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Executive Summary

St. Mary's County Public Schools

I. Introduction

The last several years have provided us an opportunity to prepare our students and staff for the high expectations of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. With assessment systems in place, we now look toward a balanced accountability system that includes both the measures of achievement associated with PARCC with measures of student achievement and school quality indicators as well.

Our work this year is focused on two key elements that align with Maryland's accountability plan and our focus on the whole child. Balanced between student achievement and culture/climate, we remain consistent with our mission and commitments to our students, staff, and stakeholders.

Our mission statement's words are never truer:

Know the learner and the learning,
expecting excellence from both.

Accept no excuses, educating all with
rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships.

Work is focused on our support for students social, emotional, and academic growth. To this end, SMCPS has embraced the tenets of ASCD's Whole Child Initiative. Specifically, we are asking questions about how students feel safe, engaged, supported, challenged and healthy.

- Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
- Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
- Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.
- Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.

These tenets align with our two umbrella goals associated with our accountability measures: Academics and Climate/Culture. For students to succeed, they must feel safe and supported, they must be challenged and engaged, and we need to support their physical and mental health. With this in mind, key initiatives for SMCPS align with these areas.

The Goals and Objectives section of the Master Plan details the progress of students as is measured by one component of the accountability framework, i.e., how students performed on PARCC. In the 2018 administration of PARCC, SMCPS students outperformed state average for all grade levels and content areas. However, amongst that performance, there were areas where the AMO was not met, and gaps in performance were persistent for some student groups.

Addressing Achievement Gaps

Our work puts our students first, with a focus on equity, achievement, and the whole child. We recognize that student achievement does not simply come from academic support alone. As is reflected in the Maryland accountability model, we too recognize the importance of both academic achievement and school quality indicators. To that end, we have aligned school improvement to reflect these same elements.

Aligning to the Maryland State Department of Education’s vision to prepare all students for college and career, our goals, initiatives, and strategies consider all subgroups and specialized populations as we promote academic excellence. Persistent performance gaps are analyzed and addressed routinely for the system, for each school, and for each individual student. We have a variety of initiatives focused on teaching and learning to address these gaps. Specifically, we have identified a significant gap with all measurable data points (achievement, discipline, and attendance) between our economically disadvantaged students, minority students, special needs students, English Language Learners, and the rest of our population. SMCPS has experienced an increase in the number of students receiving free and reduced meals. The achievement gaps for our students living in poverty are persistent.

We have dedicated our professional development and our initiatives throughout the year to address these needs. Specifically, we have designed professional development around the two key focus areas:

- Academic Achievement
- Culture and Climate

At the school level, principals work with their staff to develop a professional development plan consistent with these areas. Systemic initiatives include:

Academic Achievement

- Using assessments for student learning
- Implementing formative assessment throughout the instructional process
- Monitoring interventions for consistency and effectiveness

Culture and Climate

- Implementing Multi-tiered Systems of Support or a PBIS model
- Implement Restorative Practices and the Responsive Classroom
- Providing for the RTI Process for monitoring interventions

Understanding and intervening for our students who face challenges is our priority. This envelops our work across all areas, recognizing the impact chronic and acute stress has for our students on learning as well as behavior and that student attendance is critical to their school success.

The strategies articulated in the Goals and Objectives section of the Master Plan detail a rationale for each. The explanation of these strategies communicate the consistent approach to instruction, intervention, and support for students who are underperforming in the assessed areas.

Academic Achievement

SMCPS continues to institutionalize the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards/Common Core State Standards and with the implementation of these rigorous education standards, we established a set of shared goals and expectations for what students should understand and be able to do in grades K-12 in order to be prepared for success in college and the workplace. Throughout the year, our students are asked to demonstrate independence and perseverance, construct arguments, comprehend, critique, and support with evidence, and use resources, strategies, and tools to demonstrate strong content knowledge. We moved to deeper and richer lessons, replete with informational texts, analytical writing, and trans-disciplinary project based learning, all of which we fundamentally know will end with our graduates more prepared than ever to face the challenges of a 21st century post-secondary landscape.

The learning outcomes for our students places emphasis on higher levels of thinking, reasoning, modeling, written expression, and conventions of language. To that end curriculum expectations continue to focus on increasing the rigor and depth of assignments and the inclusion of writing in response to text across all curriculum areas. This focus emphasizes analytical and higher-level thinking and comprehension.

Furthermore, formative assessments used to drive targeted instruction will continue to be a focus in St. Mary's County Public Schools and will provide continuous measures of standard attainment as students move through the curriculum. Teacher teams are involved in ongoing professional development to lead the design of resources and providing professional development that centers on the shifts of the MCCRS as well as how to develop, analyze and then use Formative Assessments to plan and deliver their daily instruction.

Assessments for Learning

SMCPS has developed a balanced assessment plan to help guide teaching and learning. Through the use of formative and performance assessments, students can demonstrate their learning on an ongoing basis. Formative content assessment data helps to identify where students are and informs the design of instructional supports, interventions, or extensions based on where students need them most. Performance assessments across content areas are designed to offer students opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge of the curriculum. The assessments vary from content to content based on each one's standards and instruction.

Another key element in the SMCPS assessment plan is flexibility. While some county assessments are required to ensure consistency of expectations, others are offered as instructional resources for teachers to integrate as appropriate to meet the needs of their students and accommodate the schedule within which they are working. Therefore, testing windows are offered rather than rigid dates for giving an assessment. Another element of flexibility is offering the assessments through different means. Some are provided through a traditional paper/pencil administration, while others utilize an interactive online platform designed to mirror the PARCC assessment platform. Beyond those

approaches, some performance assessments allow endless possibilities of how students can demonstrate their learning (e.g., through presentation, multi-media, etc.).

The purpose of assessment is to measure students' proficiency and learning in order to make instructional decisions. In that sense, assessment is a tool in the teacher's toolbox. Used appropriately, this tool is one of many used to design and build an (architectural masterpiece of learning). SMCPs also utilizes the Performance Matters/UNIFY data warehouse so that leadership and teachers alike can analyze all aspects of the assessments that students are given in order to provide focused individualized feedback and instruction. Active, problem-based learning, and critical thinking are key elements that guide the work in designing the blueprints for each class and its daily instruction.

Using Formative Assessments to Drive Instructional Decision Making

In reviewing assessment data, SMCPs leadership has employed the professional development model of collaborative and peer support to review data and allow for differentiated, individually guided professional dialogue for each school team. System leaders utilized the aggregated and disaggregated PARCC English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics data to analyze trends in both System and School PARCC performance through the dual lens of proficiency and growth, respectively. Coupled with our local formative assessments, the system was able to help schools truly analyze student performance. This ongoing professional learning and collaboration continues throughout the year with a focus on trends with respect to each school's and the overall system's content and classroom performance.

Periodic review of data, especially disaggregated data from county level and standardized assessments to make instructional and intervention decisions. The use of Unify (formerly Performance Matters) as a tool for both formative and summative assessments, which allows for the instantaneous review of student proficiency as it relates to learning objectives.

Cross-departmental Collaboration

Purposeful and planned collaboration between the Office of Assessment and Accountability, Special Education and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction have taken place over the past two years to ensure a comprehensive aligned assessments plan that meets the needs of all learners while providing data needed to inform system practices while meeting students' individual needs.

An example of this collaboration is the use of the Goalbook Toolkit, which guides educators working with specialized student populations to varying the levels of instructional support. Goalbook Pathways combines research-based resources, strategies, and training so that educators can design multiple pathways for ALL students to succeed.

Curriculum Alignment

Our work has focused on aligning curriculum, both in terms of matching the rigor of the instruction to the standards, and in the overarching vertical alignment across grade levels. This has helped us to identify gaps of knowledge, skills, and proficiency in order to back-map our instruction.

To ensure alignment, SMCPS has invested in new textbooks and resources across all levels of English/Language Arts and Mathematics. Further, we have provided support and professional development in Universal Designs for Learning. These two companion pieces have helped to align with MCCRS; provide students with activities that allow them to demonstrate various levels of rigor; and embed supports and resources for our special education, ELL and struggling students.

Monitoring Interventions and Providing Support

In working to eliminate achievement gaps for students who are underperforming, we have employed targeted instructional interventions aimed at specific content and skill gaps. School teams identify the appropriate intervention and use progress monitoring to assess a student's academic performance that examines the student's rate of improvement (i.e., responsiveness to instruction), through which we evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Of special attention in progress monitoring is the focus on the fidelity of implementation. This includes the selection of evidence-based tools with consideration for cultural/linguistic responsiveness and recognition of student strengths.

Interventions begin with setting the target by using a variety of data to include specific performance data from both lagging and leading data, as well as classroom observation and formative assessments. Through collaborative analysis of this data, teacher teams identify the target population for interventions and create action plans, data findings, and focus skill calendars. Through this process, teams develop individual lesson plans and utilize leading data to drive instruction and monitor progress. Progress monitoring includes a deeper dive into the data to review, reassess, and reteach skills. Ultimately this is a recursive and ongoing process as these teams discuss new outcomes and makes necessary changes to the next iteration of the intervention.

Further, our collective efforts revolve around the process of Response to Intervention (RTI). This multi-tier approach, helps with early identification and support of students with both learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. This year's focus will be on pre-referral data and be putting intervention data into our Unify/Performance Matters data warehouse.

Systemic Approaches to Literacy

We have procured two grants in the past year to help us better achieve our Literacy and Universal Screening goals-- Striving Readers Grant and the MSDE grant partnership with NCIL (National Council on Improving Literacy).

Additionally, specific support for individual needs has been an ongoing focus. To this end, additional training and certification is provided in the Wilson Reading System to address word-level deficits and intensive and structured literacy instruction due to a language-based learning disability, such as dyslexia.

As a key component of our literacy initiative, literacy coaches and resource teachers have been deployed to provide site-specific intervention support and professional development

Standards Based Instruction and Feedback

Coupled with formative assessment is the ongoing feedback to students and their parent/guardians about how well they are doing relative to the learning standards. At the elementary school level, we continue our work in transitioning to a standards-based report card to provide students and families with feedback specific to student progress on the MCCR standards. Students in gr. Pre-K through 3 receive a standards based report card. The standards-based report card articulates student progress toward mastery of the identified MCCR standards for the grade level. Through this process, parents, students and teachers will more clearly understand what is expected, and parents and teachers are better able to work together to guide students, helping them to be successful. Families have been provided with a great deal of [information](#) to support their understanding of their child's progress.

Graduation Rate

Demonstrating our preparedness for students to be college and career ready has led to remarkable achievements in our graduation rate. The four-year cohort graduation rate continued to climb this past year, **93.9 percent** of the class of 2017. The new rate represents a continued increase over five years. At the same time, the four-year cohort dropout rate fell from 10.98 percent in 2010 to 3.67 percent in 2017. Both measures outpace the Maryland State Average.

Dual Enrollment

We continue to partner with the College of Southern Maryland (CSM), as well as other partner institutions to help our students to be College and Career Ready. This focus has resulted in the expansion of dual enrollment courses both on and off campus for our students. During the 2017-2018 school year, 281 students across our three high schools enrolled in courses off campus at CSM for credit, and 1070 students enrolled in courses at SMCPs high schools that were eligible for CSM dual enrollment credit. For the 2018-2019 school year, we have seen these numbers increase to 435 enrolled on the CSM campus, and 1106 in eligible courses at SMCPs high schools. These courses include Finite Math, Calculus, Human Anatomy, and College Prep English. In addition, over 25 courses at the Dr. James A. Forrest Career and Technology Center have articulated credit agreements with seven (7) colleges and institutes of higher education.

Virtual Learning and Recovery

St. Mary's County Public Schools continues in its partnership with America's Promise Alliance and Apex Learning® to provide comprehensive digital curriculum to students at all of our high schools. This three-year partnership has resulted in the implementation of programs for remediation, credit recovery, unit recovery, supplemental courses, Advanced Placement, and summer school. The program at each of our high schools includes a dedicated teacher running a resource room each period of the day, where students can complete work, receive tutoring, and monitor their graduation plan.

Professional Development

Individualized Professional Development: Professional learning opportunities provided at both the system level and school house level to help staff attain system goals and meet individualized goals and needs. All professional development centers around our two system goals of achievement and culture/climate.

Culture and Climate

- Implementing Multi-tiered Systems of Support or a PBIS model
- Implement Restorative Practices and the Responsive Classroom
- Providing for the RTI Process for monitoring interventions

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

The Code of Conduct for St. Mary's County Public Schools is designed to reflect a discipline philosophy based on the goals of fostering, teaching, and acknowledging positive behavior. Additionally, we recognize the critical need to keep students connected to school so that they may graduate college and career ready. To this end, we have reviewed our discipline practices to coincide with the statewide guidance on discipline, emphasizing the effort to provide intervention and positive reinforcement through a multi-tier system of supports

Numerous Tier 2 interventions have been implemented this year to assist with challenging behaviors in an effort to not rely on out-of-school suspensions. Interventions include *Zones of Regulation*, *Check and Connect*, *Check In Check Out*, mentoring, and morning meetings. *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect* are the primary curricula used for teaching social and emotional learning. Fourteen schools are actively involved with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

Restorative Practices

SMCPS has partnered with the Education Association of St. Mary's County (EASMC) and the National Education Association (NEA) organization to provide professional development for staff in restorative practices. Each secondary school is working to develop a plan based on an understanding of the restorative practices model and addressing student behaviors in proactive ways. At the elementary level, schools have taken on the Responsive Classroom model, which builds upon this same premise of relationships, clear expectations, and a proactive approach.

The Student Conduct Committee meets this year to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Code of Conduct, recommend revisions for policies, and recommend interventions to assist schools to move forward, as well as reduce disproportionality. Ongoing data analysis occurs at each meeting. The committee includes the superintendent, deputy superintendent, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members.

Specific components are differentiated for grade levels across the system:

- Frog Street Curriculum: A comprehensive, research-based program that integrates instruction across developmental domains and early learning disciplines.
- Responsive Classrooms: An evidence-based approach that focuses on the strong relationship between academic success and social-emotional learning.
- Conscious Discipline: Social Emotional Learning beginning in ECE classrooms and transitioning into several Title I schools. Companion programming with Special Education and the local ECE partnership groups.
- Restorative Practices: A framework for building community and for responding to challenging behavior through authentic dialogue, coming to understanding, and making things right.
- Capturing Kids' Hearts: A research-based process to improve the five key indicators of school performance: fewer discipline referrals, improved attendance, higher student achievement, lower dropout rates, and higher teacher satisfaction.
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (MTSS/PBIS): A framework to provide targeted support to struggling students. It focuses on the "whole child." MTSS supports behavior, social and emotional needs as well as academic growth and achievement. MTSS is comprised of 3 tiers with increasing levels of targeted support for those who are struggling. Integrated plans that address students' academic, behavioral, social and emotional needs are implemented using evidence-based strategies. Frequent monitoring of students' progress provides educators with useful data to help decide if changes to the student's plan is required.

RTI Processes for Monitoring Interventions

As a county, SMCPS has piloted the RTI/MTSS Report in our data warehouse known as UNIFY. The RTI/MTSS Report provides the appropriate flexibility and latitude for interventionists to set up, organize, and document a particular intervention (i.e., academic or behavioral) within the UNIFY platform. Specifically, the RTI/MTSS Report is organized to provide reports on the types of interventions and the extent to which the intervention is occurring for each student. School teams can then use this information to compare to formative assessments and progress monitoring tools to determine the effectiveness of the interventions and supports.

Fulfilling our Commitments

St. Mary's County Public Schools has made a commitment to our students, staff, schools, and stakeholders. Our commitment is our mission: Know the learner and the learning, expecting excellence in both - Accepting no excuses, educating ALL with rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships. These just aren't words, they are beliefs that drive our work. They are the very purpose to which we dedicate ourselves each day. As we embark on the 2016-2017 school year - and beyond - we commit to providing our students with opportunities and supports to prepare for the world beyond the walls of our classrooms. They are the reasons for our work. Our Students. Our Future.

