and well-being and consider mental health leave days**, specific individuals (e.g. ED's, Principals, etc.) can give staff access to (e.g. Employee Assistance and community mental health resources) quickly and directly align with requirements of the Blueprint.



Focus Area 3: Community Engagement and Communication

BCPS is committed to thoughtful and regular engagement with our students, families, the community, internal and external BCPS stakeholders. Our goal is to provide transparent and effective communication of our processes, challenges, accomplishments, and goals to all BCPS stakeholders on a daily basis. The specific areas of focus under Community Engagement and Communication were: Accessibility For All Stakeholders, Stakeholder Engagement and Enhanced Communications, Direct Outreach to Students, Central Office Collaboration, and Interagency Partnerships.



Focus Area 3: Community Engagement and Communication

Findings

- Communications questionnaire responses indicate a lack of geographic diversity in participation, which could reflect an accessibility issue.
- Given the ongoing changes among service providers and organizations, there's a consistent need to review, update, and refresh the resources and contacts within our community.
- Existing communication barriers hinder direct interactions between various levels of employees. Staff desire to provide candid information to central office.
- The change in student demographics has a direct impact on the services and programs BCPS must offer to meet the educational needs of the students. Between 2018 and 2022 there have been significant increases in both the number of students enrolled in the English Speakers of Other Languages Program (ESOL) program and those requiring special education services, communication translation needs for the school system are met through contractual services and a language line which creates barriers for families in need of immediate support and face-to-face interaction.

Recommendations

Short-term

- **Develop and hold professional learning experiences for all supervisors and managers** to address the current concern of inter/intrapersonal communication barriers to include how to communicate effectively across and between roles, departments and different stakeholder groups while **simultaneously engaging different stakeholder focus groups to analyze the root causes.**
- **Initiate a campaign** to enhance stakeholders' understanding of the current communication changes being implemented, how to access information, where to find information, how to navigate the BCPS website, - this should include details about the roles of the central office, how they directly support schools, students and families (particularly the underserved and homeless students and families with limited access to resources).
- **Set up system-wide expectations and standard operating procedures/ protocol** for efficient and suitable internal communications, particularly focusing on supporting schools and principals, and **establish uniform practices, channels, and expectations for schools** to distribute BCPS communications to communities, including via their websites and social media platforms.

Long-term

- **Increase staffing** in the Department of Communications and Community Outreach in response to the growing internal and external communication needs of the system, particularly for enhanced communications and community engagement with multilingual families.
- **Complete implementation and monitor** the effectiveness of the existing strategic communications plan and its five focus areas: Improve Accessibility for All Members of Team BCPS, Enhance Parent, Staff, and Community Engagement and Strengthen Communications, Expand Direct Outreach to Students, Enhance Central Office Collaboration, Cultivate Stronger Interagency Partnerships.

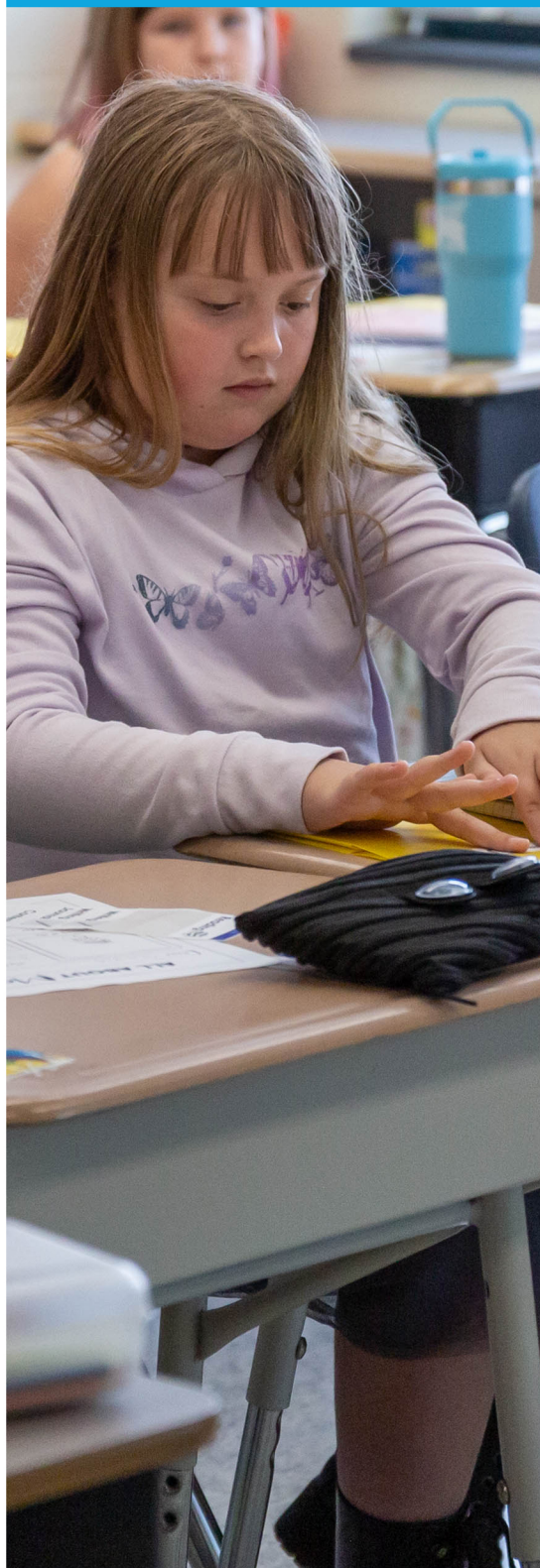


Focus Area 4: Infrastructure

BCPS is committed to fiscal responsibility and strategically leveraging funds to advance the goal of increasing student achievement. BCPS is intentional in attracting future employees, retaining current employees, and developing all employees. The specific areas of focus under Infrastructure are: Fiscal Services, Human Resources-Staffing and Recruitment, and Human Resources-Administration.



Focus Area 4: Infrastructure



Findings

- Antiquated systems have had a significant impact on operational effectiveness and efficiency.
- NBCT teachers increased in FY 20, 21, and 22, however the number of NBCT certified teachers was 66 in FY20, 116 in FY21, zero in FY22 and 116 in 2023.
- Retention figures decline annually with the most recent five-year retention figures as follows:
 - 1 year - 87.83 percent
 - 2 years - 80.53 percent
 - 3 years -76.25 percent
 - 4 years - 71.18 percent; and
 - 5 years- 66.9 percent
- BCPS is providing incentives to new special education teachers of a \$4,000 signing bonus at the completion of the first year of teaching.
- There are 53 recommendations in the efficiency report for the Human Resources divisions that should be addressed or updated as to progress.

Recommendations

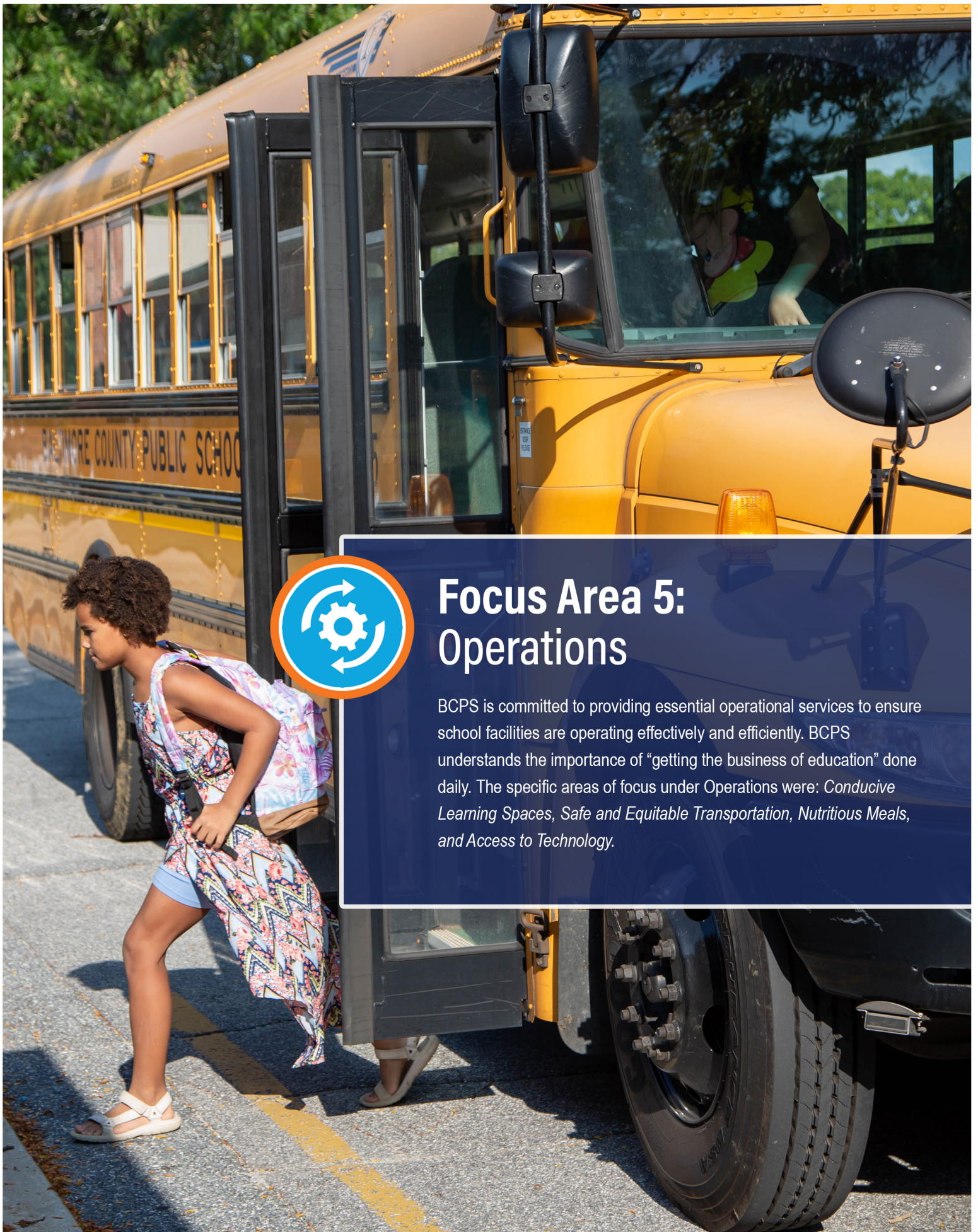
Short-term

- **Hire and train additional staff** to implement the new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system to support system automation and processes.
- **Publicize the Maryland Blueprint career ladder* and NBCT stipend** and increase the number of National Board Certified Teachers in low and high poverty schools and promote the BCPS benefits that are available to all employees.

Long-term

- **Research similar sized Maryland LEA's to benchmark** exemplary practices and models in Human Resources Administration and Compliance to inform improvements in current processes (e.g. risk management; leadership development and site-based administrator training; salary/classification studies; pay scale policies/practices).
- **Form cross-office teams to regularly review BCPS HR effectiveness** (including the new web-based forms for employees) to identify and implement next steps to address and continuously improve stakeholder satisfaction.

* See *Blueprint Pillar 2- High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders*



Focus Area 5: Operations

BCPS is committed to providing essential operational services to ensure school facilities are operating effectively and efficiently. BCPS understands the importance of “getting the business of education” done daily. The specific areas of focus under Operations were: *Conducive Learning Spaces, Safe and Equitable Transportation, Nutritious Meals, and Access to Technology.*



Focus Area 5: Operations

Findings

- Inadequate and outdated equipment is negatively impacting operations of school-based food service and nutrition teams.
- Improvements in communication to all BCPS stakeholders is needed e.g., dashboards are needed to track key performance indicators, quarterly meetings with leadership for different focus groups on system initiatives.
- Improvements in communication to all BCPS stakeholders is needed. For example, dashboards are needed to track key performance indicators and quarterly meetings with leadership for different focus groups on system initiatives should be held.
- Collecting, monitoring and analyzing data regularly to ensure all the systems and technology that support operations is inconsistent or not evident.
- BCPS identified resources to help fill gaps that improved bus safety.

Recommendations

Short-term

- **Provide professional development and training** to teachers and staff centered on the effective use of student accessible technology (e.g., Chromebooks, Google applications, Schoology).
- **Assign appropriate support staff in offices** and provide adequate time and attention to verify the imported data for the new enterprise resource planning (ERP) and time reporting systems.
- **Collaborate with Baltimore County Government** to implement the Stop Arm Cameras on the outside of each bus to ensure safety of students while loading and unloading.

Long-term

- **Create a comprehensive plan** to identify timeframes, costs, resources, and processes in which food service and nutrition program equipment improvements will be executed.



Overarching Themes

During the 3-week period the Transition Team convened, there were several broad or overarching themes that became apparent across the BCPS community. The transition team offers the following themes for consideration as a means to develop additional short- and long-term recommendations in the near future.

- **Document and Strategy Coherence** - Reviewing and consolidating key documents and plans that guide the strategic efforts of BCPS. Ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the system's overarching strategy for improvement.
- **Culture of Communication and Inclusion** - Strengthening internal and external communication to help rebuild trust and ensure all stakeholders feel connected to the system.
- **Safety** - Establishing clear expectations, consistent responses and shared accountability that will help protect and preserve safe learning environments.
- **Data Diagnosis** - Consistently tracking and analyzing metrics and data.
- **Root Cause Analysis** - Replicating the process used for the transition team to unearth some of the most pressing challenges in BCPS.





Limitations of the Transition Team Report

The Transition Team was established, organized, and implemented to conduct a review of the current state of BCPS with a very specific focus and in five specific areas over the course of three weeks. Moreover, the team conducted this examination over the summer, where schedules did not always afford us the opportunity to meet. The team also acknowledges that while a very intentional approach to conduct the landscape analysis was taken, interview questions and focus group questions were specific to the concerns of the sub-committees. It is important to also recognize that the recommendations presented were presented with the understanding that this was not an official research study but an extensive, not exhaustive, review of the current state of BCPS.





Conclusion

The Transition Team has identified actions for the school system to take in the immediate future based on this examination. Moreover, this Transition Team process can be replicated and repeated over the next several years with different stakeholder groups, areas of focus and transition team members as part of a continuous improvement strategy. Lastly, the transition team members communicated that this experience not only helped them examine current strengths and opportunities for the system but helped them learn more as stakeholders vested in the success of the system. After going through this experience, members have an elevated understanding of the complexity of the system's work to ensure every student receives a world class public education that prepares them to graduate ready for college, military training, careers, and life. While much needs to be accomplished, BCPS has the talent and dedication of many staff members who are committed to providing the necessary support from preschool through high school that will deliver on this promise and move the system forward.



BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

6901 N. Charles St. | Towson, MD 21204

443.809.4554

www.bcps.org