WCPS | Washington County Public Schools

BLUEPRINT

for our students' future

2024

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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Systemwide Blueprint Implementation Response

District's Strategic Alignment to Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) is committed to the transformation outlined in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint). The WCPS vision, goals, strategic plan, and system-level initiatives are strategically aligned with the Blueprint to ensure equitable education and opportunities for all students while closing achievement gaps.

The Blueprint priorities serve as foundational pillars guiding district-wide initiatives. WCPS is in the process of crafting a new district-wide strategic plan, with the Blueprint serving as the cornerstone of the plan. WCPS will create a district vision that aligns seamlessly with the transformative goals outlined in the Blueprint. The district-wide plan will be designed to ensure cohesive and comprehensive strategies to ensure a world-class education for all students.

The Blueprint pillars and expected outcomes are systematically integrated into current WCPS operational plans, including the WCPS Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plans, which outline a unified approach to improving education outcomes for all students across the district. WCPS has leveraged the priorities of Blueprint as priorities of all work across the district. For example, departmental teams, and school plans are focused on closing achievement gaps and ensuring high quality support for all WCPS students using the desired outcomes as Blueprint as the overarching framework.

For the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS is focused on improvement areas and programming directly aligned to all Blueprint priorities, with particular foci within the areas of Early Childhood Education (*Pillar 1*), high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders (*Pillar 2*), college and career readiness (*Pillar 3*), and providing the necessary resources to students to close the achievement gap (*Pillar 4*). The following are examples of the cross-pillar intersection between district programming and Blueprint outcomes:

Early Childhood Education (*Pillar 1*)
The Blueprint envisions all students entering kindergarten ready to learn, including developmentally, physically, and socially/emotionally ready. WCPS has prioritized this work by offering Universal PreK, including transportation, for all 4-year-old students regardless of income. WCPS partners with community organizations to offer before and after school daycare in some elementary schools. Additionally, WCPS is partnering with private providers to expand access to PreK, with a focus on preparation for the expansion of PreK for 3-year-olds. WCPS is working on increasing the number of certified PreK paraprofessionals (*Pillar 2*).

In the 2024-2025 school year, WCPS will begin to add literacy and math supplemental teachers and tutors in PreK classrooms to support students with gaps in their early literacy and numeracy skills. This initiative is aimed at closing achievement gaps at an early age and is in direct correlation with the vision of the Interim Maryland State Superintendent, who advocates for early interventions. Dr. Wright has shared that College and Career Readiness begins in PreK and, therefore, must be addressed at the onset of the identification of a child's educational needs.

WCPS is providing more robust training and development opportunities for staff members who work with the district's youngest students and is "operationalizing structures and supports" that help families access and enroll their children in our PreK programs. WCPS facilitates collaboration between the Birth to K department, Judy Center, Community Schools, and the International Welcome Center, which has increased the ability to support the youngest learners across the district who would benefit most from early childhood education (*Pillar 4*).

High-quality, Diverse Teachers & Leaders (*Pillar 2*)
WCPS has continued to develop plans to ensure the employment of high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders serving students. The WCPS Human Resources team is in the process of developing a strategic plan with concrete goals to "engage, inspire, hire, and develop a diverse workforce that passionately supports each student's success." The team is working to make this vision possible through initiatives such as "grow your own" student-to-teacher certification programs, reimagining benefits to make our district competitive and compelling for all, and developing a clear narrative and engagement campaign to attract new, diverse educators.

WCPS has launched a number of Action Planning teams charged with increasing the pipeline of high-quality, diverse staff as well as differentiated retention. The team is honing processes that support the recruitment, onboarding, training, and experiences of WCPS educators and paying particular attention to the culture of inclusion that will ensure diverse staff and applicants are welcomed and connected. The WCPS team acknowledges that hiring and staffing supports are critical to the success of all schools in meeting the needs of all students. For example, through intentional staffing and recruitment efforts, WCPS is "on track" to hire forty (40) new English language teachers within two academic years (*Pillar 4*).

WCPS has established a cross-pillar Action Planning Team to engage in the work of identifying and improving the new teacher lifecycle. The team is strategically planning and evaluating middle school and high school student exposure (*CTE, Pillar 3*), developing partnerships with Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) and others to provide degrees or certifications for those not yet qualified, and working on the extension of the WCPS new teacher induction program to support novice teacher development across academic programs (*Pillar 1, 3 - 4*), and to overcome challenges with teacher participation in National Board Certification.

WCPS also recognizes the need to hire and retain leaders. WCPS acknowledges that leaders must be developed and the value in growing leaders internally. While WCPS has had to cut the administrative interns from the budget for the 2024-2025 school year, those positions will continue to be a priority for future funding. WCPS also recognizes the need to grow non-building-based leaders, including curricular leaders and mentor teachers.

Academic Outcomes & College-Career Readiness (*Pillars 3 and 4*)
WCPS has been consistently focused on providing a high-quality education that ensures academic achievement for all students. Structures are in place to support the transition to post-secondary success. In an effort to continue to enhance programming and the success of students, WCPS is currently focused on two key goals: 1) improve Literacy and math outcomes for all students to ensure they are college and career ready (CCR) by the end of 10th grade, and 2) prioritize school climate and culture improvement across all schools in the district. These goals align with the WCPS Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. It is critical to create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued, respected, and supported for us to excel academically. WCPS continues to work to address chronic absenteeism in an effort to increase instructional time and see the academic gains of each and every student.

WCPS has strengthened the work and expectations to empower teachers to implement fully aligned and evidence-based Reading and Math curricula and instructional practices across all grades. Additionally, WCPS has continued to strengthen math and literacy interventions and supports available to students who are "not on track" to be college and career ready. In the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS began a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to implement intervention plans and monitoring of students. Disaggregated subgroup data reflects performance gaps and disproportionality, which has resulted in

WCPS reprioritizing investments in differentiated resources, supplemental instruction, new curriculum, and other research-based strategies to ensure that ALL students are learning.

WCPS invested in the implementation and consistent usage of MTSS to close gaps and strategically ensure all students receive interventions matched to their unique learning needs. The WCPS Special Education team is working on an extensive strategic plan focused on the vision to "recognize the uniqueness of every learner to create proficient readers, writers, and thinkers who achieve their life and career goals." With a goal to consistently implement services, the team is focusing on designing a staffing model and vision for service delivery, as well as codifying processes with ongoing coaching and differentiated professional development to increase implementation fidelity and consistency across all schools and classrooms. WCPS staff are working collaboratively to increase investments to address mental health and behavior supports while expanding ownership of the whole child by the whole school (or district). This collaborative effort will ensure that students who need the most support receive it and that staff shift from a focus on compliance to a focus on progress monitoring and consistent maximization of current resources and programs.

WCPS is also focused on providing students with post-CCR pathways to earn early college credits, industry-recognized career technology education credentials, and real-world, hands-on learning experiences. The WCPS counseling department has increased career exploration through Naviance lessons that explore interests, strengths, and career options; expanded dual enrollment offerings, provided college exposure and preparatory programming, created partnerships with workforce recruiters, and has offered opportunities for students to attend career fairs. WCPS continues to prioritize Career & Technical Education (CTE) pathways and enrollment each year through strong partnerships aligned with local industry/workforce needs and student interests.

Cross-Pillar Collaboration Comes Naturally

WCPS recognizes the interconnectedness of the pillars within Blueprint and has integrated them into the overarching vision and cross-functional approach to achieving system priorities. Collaboration is one of the strengths of the district, and cross-functional work comes naturally. Although each of the strategies outlined above will advance student outcomes in isolation, intentional collaboration across pillars or departments, combined with the alignment to Blueprint, will intensify the impact WCPS staff have on student outcomes. WCPS departments naturally collaborate and support teams to delve deeper into initiatives to better meet the goals of Blueprint by making ongoing improvements to ensure every student has access to the resources and support needed to succeed. WCPS has passionate leaders and staff committed to the success of our district and each other. Staff work to regularly create opportunities to collectively review data, problem solve, and identify new opportunities and solutions.

Systemic Changes within WCPS

Over the last few years, WCPS has worked diligently to balance the development and execution of Blueprint plans while onboarding a new Superintendent and navigating the challenges of the pandemic. In 2024, systems will be in place to ensure that the District develops the capacity to engage in short- and long-term planning, regular data analysis, goal setting and monitoring, action planning, and stakeholder engagement. These strategic priorities sometimes result in competing interests with the day-to-day needs of running the District, meeting the immediate needs of students, families, and staff, and advocating for additional resources and support necessary to be successful.

Responding to Students in Crisis

One of the needed shifts across the district (and in education more broadly) has been to address the root causes of many of the challenges in schools and classrooms. WCPS continues to work to identify and support students (and families and staff) in crisis. The increase in the number of students, staff, and

stakeholders struggling with stress, resiliency, self-regulation, and mental health challenges impacts the day-to-day operations of schools and the ability of students to engage in learning in classrooms.

Several departments and teams have explored and developed opportunities to provide ongoing support. WCPS has priority action teams continually working to address systemic challenges such as strengthening mental health supports, increasing access to mental health supports, building positive school climate and culture across the district, developing Community Schools or wrap-around programs, building a strong workforce to support a thriving community, and strengthening community relationships to support programming. In 2022, WCPS had two board-certified behavior analysts (BCBA). Currently, WCPS has 14 BCBAs due to the increased number of students who require additional support. BCBAs work with WCPS staff to develop behavior intervention plans, conduct assessments, and provide recommendations for behavior change. In addition, WCPS has secured additional grant funding to support mental health counseling for students during the school day. WCPS also provides professional learning to staff on supporting students who have experienced trauma.

Creating Space for Innovation

WCPS has created intentional structures that empower staff to be forward-looking while continuing to be responsive to day-to-day needs. For example, the Human Resources (HR) and Special Education teams created weekly planning and implementation sessions. The teams work to refine the vision for success, problem solve, collaborate, implement, receive feedback, and share updates across stakeholders and teams.

Within HR, the weekly meetings rotate across recruitment, hiring processes, diversity in hiring, a culture of inclusion, as well as teacher preparation and licensure to ensure space to innovate outside the day-to-day operations. Efforts to increase staff retention, develop a strong culture of inclusion, and create certification and preparation programs that satisfy the hiring needs of the district will take time. Creating the space and process to invest the time has been, and will continue to be, pivotal. WCPS must prioritize the work sustainably to perpetuate the needed shifts to attract and retain high-quality, diverse teachers and leaders.

The WCPS Special Education department meetings rotate across topics like intervention and instruction, service delivery, staffing model, process development and accountability, MTSS & progress monitoring, and professional development and coaching. By creating consistent structures, these teams typically pulled to complete compliance activities or triage urgent needs, now also have the space to push to the future and improve education for all students with disabilities.

In all middle and high schools, teachers have dedicated time weekly for job-embedded professional learning and collaboration. In job-embedded professional development (PD), teachers are given opportunities to learn new skills and strategies and to collaborate with their colleagues to improve their practice. Job-embedded PD is delivered in various ways, such as through coaching, mentoring, workshops, and peer observations. These opportunities are designed to be relevant to the teachers' specific roles and needs and to be integrated into their daily work. Collaborative planning time is also important for secondary teachers. This time allows teachers to work together to plan lessons and units, align assessments, and develop strategies to support struggling students. During this time, teachers can share ideas, discuss best practices, and problem-solve together. This collaboration can lead to more effective instruction, improved student performance, and a greater sense of community among teachers. WCPS is piloting a new elementary schedule at two schools that includes time for teachers to have embedded professional learning and collaboration opportunities.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support & Supplemental Instruction

The WCPS Division of Curriculum and Instruction team has engaged in cross-functional work to create

and support MTSS plans that identify and target students who are not yet "on track" to being college and career ready. WCPS has restructured the master scheduling process at the middle and high school levels. All elementary and middle school students have at least 90 minutes daily for English language arts and mathematics. This includes time to ensure that teachers are able to provide supplemental instruction – necessary to execute more robust and intentional MTSS processes for students not on track to be college and career ready. WCPS has re-assessed curricular and instructional supports to make adjustments in programs that have not historically garnered high results.

Another example of systemic change is the WCPS elementary curriculum and instruction team has developed cycles of monthly, school-based data analysis and resolution sessions that include leaders from the school, curriculum team, special education, early childhood, multilingual department, and others to ensure that each school understands where they have potential gaps and have a plan on how to address the gaps moving forward.

Budgeting & Funding Allocations

In addition to changes around collaborative structures, WCPS has made changes to the budgeting and resource allocation process. WCPS has changed its budgeting process from primarily centralized to prioritizing allocations so the budget can be tracked to the student level. This change ensures that WCPS is able to develop budgets that are aligned to specific school needs and context. Additionally, for centralized purchases made for economies of scale, WCPS is able to track the amount of funding at the student level. Furthermore, as part of its commitment to transparency and accountability, WCPS has implemented a comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluating the use of funds. This system includes regular reporting and analysis of financial data, as well as ongoing feedback from stakeholders. This allows WCPS to identify areas where additional resources may be needed, as well as areas where resources may be underutilized. By continually monitoring and evaluating its funding allocations, WCPS is able to ensure that resources are being used effectively and efficiently to support student learning and achievement. An example of this commitment is the recent addition of 25 supplemental teachers to four middle schools and one high school. These four schools had lower student achievement results in math and literacy as measured by MCAP assessments. The additional teachers are engaging in high dosage tier 2 interventions to increase the number of students performing on grade level.

Greatest Challenges across WCPS

WCPS has identified the top three (3) current challenges with our ability to successfully implement Blueprint: (1) funding, (2) staffing, and (3) academics/instruction.

Funding and Resources Allocation:

WCPS has been very intentional about changes to both the funding process and allocations for staff, programs, and student supports, particularly as a result of the cessation of COVID-19 relief funding, which has resulted in increased financial constraints. The necessity of changes to budgeting has been particularly challenging in terms of staffing, especially those designated to support learning recovery from the pandemic (like high-impact tutoring). Although the funding is decreasing, achievement gaps are not. All levels of government must be intentional and collaborative on how to support schools through the "COVID funding cliff."

In addition, in spite of changes to the budgeting process and diligent cost-cutting measures at the district and school levels, additional financial support and funding are needed in order to meet the goals of the Blueprint and the evolving needs of staff and students. Resources earmarked for schools at their current allocation levels (local, state, and federal) will not support the current or ongoing strategies needed to be successful in the post-pandemic environment. Exacerbated by our local funding context, WCPS will not be able to maintain services at pre-pandemic levels, made especially more difficult by the impact of

inflation on prices for goods and services and employee compensation.

Pre-pandemic funding is not sufficient to make the investments that Blueprint success will require. WCPS will need consistent, long-term funding to be able to develop and fund our career ladder and pay scales to incentivize teachers and remain competitive in the market. WCPS needs additional funding to be able to attract new candidates into the career of teaching so that we can fill vacancies in every classroom and pivot to a model where staff have release time for collaboration, co-planning, and supporting each other. WCPS needs additional funding to provide ongoing 1:1 or small group tutoring for those students who are behind, as this method has demonstrated success. WCPS needs funds to further develop spaces for Universal Pre-K programming. WCPS needs investments in wrap-around service, mental health support, and a continued expansion of career development support for our students.

Currently, the amount of local funding is not adequate to meet the needs of students or to support educators in their efforts to implement the Blueprint. This lack of additional funds has further contributed to the district's fiscal situation. WCPS will continue to advocate for and secure additional localized funding.

Initiatives & Transformation:
To mitigate the impact, WCPS will continue to engage with local government, community leaders, and stakeholders to raise awareness about the importance of investing in education. The superintendent and the WCPS communications team will highlight the benefits of a well-funded education system for the local economy, as well as for the success of individual students. In addition, WCPS is actively reevaluating the budgeting process and implementing cost-cutting measures. WCPS will have to make significant cuts in the FY25 budget. WCPS will continue to explore innovative funding sources and partnerships to sustainably support initiatives, such as career ladder development, recruitment of new teaching candidates, and expansion of support services like tutoring and mental health programs.

Additionally, WCPS acknowledges that it is imperative for state leaders and funding to reflect the elevation of the education profession and increase the appeal of a career in education to future generations. Our nation and our state need our students, college students, and career changers to see education careers as worthy and inspiring. Most importantly, the funding of education must reflect that careers in education are grounded in a valued and supportive work environment that makes education careers enticing and sustainable. Maryland must invest in systems to support and retain future staff for life-long careers in education.

Staffing & Hiring:
The challenges school-based staff face daily have evolved dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic. Accelerated learning recovery and mental health crises have resulted in the need for staff with a broad repertoire of skills. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in Special Education services and needs, identification and compliance, and a growing need for intervention-based/supplemental instruction. COVID-19 has also contributed to a significant mental health crisis in young people and adults. This crisis has led to an increase in avoidant based behavioral and trauma responses, and a growing need for additional mental health and support professionals who are experienced in meeting the unique needs of students and staff. These realities require additional staff members and additional resources. Due to funding challenges, WCPS has been unable to navigate these changes quickly or adequately.

These challenges are compounded by the national teacher shortage and a universal shortage of individuals pursuing degrees and careers in education. WCPS is feeling the impact of the competition for high-quality, diverse teachers and leaders. At one time, there were multiple candidates for each vacancy. Post-pandemic, there are fewer candidates interested in education positions, and there is severe competition for candidates across Maryland, as well as Virginia and Pennsylvania. In Maryland, as a result of Blueprint's

standardization of starting salaries and career ladders coupled with trends within Generation Z, a dynamic has developed where only individuals with a previous connection to Washington County are applying and/or accepting roles in our district.

Initiatives & Transformation:
WCPS is actively re-evaluating its recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies to address staffing challenges. The district is prioritizing efforts to promote itself as an attractive destination for educators through targeted marketing, communications, and culture-building initiatives. A comprehensive needs assessment has been conducted to identify opportunities for improvement, focusing on increasing the quantity and diversity of applicants. Additionally, WCPS is committed to eliminating bias from its hiring processes and fostering a culture of inclusion to support diverse staff members.

WCPS acknowledges the need for robust policy support at the state level to ensure the sustainability of Grow Your Own initiatives and generate renewed excitement for careers in education among the next generation. One potential solution to this challenge is the implementation of Grow Your Own programs that offer a pathway for aspiring educators to pursue their dreams while also addressing teacher shortages in high-need schools. These programs provide participants with the opportunity to receive financial support for their education, and professional development, and a mentor to guide them through the process. By investing in the development of future educators, we can help to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education, regardless of their zip code or socioeconomic status.

To monitor progress and ensure ongoing success, WCPS has established clear priorities and goals for recruitment, hiring processes, retention, preparation, licensure, and fostering a culture of inclusion. Quarterly updates will be provided to stakeholders, accompanied by ongoing strategic planning and innovation efforts. WCPS has recently incorporated weekly leadership and action planning time committed to innovation and implementation to better position the district for increased success. Through a combination of proactive measures and stakeholder engagement, WCPS is committed to overcoming its staffing challenges and evolving to meet the dynamic needs of its students, staff, and community.

Academics & Instruction:
WCPS is working to ensure that all students are college and career-ready by the end of 10th grade. Although WCPS has made annual improvements, and in recent years students have outperformed the state average, there remains a great deal of work to be done. The biggest areas of focus are supporting continued growth in mathematics and literacy as well as supporting our subgroup students (especially our students with disabilities, as outlined above, and English Learners).

WCPS' academic & instructional challenges are tethered to the staffing and funding challenges outlined above. Prior to the pandemic, WCPS was working to close achievement gaps present within our student population—gaps that are commonly seen within districts that serve students of color, English Learners, and low income families. Due to the pandemic, these achievement gaps have widened in some areas. Spring 2023 MCAP assessment results show student achievement was higher in English language arts than prior to the pandemic; however, the results were lower in math. Learning recoveries will require an increase in academic and intervention-based supports. Additionally, students need more social/emotional, behavioral, and mental health support, requiring WCPS staff to be equipped with more resources to support students.

In the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS has developed a district-wide collaborative approach to fostering school culture and climate, with a focus on communication strategies to create environments for students to learn, ways to teach behavioral skills rooted in relationships, and leveraging Classroom 180 for trauma-informed care and classroom practices (including creating a family culture in the classroom, self-regulation, language of trauma, safety, and discipline & empowerment).

Initiatives & Transformation:
In response to the academic and instructional challenges outlined, WCPS is implementing a multifaceted strategy aimed at transforming the approach to supporting student success. To address the achievement gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, a number of structures have been established to deepen the support available to all subgroups of students. WCPS staff develop MTSS plans for students who are not "on track" to be College & Career Ready, aligning curricula to state standards, investing in high-quality instructional materials, and providing more robust CTE courses and support opportunities for students. WCPS has invested in supplemental instruction resources, including programs targeting phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and math fluency. By investing in supplemental instruction resources and leveraging data-driven approaches such as the Early Warning System and Progress Monitoring, WCPS is working to accelerate student progress and narrow achievement gaps.

In parallel, WCPS fosters a collaborative school culture centered on communication, relationship-building, and trauma-informed care. Through initiatives like Classroom 180, we are equipping educators with the tools and strategies needed to create supportive learning environments that prioritize students' social, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

Looking ahead, WCPS is committed to ongoing progress monitoring and stakeholder engagement to ensure the effectiveness of these strategies. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, WCPS is dedicated to transforming our academic and instructional practices to meet the evolving needs of all students, particularly those facing the greatest challenges. Through collaborative efforts and strategic investments, WCPS is poised to achieve meaningful and sustainable transformation in academic outcomes for all students.

Stakeholder Engagement & Progress Monitoring

Communicating Goals, Priorities, and Action Plans

In its initial Blueprint development process, WCPS leveraged a robust stakeholder feedback initiative. Over the course of several months, WCPS leadership met with internal and external stakeholder groups in order to gather feedback about what was going well within WCPS schools, where there were areas for improvement, and what strategic initiatives could be implemented to drive improvement and meet the needs of students, staff, and families.

Now that WCPS is in the midst of Blueprint implementation, there is an ongoing focus on keeping stakeholder groups updated on progress and gathering feedback and input to drive iterative improvements to the core priorities and improvement strategies.

Throughout the year, we leverage many of the same stakeholder groups and processes, including

- Facilitation of monthly school leader and teacher leader meetings focused on efforts to improve literacy and math outcomes, subgroup support, and implementation of academic programming, including dual enrollment and CTE.
- Involvement in the Greater Hagerstown Committee (GHC), where community leaders meet regularly to discuss important issues and work towards improving the local area. The GHC is a great opportunity to have a voice in the community and make positive changes that benefit everyone.
- Involvement in the Chamber of Commerce, where WCPS can strengthen its ties with the local community and better prepare its students for success in the workforce.
- Development of Blueprint One-Pagers and social media posts to distribute district progress updates widely, focusing on engaging stakeholders through graphics, images, and videos that promote what is happening in our classrooms across the community.

- Regular meetings with teachers participating in the National Board Certification cohorts. These meetings include regular updates and ongoing communication through Google Classroom between sessions.
- Establishment of the Blueprint Committee that includes principal, teacher, staff, and association representation. These groups meet quarterly to review district-wide updates on implementation and provide feedback and insight.
- Invitation to broader audiences to our board meetings and listening sessions to showcase "wins" across the district.
- Evaluation of the existing WCPS website and implementation of design changes to help provide insight into what is happening in our schools.
- Collaboration between the WCTA leaders and the superintendent's leadership team to address implementation issues proactively.

Soliciting Feedback & Adapting Communication Strategies
Actively, WCPS receives valuable feedback from many stakeholders, including community members, administrators, board of education members, Washington County Teacher's Association, teachers, Washington County Education Support Personnel, ESP staff, parents, and students. The district values this feedback and uses it to inform its decision-making processes. WCPS has recently hired additional staff in the communications department to ensure that important information is shared with the community in a timely and effective manner. As we proceed further into our work across all pillars, additional strategies are being built to engage principals and educators in priorities in the district beyond just the classroom. For example, Human Resources and Special Education teams are building opportunities to have school-based staff participate in Action Planning Teams. By engaging with diverse stakeholders, WCPS ensures everyone has a voice in shaping the district's policies and practices. This collaborative approach is essential for creating a school system that meets the needs of all students.

This work is now also being done in conjunction with the development of a district-wide strategic plan with a shared vision for our students and their futures. The goal of this process is to develop a district-wide plan with authentic stakeholder engagement that integrates all aspects and priorities of Blueprint within the district. The development and release of this strategic plan are being done in conjunction with the development of our Blueprint engagement plan to ensure WCPS priorities and implementation of Blueprint are one and the same, with authentic stakeholder engagement around these priorities and progress. A Request for Proposal has been launched for an external organization to support this process. WCPS envisions this process will include a listening tour, stakeholder roundtables, and consistent updates (through various channels) on how progress is being made.

Structures for Engagement & Progress Monitoring
While the above efforts focus on stakeholder engagement, there are a number of internal structures to ensure that those charged with leading and implementing change initiatives (District staff) remain invested and engaged in Blueprint efforts.

For our greatest three challenges, funding, staffing, and academics, WCPS will use project plans with short-and long-term goals and measures of success to monitor progress quarterly and pivot strategy as needed.

More specifically, WCPS has established Pillar specific and cross-functional teams that meet regularly to set a vision on integrating Blueprint into the strategic direction of their departments and teams and to monitor implementation. These teams leverage input from specific stakeholders as part of the needs assessment, prioritization, implementation, and progress monitoring processes. Teams are building opportunities for authentic engagement of stakeholders through program development but also leverage progress monitoring as an opportunity to update and engage stakeholders as we take a step back. Teams

are developing monthly and quarterly opportunities to monitor progress, problem solve, and update or engage stakeholders in the path forward.

As previously described, WCPS has established a number of structures to ensure that stakeholders are monitoring not only the execution of Blueprint improvement initiatives, but also the success and outcomes of those initiatives. These structures have also been established to ensure that WCPS is transparent around progress points and opportunities for continued improvement, change, and investment with public stakeholder groups.

- School & district leadership are regularly engaging in school data meetings and walkthroughs to determine areas of success and opportunities for improvement.
- Blueprint working groups have been established and meet regularly (weekly or monthly) to review progress, iterate and propose solutions to challenges, and respond to stakeholder input. Priority working groups focus on talent/staffing work, Special Education, and College and Career Readiness implementation.
- District leadership meets monthly to review progress against district-wide strategic plan goals, annual report card outcomes, ESSA outcomes, and school-level student data. The district will begin a process of engaging in quarterly stepbacks in the coming months.
- Centrally-based leadership meetings are held monthly and include: data, curriculum, special education, and culture. At the elementary level, quarterly data meetings are held at each school with district staff in attendance. At the secondary level, yearly data meetings are held centrally with district leaders.
- The district's finance team meets quarterly with cross-functional implementation teams to monitor resource allocation and determine if changes are needed in order to be responsive to evolving needs.
- The WCPS annual board meeting and public updates on progress and priorities.

In conclusion, WCPS is committed to aligning the Blueprint for Maryland's Future with our vision, goals, and plans, which is reflected in an integrated approach, with Blueprint priorities becoming the cornerstone of our district-wide strategic planning. Through clear communication, stakeholder engagement, and innovative initiatives, WCPS will lead the community in overcoming challenges within funding, staffing, and academics to propel our district to the transformative goals and outcomes outlined in the Blueprin

Pillar 1: Early Childhood Education

1. Access to High-Quality, Full-Day Pre-K

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 1 - 5, 11 - 16

In March 2023, the LEA described how it would increase access to high-quality, full-day Pre-K for Tier 1 and 2 students, including students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and English learners.

Responses discussed considerations related to facilities, including expansion to new facilities, transformation of existing facilities, opportunities for shared spaces with private providers, strategic communication and outreach, and the development of a common and unified enrollment system to support racially and socioeconomically diverse learning environments.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.

- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint Outcome to serve all Tier 1 4-year-old children who wish to enroll in Pre-K by SY 2025-2026.

WCPS Response

Progress Updates

Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) continues to provide access to the Universal Pre-K program for all 4-year-olds regardless of income or any other barriers to enrollment. WCPS has Pre-K in every elementary school (25 schools) and in two high schools. The Pre-K programs in the high schools are partnered with the Teacher Academy Programs of Maryland (TAM), as described more in Pillar 3. As of September 30, 2022, WCPS Pre-K enrollment was 1,035 students. On September 30, 2023, Pre-K enrollment was 1,113 students, reflecting an increase of 78 Pre-K students. Enrollment has continued to increase during the 2023-2024 school year. As of March 12, 1,149 students were enrolled in the WCPS Pre-K program. The Pre-K enrollment for the 2023-2024 school year surpassed the projection in the 2023 Blueprint Implementation Plan, which was 1,060 students.

As of September 30th, 2023 WCPS had 765 Tier 1 students enrolled in pre-k. WCPS continues to be able to provide 4-year-old Pre-K to any child enrolled in WCPS. The 2023 Blueprint Implementation Plan reflected 35 private provider slots for the 2022-2023 school year and projected 45 slots for the 2023-2024 school year. The number of private provider slots has increased by 39 to 74 for the 2023-2024 school year. WCPS plans to continue to work to increase the number of private provider slots in FY25-FY27. One of the current private providers is looking to expand and add an additional 20 slots to her center, which would allow for 94 slots with the current private providers. Additionally, WCPS continues to actively seek opportunities to expand the private providers servicing WCPS students.

WCPS 4-year-old Pre-K students are provided a high-quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum that ensures students are kindergarten ready. WCPS utilizes research-based resources in Pre-K programs to support student needs. Mathematics instruction is supported by high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), such as bridges produced by the Math Learning Center. Bridges is a play-based resource based on a logically sequenced research-based approach to mathematical skills and knowledge. Language & Literacy instruction is supported with the HQIM from Amplify CKLA (Common Knowledge Language Arts). CKLA is a comprehensive English Language Arts curriculum based on the Science of Reading, designed to prepare the earliest learners academically, socially, and emotionally for later reading success through building foundational language and literacy skills. Both the math and ELA curricula align with the curriculum utilized in WCPS in grades K through 5, as described in Pillar 3.

WCPS promoted 4-year-old Pre-K in all areas of the county. To increase the promotion, in the Spring of 2023, WCPS staff visited local businesses and posted fliers (Pre-K Flier) in the community. Additionally, Pre-K was promoted through a Pre-K promotional video that was shown in previews at the local movie theater and on Facebook. WCPS also partnered with Children In Need to promote Pre-K enrollment by setting up a Pre-K Informational Table (Children in Need). WCPS increased efforts in low socio-economic areas to target the Tier I population. WCPS partnered with Judy Center, Community Schools, and Title I to help focus Pre-K enrollment efforts in Title I schools by sharing information at family engagement events (such as Kindergarten Readiness Nights), playgroups, and community events (such as Baby Palooza, Healthy Kids Day, Kids Day at Ag Fair, and Department of Health Workshop) (Ag Fair Photo).

WCPS provided opportunities for families to join us for open office hours, both in person and virtual, to provide enrollment support and answer any questions that families may have had about our pre-k programs (Virtual Office Hours). WCPS will continue to provide these office hours to promote pre-k and support families with enrollment. As a result of these efforts, enrollment increased, resulting in the addition of another Pre-K classroom at a Title I school (Ruth Ann Monroe Primary School).

WCPS Early Learning Department continues to collaborate with the WCPS Birth to K Department to ensure that students with disabilities are provided access to a Pre-K program. In addition, the Birth-K Department has provided additional positions to help students and families transition into a WCPS Pre-K program. The positions that were added to support these transitions are the following: Birth to K Education Readiness Specialist, Birth to K Community Liaison Specialist, and an Occupational Therapist. WCPS continues to meet the needs of EL families through the International Welcome Center (IWC). The IWC works with EL families by assisting with enrollment and documentation in any language. Due to increased enrollment with EL families, the IWC added a multilingual paraprofessional who is an experienced Pre-K paraprofessional who taught many EL students in her classroom. The paraprofessional translates documents and applications and meets with early learning families to learn more about Pre-K opportunities. Two Title I Pre-K Teachers and Family Liaisons provide support and instruction to multilingual students and their families. Title I EL Pre-K teachers support family engagement by establishing open communication channels with parents through newsletters and apps like Remind (Invites in various languages). The teachers and family liaisons conduct home visits to build relationships, understand families' cultural backgrounds, and create partnerships between home and school. They provide direct instruction to ELs and collaborate with Pre-K teachers through co-teaching and consulting to ensure individualized support for EL students. Likewise, they organize parent-teacher conferences to discuss children's progress and strengths. Title I Pre-K EL teachers foster a sense of community and create opportunities for families to actively participate in their child's education by hosting family engagement activities like workshops, social events, and multicultural celebrations (EL Celebration). Through these events, teachers reinforce learning at home and promote children's holistic development within a culturally responsive environment.

The WCPS Early Learning Department is aware of the barriers for students experiencing homelessness and continues to collaborate with Student Services and the WCPS Homeless Coordinator to meet the needs of early learners. The Early Learning Department attended the McKinney-Vento Professional Development Institute (McKinney-Vento Agenda) on October 26, 2023, in Annapolis, MD, to learn more about supporting the needs of students and their families. The Early Learning Department also participated in an event at the Horizon Goodwill Building for families experiencing homelessness and promoted Pre-K enrollment by passing out applications and general information regarding Pre-K (Invite to Attend Goodwill). All Pre-K applications for homeless students are processed immediately, and the WCPS transportation department coordinates transportation arrangements to ensure services are ready and students can begin school within three business days.

A challenge for WCPS continues to be providing access for Tier 1 3-year-olds. There is limited space in WCPS buildings to provide 3-year-old Pre-K due largely to the system-wide expansion to provide universal 4-year-old Pre-K, which began in 2017, and universal access was established in 2019. WCPS collaborates with private providers to implement a mixed-delivery Pre-K system. WCPS continues to explore the possibility of utilizing buildings located in high-needs areas with the intent of establishing additional early learning programs if private providers aren't able to do so.

WCPS is in the planning stages to open a new elementary school in August 2027. Initial plans for the building include three 4-year-old classrooms and two 3-year-old classrooms. As WCPS continues to plan for the building of new elementary schools in the future, the plans will include 3- and 4-year-old Pre-K slots for at least 75% of the kindergarten enrollment numbers.

2. A High-Quality, Mixed-Delivery (Public And Private) Pre-K System

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 6 - 10 and 18

In March 2023, the LEA described how it would collaborate with private providers to implement a mixed-delivery Pre-K system and ensure every student has access to a high-quality Pre-K program.

Responses included considerations for increasing access as discussed in the previous question as well as sharing data and information, providing comprehensive services, and leveraging shared resources.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

WCPS Response:

WCPS continues to utilize multiple strategies to meet the targets outlined in Blueprint with the mixed-delivery system. WCPS collaborates with private providers to implement a mixed-delivery Pre-K system and ensure every student has access to a high-quality Pre-K program. WCPS currently has the following partners: Head Start, Ritchey's Totlot, and Child Care Alliance (2 of these are in-home childcare providers). To support private providers and streamline the Pre-K process for the community, WCPS has created a common Pre-K enrollment application that lists all approved private Pre-K options for parents/guardians (Pre-K Application). A Pre-K enrollment aligned with the form used for WCPS enrollment was crafted for utilization by private providers (Ritchey's Tot Lot Example)

A continuing challenge for WCPS is providing access to Pre-K for Tier 1 3-year-olds. This challenge is largely due to the limited number of eligible private providers in Washington County. WCPS has met with stakeholders interested in applying for expansion grant funds; however, they are not published at a Level 3 in EXCELS and, therefore, would not qualify for the grant funds. This poses an additional challenge, currently and in the future. Private providers have shared that it is a struggle to meet the requirements for a Level 5 rating in EXCELS due to the accreditation requirements. Without grant funding, funding becomes a barrier because the delay in state funding requires private providers to float funds for staff salaries since they can not charge for Tier 1 students.

Another challenge for private providers is finding certified teachers and assistants who meet the qualifications required in Blueprint. WCPS proposed the idea of providing a certified WCPS teacher in a private provider setting. However, private providers shared they can not afford to pay the salary, benefits, and retirement of the teacher even with the Pre-K Expansion Grant funds (Private Provider Staffing). Current private providers are located in geographical regions that are not in proximity to the Tier 1 population, which causes transportation to be a barrier for families.

WCPS has continued to meet with current providers and centers to encourage participation with Pre-K. The Early Learning Coordinator has met with the Islamic Society multiple times and visited their site to help support their efforts in becoming a possible community partner. The Early Learning Department has also met with several center-based providers to share information about the grants and the steps to becoming a community partner. WCPS continues to collaborate with Easter Seals as they begin the planning stages of establishing a Pre-K Center. The focus of Easter Seals is to provide high-quality early learning opportunities in an inclusive setting. Easter Seals is aware of the need for early learning programming in the downtown area based on kindergarten readiness data. The Easterseals Center would provide early learning experiences for children from the ages of birth through 3-year-olds. WCPS continues to work with the Washington County Chamber of Commerce and Greater Hagerstown Committee to share information on the need for 3-year-old Pre-K.

WCPS will continue to partner with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to support Pre-K's efforts. The ECAC consists of several community agencies, including Healthy Families, Bester Community of Hope, the HUB at the University of Maryland Hagerstown, Judy Center, Childcare Choices, Apples for Children, Special Education Advisory Council, WCPS Birth to K, Washington County Head Start, and parent representatives. The Early Learning Department shared Pillar 1 in the Spring of 2023 and received feedback from all stakeholders. (ECAC Blueprint Feedback). WCPS will also continue to promote pre-k enrollment not only for WCPS but also for community private providers so that families will have the choice of public or private pre-k spots. A new strategy to support the challenge of providing Pre-K for Tier 1 3-year-olds would be to have an informational session on the grants for private providers to help answer any questions and gather feedback.

3. Workforce Development and Pipelines for High-Quality Pre-K Staff

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 19 - 22

In March 2023, the LEA described its plan to develop its workforce and build pipelines for teachers and teacher assistants that meet the high-quality requirements.

Responses addressed providing professional development related to the instructional program and high-quality instructional materials discussed in Pillar 3, using a diverse set of strategies to build the Pre-K teacher and teacher assistant pipelines, supporting teachers and teacher assistants in meeting the credentialing requirements set forth by the Blueprint by the beginning of SY 2027-2028, and communicating opportunities to current and prospective employees.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint Outcome of Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants meeting high-quality requirements.

WCPS Responce

WCPS provides many opportunities for professional learning for grade levels Pre-K - 12 in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Pillar 3 includes the details and plans for professional learning in WCPS. WCPS also ensures that Pre-K community providers are afforded the same opportunities for professional learning as WCPS staff. WCPS checks in and collaborates with private providers based on the current needs of their programs, as well as provides learning focused on best practices in Early Literacy and Mathematics instruction. WCPS offered professional learning opportunities throughout the summer, including the Summer Summit and Teacher Induction Academy (TIA). Additionally, professional learning is offered throughout the school year at the school level and through supervisor-led professional development. The professional learning offered is based on systematic initiatives, staff needs, and root cause analysis of student assessment data.

WCPS has developed a series of professional learning opportunities for not only Pre-K teachers but also Pre-K paraprofessionals. WCPS wanted to ensure paraprofessionals are fully equipped to provide high-quality instruction for Pre-K students. Pre-K paraprofessionals have engaged with both literacy and mathematics professional development opportunities. The professional development sessions include four

in-person professional learning opportunities and five virtual sessions during the 2023-2024 school year. Pre-K teachers have had the opportunity to engage in Literacy Communities of Practice and Mathematics Professional Learning with the math curriculum Bridges. WCPS invites Pre-K providers to professional learning opportunities. However, it is a challenge for private providers to participate because WCPS professional learning opportunities are focused on the WCPS curriculum and do not align with the curriculum of private providers.

A Pre-K Cohort was established in November of 2023 to focus on literacy instruction in the Pre-K classroom. The cohort is composed of Pre-K teachers, lead teachers, and administrators. They meet monthly, hold coaching sessions, and provide instructional feedback to Pre-K teachers. WCPS continues to provide professional learning opportunities on the Science of Reading during the 2023-2024 school year for teachers, staff, community partners, and private providers. Staff could participate in an asynchronous Science of Reading course, which includes ten modules and an assessment of learning for each module. Community partners were provided professional learning from the modules of the Science of Reading course. They were also invited to participate in the Science of Reading course. WCPS has given private providers the opportunity to attend virtual and/or in-person professional learning opportunities. These professional learning opportunities included a conference style-Summit Week of professional development surrounding Language & Literacy and Social/Emotional Learning.

The Coordinator for Early Learning and the Early Learning Lead Teacher has provided professional learning on-site at the private provider locations. These professional learning opportunities are focused on behavioral strategies and a literacy book study using the book *Literacy Learning for Infants, Toddlers, & Preschoolers*. In the Fall of 2023, Head Start staff requested professional learning on behavioral strategies and techniques to help support classroom management. WCPS coordinated a behavioral professional learning opportunity facilitated by a WCPS Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) to meet their needs. WCPS accommodates the needs of providers by providing flexibility when scheduling professional development, such as virtual options and on-site options at times that are convenient for the provider. WCPS also provides resources and materials for private providers based on their needs (ex, alphabet charts, behavioral visuals, and professional learning books). WCPS plans to host a Childcare Provider workshop in the Summer of 2024 to share School Readiness Expectations and best practices with private providers.

The WCPS Early Learning Department presented at the Maryland Early Childhood Conference, held in Hagerstown, Maryland, to facilitate professional learning sessions for Maryland public and private providers (HCC Slides). WCPS has a current Pre-K staff of 68 teachers (67 of whom are certified teachers, and one is on a provisional certificate working toward certification) who provide instruction to 4-year-olds. The 2023-2024 demographics for Pre-K staff are similar to the demographics of the K-12 staff. WCPS anticipates hiring five new early childhood teachers for the 2024-2025 school year. As Pre-K openings occur in future years, the WCPS Early Learning Department is committed to the vision of the WCPS Human Resources Team and will move forward with the plans outlined in Pillar 2. The WCPS Early Learning Department will work to support early learning staff in transitioning from certificates to the new licensing requirements set forth by MSDE. The Early Learning Department is passionate about continuing to build teacher pipelines and build-your-own programs to bolster the number of qualified educators for both public and private Pre-K programs. Building pipelines must start in the CCR

programming in the public schools. WCPS currently has two Pre-K programs in high schools with the Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM). These Pre-K programs support high school students with hands-on learning, including classroom observations, assisting with lesson planning, teaching Pre-K students in whole and small groups, and learning about child development and pedagogy. These students gain valuable knowledge from experienced teachers while working directly with Pre-K students. WCPS will host sessions in the spring to share educational and career opportunities in public schools as well as with private providers partnering with WCPS. WCPS staff will support graduates through the substitute application process so that students may work as substitutes when they are home on breaks from college. WCPS will continue to focus on providing additional follow-ups and communication with graduates during their college years to continue to foster and build relationships in hopes of having them return to WCPS for employment. Additional information on tuition reimbursement, recruitment, and hiring and retention of high-quality teachers and leaders is described in Pillar 2.

WCPS continues to support Pre-K paraprofessionals with the credentialing requirements set forth by Blueprint. In the fall of 2022, a Pre-K Paraprofessional Child Development Associate (CDA) Cohort was established to help support Pre-K paraprofessionals in obtaining their CDA. WCPS utilized the Ready for Kindergarten grant to support the CDA process. WCPS also utilized the Maryland Family Network to support the CDA process. The CDA cohort included regular check-ins and professional development opportunities. In addition, WCPS has invited Child Care Specialists to join the professional development opportunities so they can review the portfolios and answer questions pertaining to the CDA process. The WCPS Human Resources Department has surveyed staff and continues to collect the credentialing information of Pre-K paraprofessionals. At the start of the 2024 school year, there were 30 paraprofessionals in the CDA cohort, 7 of whom have earned their CDA. WCPS continues to uphold its workforce vision by opening up the cohort to other paraprofessionals interested in becoming a Pre-K paraprofessionals and 3 special education paraprofessionals are part of the CDA cohort. Currently, WCPS has 74 Pre-K paraprofessionals working in 68 of the Pre-K classrooms. The information collected from the surveys indicated that 39 out of the 74 Pre-K paraprofessionals have at least an Associates Degree. There were 8 Pre-K paraprofessionals who are still deciding whether to pursue an Associates degree or obtain their CDA. In addition, there may be several Pre-K paraprofessionals who will meet the qualifications of a Documented Experience from House Bill 1441. Since obtaining her CDA, one of our Pre-K paraprofessionals has made the decision that she would like to further her education and work towards an education degree. Therefore, WCPS will continue to highlight growing our own Early Learning workforce with our staff. On the Supervisor Led PD Day in August 2024, the WCPS Early Learning Department will recognize the Pre-K paraprofessionals who have received their CDA. WCPS Early Learning Department will continue to support the paraprofessionals in the CDA cohort with professional learning opportunities, so they are able to meet the Blueprint requirements and support our youngest learners.

4. **NEW - Kindergarten Readiness:** Discuss the LEA's plans to ensure all students in Pre-K programs, public and private, are ready for kindergarten. Plans should include strategies for supporting the development and implementation of the instructional program in mixed-delivery settings and using data (e.g., Kindergarten Readiness Assessment) to adapt instruction.

Considerations:

- Private provider collaboration
- Selection and use of materials
- Teacher training and professional development
- Resource sharing
- Specific instructional strategies for early learning
- Transition from half-day to full-day Pre-K
- Alignment between Pre-K and K-2
- Transition into Pre-K and from Pre-K to Kindergarten
- Student groups (special education, multilingual learners, students experiencing homelessness)

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint Outcome of ensuring all Pre-K students are ready for kindergarten.

WCPS Response

The goal of WCPS is to ensure that all students entering kindergarten are demonstrating the readiness skills needed to be successful. Over seven years ago, WCPS ranked next to the bottom in the state for Kindergarten Readiness scores. WCPS Pre-K programs at that time were half-day programs offered at some elementary schools. Between 2017 and 2019, WCPS expanded the 4-year-old Pre-K programs to full-day, universal Pre-K to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality Pre-K education. All students are provided the opportunity to enroll in WCPS Pre-K, regardless of income. Since beginning universal Pre-K, WCPS has ensured that students with an Individualized Education Plan, multilingual learners, and students experiencing homelessness are given priority enrollment.

In 2017, only 33% of WCPS students entering kindergarten were demonstrating readiness. In 2023, 55% of students entering kindergarten were demonstrating readiness. In 2023, 66% of students enrolled in a WCPS Pre-K program were demonstrating readiness. The percentage of WCPS Pre-K students demonstrating readiness has continued to increase. Additionally, WCPS Pre-K programs are closing the gap in the percentage of students emerging (11.6%). The percentage of WCPS Pre-K students who have scored in the performance levels of Demonstrating and Approaching is 88.4%. WCPS continues to monitor the Prior Care Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) Data. The KRA data trends show that students who were in Informal Care, Family Child Care, and Head Start of Washington County are the least prepared for Kindergarten. Approximately 29% of students who attended these prior care locations were demonstrating readiness, and 33% of students had an emerging score. As a result, WCPS collaborates with and provides professional learning opportunities with Family Child Care and Head Start.

All staff administering the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) are trained and have an understanding of an unbiased administration of the KRA. The WCPS Early Learning Department and WCPS Department of Testing & Accountability compiled the data from the KRA so it could be shared with administration and school-based teams. The Early Learning Coordinator and Early Learning Lead Teacher met with the pre-k and kindergarten teams and school-based leadership at every elementary school (25 schools) for KRA Data Analysis meetings. The KRA data analysis meetings provided school staff the opportunity to reflect on and analyze county and school-level KRA data. To address standards that were below 80% mastery on the KRA, a county-level implications resource was created. During the KRA data meetings, staff had the opportunity to make meaning of the resource and determine the next instructional steps using the WCPS high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) in literacy and mathematics.

The WCPS Early Learning Department plans to meet with private providers in the Summer of 2024 to provide professional learning focused on Kindergarten Readiness expectations. The professional learning will ensure that all partners understand school readiness and strategies to support students who have gaps in their readiness. The Early Learning Department has offered to meet with private providers to plan professional learning for their teams. WCPS will meet with Head Start's Director of Education in summer 2024 to plan for professional development opportunities for the 2024-2025 school year. The Early Learning Department meets bi-monthly with the staff of Ritcheys Totlot to provide resources, collaboration, and coaching opportunities. The Early Learning Lead Teacher has conducted observations and modeled lessons for the staff. In addition, WCPS and Ritcheys Totlot collaborated to create an aligned checklist for cohesive student expectations.

WCPS has a process in place for reviewing and adopting instructional materials. WCPS followed the process when selecting new HQIM in reading and mathematics. WCPS began the utilization of Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) for literacy instruction in the 2023-2024 school year. WCPS began the utilization of Bridges for mathematics instruction in the 2022-2023 school year. WCPS values curricular alignment from Pre-K - 5th grade through various indicators, such as the use of consistent learning objectives, progression of curriculum vertical alignment, and stakeholder involvement. WCPS emphasizes the provision of professional learning for staff because it helps to enhance their knowledge and skills, develop new strategies and techniques, and develop a better understanding of child development. Pre-K teachers and paraprofessionals are provided multiple opportunities to engage in professional learning throughout the school year and summer. The learning opportunities are focused on the domains of kindergarten readiness: language & literacy, mathematics, social foundations, and physical development & well-being. Professional learning has also centered on the Unit Prep Protocol to help staff plan and prepare with HQIM. Pre-K paraprofessionals have been provided additional professional learning opportunities to help build their capacity as instructional leaders in the classroom.
Providing a smooth transition for students is vital for school readiness success. WCPS prioritizes transition events for students and families in Pre-K and Kindergarten. Pre-K teachers have the opportunity to conduct porch visits every summer for their incoming students. During these visits, staff meet the families and students and provide them with a Home Book Library. The porch visits were a great way to meet their new students and families and build a bridge between home and school. The Early Learning department held Kindergarten Readiness Nights in the Spring of 2023 to support student transition to Kindergarten and plans to host them again in the spring of 2024. The purpose of these evenings is to share

kindergarten expectations and provide families with information on how they can support their children at home. The students and families also receive learning materials to support learning over the summer. (Readiness Flyer). The Early Learning Department created a Summer Readiness Calendar to help promote Kindergarten Readiness and share expectations with families. WCPS partners with Head Start to transition students to WCPS Kindergarten programs. In spring 2023, the Director of Education at Head Start reached out to the elementary schools where Head Start students will transition to kindergarten and invited them to attend articulation meetings. Head Start is planning to contact schools again this March 2024 to help transition students into kindergarten with the option of articulation meetings.

The Early Learning Department also partnered with Head Start and Judy Center Early Learning Hub in April of 2023 to provide a Kindergarten Information Session for Head Start families with a child transitioning to WCPS kindergarten. The event helped to provide families with kindergarten information and expectations. The children were able to make a stuffed animal reading buddy. In addition, the Judy Center helped to fund all families with a meal to take home. The Early Learning Department, Head Start, and Judy Center are planning to collaborate and provide another Kindergarten Information Session (Head Start Transition Night).

Pillar 2: High-Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders

5. A High-Quality and Diverse Teacher Workforce

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 28 - 36
In March 2023, the LEA described how it would recruit and hire a high-quality and diverse teacher workforce.

Responses included identifying the most critical hiring needs, strategies for recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce, and how the LEA would partner with institutions of higher education (IHE) and educator preparation programs (EPP) to build talent pipelines in response to its needs (e.g., strategic placement and support of teacher candidates, full certification of conditionally certified teachers, grow your own programs, alternative preparation programs, etc.).

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the district's staffing needs and the Blueprint outcome of recruiting and hiring a high-quality and diverse teacher workforce**.**

WCPS Response

April 2023 - Present: Highest Priorities, Progress, & Challenges

In the 2023-2-24 school year, WCPS focused on hiring more diverse teachers, expanding Grow Your Own (GYO) and alternate route programs, and increasing teachers with advanced degrees or National Board Certification (NBC). WCPS also focused on providing resources and professional development to strengthen effective methods to recruit, hire, develop, and retain staff, and implementing best practices to continually evaluate and improve recruitment, hiring, development, and retention. These focus areas continue to be the cornerstones of WCPS staffing efforts, with new strategies focused on developing a culture of inclusion and eliminating bias through an evidence-based selection process, expanding recruitment messaging and strategies, building long-term pipelines to support future educators, and staff retention strategies.

Since the 2023 submission, WCPS has hired over 250 teachers, a notable 32% increase from the previous year's recruitment of 171 (most of the hiring increase was driven by secondary curricular changes and expansion of programs). WCPS is anticipating a return to traditional hiring numbers, based on retirements and attrition, of 160-170 teachers for 2024-2025, including vacancies in high-need areas of Special Education, English Language Learners, Mathematics, English, and Elementary.

Progress Updates April 2023-Present: Revisions and New Developments

The WCPS Grow Your Own (GYO) program is being designed to establish immediate opportunities for students and current staff. In the long term, WCPS will create a self-sustaining system that will meet the district's employment needs well into the future. WCPS is working to expand enrollment in the Teacher

Apprenticeship program, where rising high school juniors and seniors balance employment as paraprofessionals while engaged in high school and college coursework. The students in the Teacher Apprenticeship program serve as reading tutors for 16-20 hours a week. Students are guided through the process of dual enrollment with Hagerstown Community College (HCC) and the application process for related associate's or bachelor's degree programs and pathways to teaching certification. The GYO program is also designed to assist current employees who are pursuing career advancement. The program incorporates professional development and encourages advancement through tuition reimbursement, career coaching, and consistent promotion of training and post-secondary education opportunities.

GYO programming is critical to long-term success. The steep declines in the enrollment and graduation rates of teacher preparation programs have limited short-term recruitment efforts. From 2011-2020, in each of the four states where WCPS recruits, enrollments in teacher preparation programs declined by 29-40%, and new teacher graduation numbers declined by similarly staggering numbers, 19-54%. The decreasing interest in the education profession continues to have a severe impact on the quality and quantity of eligible teacher applicants. WCPS is working to regularly promote education as a valued profession to current middle and high students through Career Coaches and to identify and cultivate future diverse educators through the Student Apprenticeship, Teacher Academy of Maryland, and Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs. The GYO program is an opportunity to shift this dynamic. In the 2023-2-24 school year, WCPS was able to extend participation in Maryland Accelerates for another year. WCPS is leveraging Career Coaches to advertise internal programming and opportunities for careers in education so that students are continuously engaged as part of the long-term pipeline.

WCPS leadership is investigating opportunities to develop a localized alternative route to certification programs beyond the capacity of MD Accelerates and HCC. WCPS staff have connected with over four certification organizations to explore partnership opportunities in the near future, especially for paraprofessionals, long-term substitutes, or conditionally certified teachers. WCPS is actively looking into potential partnerships similar to those that have been successful in other districts, as well as exploring opportunities to partner with current Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) and explore new opportunities for apprenticeship models. Additionally, in the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS has continued to review all applications closely. For those not quite eligible to teach in the district, human resource staff propose personalized opportunities to achieve certification, whether through MD Accelerates or programming with a traditional IHE

Implementation Challenges

Recruiting locally has been a challenge for WCPS because of the educational and financial barriers of the local workforce and community. Washington County is limited in the number of eligible adult candidates for alternative preparation programs. Only 23% of residents 25 years or older hold a bachelor's degree and are not eligible for most programs. Additionally, 18% of households live in poverty, and 22% of households are ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), meaning they earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but less than the basic cost of living in Washington County. These statistics serve to limit the ability for many interested individuals to pursue costly education certification programs as potential career changers. WCPS is working with stakeholders to create alternate routes to certification programs for current staff, like paraprofessionals, and continue to support the next generation to stay local.

Recognizing the economic hurdles that many students and community members face, WCPS is developing strategies to address financial needs for education and career development. WCPS is strengthening relationships with numerous community and educational partners, including the Education Foundation of WCPS, the Community Foundation of Washington County, and the Hagerstown Community College Education Foundation, and is also working to create opportunities for diverse candidates. The Equity in Education Scholarship is a joint effort of the Hagerstown Area Religious

Council (HARC) and WCPS, which awards annual scholarships of $1,500-$7,000 to remove financial barriers, offer mentorship and development, and increase the percentage of racially diverse teachers in Washington County. The program has awarded $29,000 in scholarships since 2022, with two African-American scholarship recipients having been hired as full-time WCPS teachers. WCPS is promoting the use of state and federal scholarships and grants to offset the cost of college for aspiring teachers. The Teaching Fellows for Maryland Scholarship is awarded to students who pledge to work as public school or public prekindergarten teachers in Maryland, upon completion of their studies, at schools that have at least 50% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

One area of development from staff feedback is centered on total compensation. While WCPS has a robust starting salary and benefits package, the district is challenged to recruit experienced candidates due to a compression of the salary schedule for years 3-12. One significant challenge is attracting and retaining veteran teachers who could make more money in other districts with a more robust salary scale for experienced staff. WCPS is working diligently to rectify this discrepancy with its career ladder. The funding required will be significant and is particularly challenging in the current economic environment. The WCPS Superintendent is collaborating with county leadership to secure increased funding for the school system. With the anticipated influx of Blueprint funding FY26-FY28, WCPS is poised to make significant advancements toward elevating all teacher salaries.

WCPS recognizes the complexity of its recruitment and retention challenges and is dedicated to implementing multifaceted solutions rooted in self-reflection, community collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization. WCPS staff are actively working to make this new vision possible through cross-functional initiatives such as “grow your own” student-to-teacher certification programs, reimagining benefits to be more competitive and compelling, and developing a straightforward narrative and engagement campaign to attract and retain diverse educators. With the current capacity, the district is focused on long-term change while prioritizing strategies that can support the most immediate needs.

The WCPS commitment to diversity has made an impact, and the district acknowledges more work needs to be done. One of the ongoing challenges facing the recruitment of diverse candidates to WCPS is geographic location with proximity to other Maryland counties as well as to Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. WCPS is located on the western side of the South Mountain range, which separates Washington and Frederick counties and serves as a physical and psychological divide between the more diverse central Maryland and the more remote west. This perceived schism has created an impression that Washington County is a less progressive and culturally diverse community, which severely limits the ability to attract candidates to relocate to the area. WCPS continues to work to leverage its unique location as a positive opportunity in marketing and recruitment messages. Washington County is within 1 ½ hours of the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. metro area and offers a unique setting balancing convenience to urban centers while still offering mountains and rural sanctuaries. Because of its unique location, WCPS can recruit from the four adjoining states and have many hires who graduate from a different state and live outside the Hagerstown and/or Washington County area.

New Developments & Revised Strategies

Hiring will continue to be an important yearly priority for the district. In the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS has established clear priorities and goals for recruitment and staffing work. These include; refining hiring processes, improving retention, preparation, and licensure, and fostering a culture of inclusion with a focus on meeting the Pillar 2 goals for Blueprint. To address the many multifaceted staffing challenges all districts are facing, WCPS has adopted a comprehensive approach encompassing short- and long-term strategies. District leadership recognized that the path forward must start with self-reflection and internal refocus. The work began with the implementation of a Human Resources Planning Working Group in February 2024 that completed a Blueprint-aligned strategic planning process with current state (needs

assessment) and future state (vision and goals) analysis. The group's initial goal was to create a vision statement to drive the work moving forward: "Engage, inspire, hire, and develop a diverse workforce that passionately supports each student's success." As a result, the district is focused on five key levers to transform systems and practices that will enable the district to attract, hire, develop, and retain a high-quality, diverse teacher workforce: Recruitment, Hiring, Prep and Licensure, Culture of Inclusion, and Retention.

The five teams are composed of senior leadership, school administrators, content specialists, operational and department supervisors and coordinators, and human resources (HR) leadership. The HR leadership team meets weekly to focus on short and long-term improvements. The team leverages the forty-member working group and action planning teams to develop new strategies for overcoming district staffing challenges and implementing actions. These teams meet on a regular basis to discuss district-wide challenges and opportunities. They have devised actionable items as the basis of a multi-year plan that will intentionally create a school system that values and respects diversity at all levels, including actively developing a culture of inclusion across all levels of the district.

Feedback Implementation
Last year, the district received feedback to include more specifics about how diverse candidates are identified and engaged. This has been a predominant focus for the HR Team and strategic planning work.

This year, the district spent time reflecting on goals and data centered on defining what representative diversity would look like in the long term. The district is committed to improving recruitment, hiring, and professional development efforts that create and sustain a workforce that better reflects the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body. Additionally, WCPS is committed to increasing the balance of gender represented in roles (for example, increasing male teachers in elementary classrooms) and the number of employees that identify as multilingual. The district is also focused on building a culture of inclusion to welcome and embrace diversity of thought and perspective as an opportunity to increase diversity in many other facets of the student experience. The HR team is also working to increase inclusion for individuals across generations, abilities, sexual orientation, background/experience, family status, socio-economic status, veteran status, religion, and more. For additional context, the district collects identifying information (as allowable by law) on the application to work in the district and data collection during the hiring process.

One of the key components for the success of diversity hiring in the district will be to build and expand a culture of inclusion so that individuals from different backgrounds, races, and identities will feel welcomed, valued, and supported at WCPS. WCPS created an action planning team that is working to build a strategic plan to engage diverse recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies and cultivate opportunities for leadership, teacher, and staff roles. The Culture of Inclusion action planning team is working on additional strategies for the rest of this school year and into the future to ensure a thoughtful and purposeful approach is taken to building the desired culture across the district. For example, district leaders are working toward demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusivity with a clear mission statement and goals related to diversity and inclusion at the district and school levels. Staff are also developing a marketing campaign for why to join or stay in WCPS that includes images and materials that are welcoming and inclusive to diverse groups and individuals. WCPS will be updating job descriptions and materials to reflect values of inclusion and diversity to attract diverse talent and foster an inclusive workplace. Additionally, the team is building inclusive language that can be used in all marketing materials and communications, as well as training materials for school leaders and staff based on survey results from students and staff.

WCPS leaders acknowledge the district must improve its culture of inclusion for individuals of all backgrounds in order to increase retention rates and, ultimately, recruitment rates. WCPS is working to

strategically cultivate an environment where diversity thrives and where every member of the WCPS workforce feels valued for their strengths and unique characteristics, respected, included, and empowered to fully engage in service to students, families, staff, and communities. One strategy is to develop a plan to intentionally welcome and onboard diverse staff, as well as develop opportunities for students, staff, and faculty from diverse groups to connect with others who share their backgrounds and affiliations, including mentorship opportunities. WCPS will also develop professional development opportunities in inclusive environments, diversity, unconscious bias, and culturally responsive practices. To that end, WCPS created a culture-building opportunity and training for staff focused on "Fostering School Culture and Climate: The Role of Communication in Staff and Student Relationships."

The Offices of Equity and Excellence and Human Resources have been conducting professional development based on the book The Leader's Guide to Unconscious Bias with school-based and operations administrators during the current school year. The team is specifically focusing on the ways unconscious bias negatively impacts hiring practices and strategizing how to overcome these in selection. The teams are actively working on redesigning a selection model and process that will be less subjective and more evidence-based, as well as leveraging tools and training for hiring teams that minimize bias in selection. The team drafted new teacher selection criteria, and the work will continue this summer for the new hiring year.

One of the top recruitment priorities for a representative workforce includes a personalized touch that acknowledges and celebrates the employee as a whole and a unique person. Short-term strategies include creating a talent acquisition and development website that markets recruitment information to specific audiences. Recently, a customer relationship management (CRM) system was adopted to aid the district in identifying and cultivating a diverse applicant pool. For this year's recruitment season, WCPS has prioritized 1) embedding a culture of inclusion language and images in marketing materials, 2) leveraging referrals and word-of-mouth campaigns, 3) expanding the digital marketing campaign and social media presence, and 4) engaging in personalized touchpoints through fairs and resume/lead cultivation. Most of the recruitment techniques have been in place and worked effectively. WCPS recognizes the need to codify these systems and ensure that all candidates are being equitably and efficiently catered to in a professional and personal manner. To support the referral campaign, WCPS has established relationships with numerous community partners, including the NAACP, Washington County Black Professionals Network, Western Maryland Young Black Entrepreneur Development, MSEA Racial Justice Team, Robert W. Johnson Community Center, Girls, Inc., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, and HARC. These partnerships are integral in engaging potential diverse candidates and cultivating a welcoming and supportive community for employees and families relocating to Washington County.

In addition to recruitment, retention is a critical strategy for WCPS's staffing goals, as about 90% of teachers return year to year. With the limitations in the number of candidates pursuing teaching, WCPS is increasing attention to developing and retaining the current workforce. The district is focused on increasing retention rates for all staff, meeting performance expectations, ensuring proportionality across groups/roles/locations/tenure, and increasing the rate and quality of conversations. WCPS supervisors have proactive 'stay' conversations and reactive exit interviews. Through the WCPS Culture of Inclusion work, leaders are prioritizing a district-level commitment, increasing representation and inclusion, staff satisfaction, and training & support. WCPS has conducted and analyzed data from staff satisfaction and exit surveys and is developing intervention plans to address feedback and increase satisfaction across the district, and will begin to do so quarterly. The next steps will include increasing opportunities for 'stay' conversations, support for when staff are thinking about leaving, and live exit interviews.

Data Analysis

The overall number of minority teachers at WCPS has increased from 3% in 2018 to 6% in 2023 (and 5B in the data workbook). WCPS has 78 teachers who identify as non-white, which is a 24% increase since

last year. Across the teaching workforce, the greatest increase is in those who identify as Hispanic (2.4% of teachers). Of the 250 new teacher hires for the 2023-2024 school year, 13% are non-white (32), which aligns with the modest but steady increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of WCPS teachers, and WCPS is seeing an increase in workforce diversity with the use of conditional certifications (out of 77 conditional certifications, 27% are non-white).

Comparatively, WCPS students are still much more racially and ethnically diverse than teachers. In 2023, 15% of students identified racially as Black or African American, with 42% of all students identifying as a race other than white. Across all students, 15% of WCPS students identify ethnically as Hispanic or Latino. WCPS does not have representative diversity, as the majority of teachers identify as white (95%), is why diversifying WCPS teaching staff is a top priority. Separately, WCPS is working to increase the number of teaching staff who identify as male to address the current disproportionate representation. Currently, 23% of teachers are male and 51% of students are male.

While the district is still struggling to attract and recruit diverse candidates from outside of Washington County, the school system is fortunate to have a student population that is 42% non-white and rapidly diversifying, including increased rates in the diversity of native language speakers (other than English). WCPS has seen its Multilingual (ML) student population grow by 65% since 2018 and is home to students from 58 countries outside the U.S. who speak 34 languages other than English. The district's critical long-term recruitment strategy, especially for representative diversity, is to continue to build and expand a Grow Your Own (GYO) program to ensure retention of current students to become educators in WCPS. This year, the district developed a cross-pillar action planning team that includes work on GYO programming to increase communication across teams while making and keeping connections between these student participants and a future career in WCPS.

6. NEW - A High-Quality and Diverse Corps of School Leaders

For the March 2024 submission, the LEA must also discuss how it recruits and hires a high-quality and diverse corps of school leaders, including its collaboration with institutions of higher education and other organizations to build leadership pipelines. Consider the potential impact of the Career Ladder and how the LEA will adapt its plans to address any challenges (e.g., National Board Certification for future school leaders, smaller candidate pools if teachers remain in classrooms, etc.).

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the district's staffing needs and the Blueprint outcome of recruiting and hiring high-quality and diverse leaders.

WCPS Response

Coherent and Cohesive Plan

WCPS is working intentionally to create a teacher-to-principal pathway to grow future school and district leaders. The key to the strategy is to focus on establishing a strong culture of inclusivity, where all members of the school community feel comfortable being who they are and expressing their opinions and points of view. WCPS leadership believes that it is vital to provide programs that prepare staff for leadership roles.

Leadership Pipelines

An important component of the culture of inclusion is transparency in the process of becoming a leader in WCPS. During the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years, WCPS senior leadership invited teachers holding a current certificate in educational administration and supervision to participate in a "Future

Administrators Workshop" (Communications for Future Admin Series) The workshop is a four-part series, with 90-minute meetings in October, November, December, February. It was created in response to the shortage of strong candidates for assistant principal and principal roles and was facilitated by two current WCPS principals. During the workshop, the participants learned about the resume, interview, and hiring process for assistant principals. The workshop facilitators shared and discussed information on key responsibilities of a WCPS assistant principal, engaged participants in discussions of common leadership scenarios, and provided practice for the interview process. The creation of this workshop series has received very positive feedback from participants in increasing their excitement and preparedness for entering the assistant principal pool (as reflected in the video embedded in the linked presentation). In the 2022-2023 school year, 34 teachers participated, with 57% being current elementary teachers and 43% current secondary teachers. Overall, the group of 34 consisted of 91% females and 7% males, and 97% of participants were white, while 3% were non-white. Twenty-five teachers participated in the workshop for the 2023-2024 school year, with 52% being current elementary teachers and 48% current secondary teachers. Overall, the group of 25 consisted of 80% females and 20% males, and 96% of the participants were white, while 4% were non-white. Most importantly, WCPS has increased the number of candidates in the assistant principal applicant pool for the 2023-24 and the 2024-25 school year, and filled all assistant principal vacancies. Of the 13 assistant principals hired in the 2022-23 school year, six participated in the future administrators workshop.

WCPS has continued to refine and add strategies for recruitment and support of staff in earning National Board Certification. Of the current WCPS teachers who hold a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) credential, 19% report they aspire to be school leaders at some point in their careers. Moving forward, WCPS staff will continue to hold interest sessions and NBCT open house sessions and talk 1:1 with known aspiring leaders to encourage them to pursue NBCT. Additionally, the NBCT Coordinator works with the senior leadership team and those in leadership development to support inviting and including NBCTs in the aspiring administrator/leader cohorts.

WCPS has had an administrative intern program (it is being discontinued for the 2024-2025 school year due to budgeting constraints).The administrative intern program is designed to prepare future leaders by providing hands-on experience in school administration. Administrative Interns in the program are typically experienced educators who are given opportunities to develop their leadership skills under the mentorship of current school-based administrators. Interns are involved in a variety of tasks aligned with the responsibilities of school administrators, such as planning, managing, and implementing school policies and engaging with students, staff, and the community. The experience is meant to prepare them for potential roles as assistant principals.

In FY24, WCPS engaged in a pilot for administrative interns (3) and a principal to teach 20% of the day. The purpose of the pilot was to begin to prepare leaders for the transition to teaching 20% of the day in compliance with the Blueprint. The principal (a high school principal) taught a dual-credit English course. Having a high school principal teach a course can have significant advantages, such as fostering deeper connections with students and staying directly engaged with the educational process, which can lead to more informed decision-making. However, it also presents challenges, including potential time management issues and the risk of spreading the principal too thin, potentially impacting their ability to fulfill broader administrative responsibilities effectively. The feedback from the pilot will be instructive in designing the future for assistant principals to directly support instruction for students. Overall, the feedback from the pilot participants provides strong value to the ability to collaborate with teachers on current instructional challenges and successes, as well as build important relationships with students. The challenges expressed by the participants center on the impact on time to adequately provide both administrative and teacher support.

Partnerships
WCPS currently partners with Wilson College in Chambersburg, PA, to offer a course explicitly for teachers pursuing NBCT. The course is taught by two WCPS NBCTs, is year-long, six credits, and designed to support teachers in completing all four components of National Board Certification in one year. WCPS has other WCPS-designed options for those wishing to pursue NBCT; however, none of them are college credit-bearing. The course is also embedded in a leadership degree program through Wilson College. The purpose of the partnership and the course is to provide multiple avenues of access to, and completion of, NBCT for staff who wish to attain certification.

WCPS has also established a partnership with Bowie State University, a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), for an administrative certification program and a doctorate in educational leadership program. It is a goal of WCPS to ensure preparation programs for leadership build inclusive leaders who can create environments that foster a sense of belonging for all students and staff. WCPS also strives to create an environment in which staff of color can see themselves in the higher education partner, just as students need to see themselves in building leaders and teachers.

Through a partnership with the Center for Model Schools (CMS), WCPS has co-crafted a program to prepare current WCPS assistant principals to be principals. WCPS and CMS have created a 6-part series for a cohort of current leaders to engage in leadership experiences in an effort to aptly prepare them for a principalship. The program is titled 'The Future Leaders Cohort', and launched in the 2023-2024 school year. Eleven current assistant principals participated in the 6-day workshop. The assistant principals were selected by the Executive Directors for Elementary and Secondary schools based on their current work performance in their roles. The group consisted of eight females and three males, with eight representing elementary leadership and three representing secondary. All participants were white. WCPS senior leadership acknowledges the lack of racial diversity of the participants and knows the current efforts to bring diversity to the assistant principal pool will enable WCPS to improve the diversity of the principal pool. The workshop guided participants through telling their story of self, communicating their core values to staff, designing and implementing an entry plan, creating high-functioning teams, maintaining a focus on instruction, and creating a sense of belonging among staff for students' success. WCPS feels strongly that a highly skilled principal in every building will be able to inspire and create the skill set in the current workforce to be future leaders. The associate superintendent and executive directors for elementary and secondary education are also engaging in three professional development team meetings during the year with the members of the future leaders cohort to provide customized coaching and professional learning for assistant principals.

A challenge to the diversification of assistant principals and principals is the overall lack of diversity in the current WCPS teaching workforce. Currently, the WCPS teaching demographic is 5.9% non-white. WCPS is working to strengthen the "Grow Your Own" (GYO) program for future teachers. The purpose of the GYO program is to engage current WCPS students interested in education as a profession and provide them with a clear pathway to a career beginning during their high school years. Students of color currently comprise approximately 46% of the WCPS student population. If WCPS can successfully leverage the GYO program from the current student population, the result would be a significant increase in the diversification of the WCPS workforce.

Career Ladder
Beginning with the administrative application and hiring process for 2024-2025, WCPS has been intentional about encouraging current applicants and future applicants to pursue their NBCT before applying to the assistant principal pool. Current teaching staff who are NBCT or are current NBCT candidates have shared that one barrier to applying for assistant principal positions is the potential salary drop or a small salary increase if they applied for and were promoted to an assistant principalship. The senior leadership team discussed the implications and agreed to factor in the NBCT salary enhancements

a current NBCT receives (or the enhancement an NBCT who certified in December will receive beginning the first paycheck of the next year). To do this, the WCPS senior leadership team agreed to include the NBCT enhancement in the salary calculation for placing new APs on the salary scale (even if they had just completed their NBCT certification but had not officially received the salary increase). WCPS values the NBCT process and would like those NBCTs who are interested in the pursuit of building-level leadership to pursue those positions without being concerned about a decrease, or lack of increase, in salary. Overall, WCPS is accommodating salary enhancement for NBCTs as they transition from teacher to assistant principal, which will help open the pathway for current NBCTs. The WCPS senior leadership team believes attaining NBCT certification prior to becoming an assistant principal will be advantageous because of the acceleration on the salary scale this certification provides. One challenge

Quantitative Data
WCPS has seen a positive impact of the leadership development work on improving the candidate pool for assistant principals and principals in FY24 and in preparation for FY25. In FY24, WCPS had both the Future Administrators Workshop and Future Leaders coaching models in place, and all of assistant principal (11 positions) and principal (2 positions) vacancies were filled. Of these new hires in FY24, 82% of the assistant principals were hired from WCPS teaching staff, and 100% of the principals hired were hired from the Future Leaders cohort. Looking into FY25-FY27, WCPS is confident in the skillsets of the assistant principal and principal candidates who have completed the WCPS leadership development program.

While the leadership development pipeline is demonstrating success in providing WCPS with strong candidates for school leadership, it is important to note that WCPS has not seen improvement in the diversity of candidates. In reviewing the percentage of white principals and assistant principals from 2021, 2022, and 2023, WCPS has increased from 94.4% white to 96.9% white. This data trend is highly concerning, and WCPS has seen some positive movement in FY24. The current school-based and central office administrative workforce is 8.9% non-white, leaving room for continued improvement to better align with the demographics of the student population. WCPS continues to make growth in this area, albeit gradually. Of the candidates hired for all administrative positions, both school and central office based in FY24, 15.8% are non-white. As previously stated, WCPS foresees strong potential in the Grow Your Own program for future leaders and plans to be highly intentional in supporting and retaining teachers currently holding a conditional certificate. WCPS currently has 77 conditionally certified teachers, 27% of whom are non-white. The current certificated teacher workforce in WCPS is 5.9% non-white. Personalized and targeted support to these employees will support the diversification of current teaching staff as well as the future pool for school-based and central office leaders.

7. National Board Certification

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 37 - 44, 48, and 51
In March 2023, the LEA described its plans to recruit and support diverse candidates through the successful completion of National Board Certification or advanced degrees (if NBC is not available) to be eligible for the designation of Lead Teacher within the Career Ladder.

Based on the implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.

- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome to recruit and support diverse candidates pursuing and achieving National Board Certification or advanced degrees (if NBC is not available).

WCPS Response

WCPS has been diligently working to create a robust program for staff pursuing National Board Certification (NBC). From December 2022 to 2023, WCPS increased the percentage of NBC Teachers (NBCTs) by 154% (31 NBCTs to 79) see data table 7a-1. WCPS increased the number of NBC Teachers in 11 certificate areas (as represented in data table 7c). Of great note, WCPS added ten teachers with certification areas not previously represented, including Music/Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood, Physical Education/Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood, Science/Early Adolescence, Social Studies History/Early Adolescence, and World Languages Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood. Additionally, NBCTs increased at Opportunity Schools: Bester: 1 to 3, Northern Middle: 0 to 8 (one transfer, seven newly certified) Pangborn 0 to 5 (one transfer, four newly certified), South Hagerstown: 1 to 4; and Western Heights: 0 to 3.

Prior to December 2023, all NBCTs in WCPS were white females (data table 7a-1). Currently, of the 79 NBCTs, seven are male, one is Hispanic, and one is two or more races. While the diversity of NBCTs in WCPS has increased from 2022 to 2023 (from 100% white females to 92% female and 8% male and from 100% white to 99% White and 1% Hispanic), there continues to be room for growth and improvement. Of the current 148 NBCT candidates in WCPS, 3% are non-white and 1.4% are Hispanic (see data table 7b-1). As a whole, 6% of the demographic composition of the WCPS teaching force is diverse. WCPS continues to work to increase diversity in the workforce (see Pillar 2: Response 5) and, likewise, in the NBCT candidacy and certification pool. In spring 2024, the NBCT coordinator provided recruitment materials to all building-level leaders and currently certified NBCTs in an effort to have them recruit teachers who may not ordinarily consider NBCT from within their schools. WCPS utilizes recruitment materials from NBPTS, including videos of diverse candidates, in marketing NBCT. School visits and personal connections with teachers have been the most successful marketing and recruitment tool and will continue to be used moving forward. The NBCT Coordinator works collaboratively with the Supervisor of Equity and Excellence to continue to build capacity and refine strategies for overall recruitment, including recruitment for underrepresented staff. One of the tasks WCPS will be working on moving forward is determining the challenges diverse staff in the district have in beginning and completing NBC, so that those challenges might be addressed moving forward. Additionally, the NBC Coordinator procures data from each candidate who withdraws from the process in terms of their reason for withdrawal and what WCPS could have done better. In the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS had nine candidates withdraw after October 1. The reasons cited for withdrawal have been the amount of work, work/life balance, and changes in the curriculum.

Recruiting and supporting diverse candidates continues to be an area for growth in WCPS. Diverse candidates need role models to see that other candidates of diversity have successfully become NBCT certified. Efforts to diversify are slowly working, and as the overall diversity of WCPS increases, the NBCT pool will also increase, as the current pool of candidates includes four diverse candidates. While the percentage is not yet correlational to the diversity in the teacher workforce, it demonstrates an increase and an upward trend each cycle. As diverse WCPS teachers continue to certify, the addition of those role models will help to build the participation of diverse candidates. WCPS has asked all WCPS NBCTs to serve as spokespeople and provide testimonies, either in writing or video. To date, four NBCTs have been willing to provide written testimony regarding the NBCT process. WCPS will

continue to work with NBCTs to provide leadership and grow the program and diversity in candidacy and certification.

Supporting NBCT candidates throughout the process helps increase certification outcomes. In spring 2023 and 2024, a job posting for NBC facilitators was posted for all current NBCTs. NBCT facilitators then attended a 3 day facilitator 'boot camp' in June 2023 (the 2024-2025 boot camp is scheduled for June 2024). The NBCT Coordinator and the facilitators meet during boot camp to reflect on what went well, what revisions need to be made, and then mapping out and crafting the plan and facilitation tools for each month for the following year. The NBCT Coordinator then meets with NBCTs who facilitate cohorts for current candidates via Zoom on the first Monday of each month. The meetings focus on what is and is not working and how to continually refine programs and processes, as well as the next steps for future training and meetings.

Several strategies and changes are being implemented in the spring and summer of 2024 to better support current and new candidates. Based on sign-ups and attendance, the virtual work sessions are not working. Candidates do not attend virtual work sessions, and it is difficult for facilitators to support candidates and for them to support one another in the group virtual platform. Two virtual work sessions were held during the 2023-2024 school year, and three candidates attended the sessions. Instead, WCPS facilitators hold work sessions at different locations in the county. The work sessions are in person with at least two facilitators present and are open for at least a two-hour block of time for candidates to come and go as needed.

WCPS believes that celebrating NBCTs is important. In December 2023, WCPS invited all recently certified NBCTs to attend a reception prior to a Board meeting. At the Board meeting, each NBCT was recognized, received a certificate, and a group photo was taken. Due to the quick turnaround, WCPS was not able to present NBCTs with other items at the Board meeting, instead, the Superintendent, Chief Communications Officer, and NB Coordinator hand-delivered items to those who had received NBC and were employed in opportunity schoos (superintendent's posts: 1, 2, 3) . The NB Coordinator delivered items to the remaining NBCs. All NBCTs received a t-shirt, stickers, NBC pin (and a star pin for those who maintained certification), a professional head-shot, and a new employee badge that says "National Board Certified Teacher" instead of teacher. Items purchased and presented to NBCTs were chosen through consultation with current NBCTs, who made the recommendations that were followed when purchases were made. Recognizing NBCTs and providing them with 'swag' to wear and utilize is one marketing tool WCPS is leveraging to increase awareness and, hopefully, recruit candidates for NBCT.

WCPS has worked to expand programming and recruitment for the five Opportunity Schools. In March, the NBCT Coordinator met with all NBCTs who are interested, or might consider, voluntarily transferring to one of the 5 Opportunity Schools. The purpose of that meeting was to discuss factors that would influence their decision-making and then to share that information with the principals of the opportunity schools. Four focus questions were used to frame the conversation. The NBCT Coordinator then met on-site with the leaders and current NBCTs at opportunity schools to discuss marketing and recruitment strategies for current WCPS NBCTs. Four focus questions were used for those five meetings. The NB Coordinator also created a spreadsheet of NBCTs in neightboring Maryland counties, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania for principals to reference and use for recruitment purposes.

WCPS is actively working on a poll of all current WCPS Teachers who are not NBCT in order to understand more about interests and barriers based on demographic data, if they plan to pursue NBCT in the future, and the factors influencing their response. The NBCT Coordinator administered a survey of all current NBCTs to determine whether they would voluntarily transfer to an opportunity school and the factors that would influence their decision. The first questions asked NBCTs whether they would consider transferring to an opportunity school. Of 62 respondents, 18 are currently teaching in an opportunity

school, 9 responded yes, 19 responded maybe, and 16 reported they would not consider transferring to an opportunity school. The primary factors influencing current NBCTs decision on whether they would consider applying to transfer to an opportunity school were: School culture, personal life, teammates, school leadership, and location. The factors teachers ranked the lowest were planning time, collaboration time, and money. The majority of respondents were unsure (36%) of how long they plan to stay at their current school or plan to stay there for more than 10 years (34%). The factors having the greatest influence on whether the NBCTs leave their current school are: school leadership, personal life, school culture, and location (needing to say b/c of location). The factors having the least influence are collaboration time, planning time, and location (would transfer, depending on location).

In prior years, WCPS held a meeting in the spring for teachers interested in pursuing NBC. The previous process was for the NB Coordinator to emailed all WCPS teachers and invited interested teachers to a spring meeting, in which there was a slide deck and NBCTs, and the Coordinator spoke. To better engage potential candidates, the NBCT Coordinator sent an email to all WCPS teachers in March 2024 and invited them to an open house on April 15, 2024. The invitation included information on how to sign up for the open house and indicate which NBCT Certificate they are interested in pursuing. The NBCT Coordinator collaborated with current NBCTs in an effort to have at least one NBCT representing each certification that potential candidates are interested in pursuing. A Google Classroom with recordings of past information sessions, a general NBPTS NBCT slide deck including general information on the NBCT process and components, and a slide deck with information specific to WCPS (deadlines and supports), and other general NBCT information Additionally, hard copies of the general portfolio instructions, applicable standards for each certificate, and What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do available both electronically and in hard copy at the open house (and electronically linked in the Google Classroom). Attendees received two hand-outs at the event: WCPS NBCT information and a question prompt and note sheet so they had support when talking with current NBCTs. Light refreshments were served. In addition to the NBCTs representing a variety of certification areas, representatives were present to share information on the Wilson NBCT cohort, and the principals of the five Opportunity Schools (Bester Elementary, Pangborn Elementary, Northern Middle, Western Heights Middle, and South Hagerstown High) were invited to set up a table to share information on their schools and attend the open house. One hundred three prospective candidates attended the open house. Informal feedback from prospective candidates and the NBCTs who attended was positive and WCPS will continue to host an open house forum in future years (instead of a sit and get meeting).

As WCPS continues to expand the NBCT program, continued efforts are being made to increase the impact on teacher leadership. For the 2023-2024 school year, NBCTs are expected to support building leaders in increasing the capacity of teacher leadership. Currently, the expectations vary from building to building. Moving forward, as WCPS further defines the career ladder, the WCPS career ladder work group will collaboratively define ways in which NBCTs are expected to increase and support teacher leadership.

WCPS is also focused on expanding the number of building-level leaders with NBCT. Because there is currently no incentive for building leaders to attain NBC (because they don't meet the definition of teacher/don't qualify for the NBCT fee incentive for fees to be paid by MSDE & WCPS), the NBCT Coordinator conducted a leadership survey of all NBCTs in Spring of 2023. The purpose of the survey was to collect data on the number of NBCTs in WCPS who plan to pursue leadership positions during their career and when in their career they plan to do so. Of the respondents, 51% of them do not want to pursue leadership positions. 19% of the NBCTs want to pursue leadership, and 28% are not certain. Of the respondents who said they do want to be a building-level leader, 76% plan to pursue leadership in the next 0-6 years. Seventeen of the respondents plan to pursue building leadership as an assistant principal/principal. The other respondents selected leadership positions such as department leader and/or lead teacher.

For employees for whom NBCT is not viable because of their certification, WCPS provides incentives, such as tuition reimbursement and salary increases, as well as partnerships with colleges. In addition to opportunities shared in the 2023 response, WCPS now offers an administrative certification and an Ed.D. program with Bowie State. WCPS staff are currently planning a partnership with a college for educational TPA licensure requirements as needed. WCPS has seen an increase in the number of men with advanced degrees. WCPS will increase the course load and options for advanced degrees, if needed and warranted by teacher/staff interest.

8. NEW - Cultivating and Managing Effective Partnerships:

How does the LEA cultivate and manage its partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHE) and educator preparation programs (EPP) to ensure the needs of all organizations are met? Consider the challenges associated with the current labor market and the individual mission and goals of each partner. Discuss how the LEA works with its partners to build relationships and adapt each organization's systems and practices to achieve shared goals.

Considerations:

- Teacher candidate placement and experiences
- Teacher induction and mentorship programs
- Talent pipelines, including alternative pathways to certification and professional development
- Advanced degree programs (e.g., in support of dual enrollment expansion, critical needs areas, etc.)
- Developing and implementing Post College and Career Readiness (CCR) pathways and CCR Support pathway
- Regular communication and feedback between LEA and IHE/EPP leadership to strengthen programs and systems

WCPS Response

Communication and Feedback

Regular communication and feedback from partners are crucial to ensuring the needs of all organizations are met and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. WCPS cultivates and manages partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHE) and educator preparation programs (EPP) in a variety of ways. The P-20 Executive Council is an education body that developed into a collaborative partnership among Frostburg State University (FSU), regional school districts, and community colleges. This advisory committee aims to foster collaboration and communication among pre-kindergarten through higher education (P-20) stakeholders. The advisory works to ensure that education at all levels is well-coordinated and seamlessly integrated, facilitating a smooth transition for students moving from one educational stage to another. By aligning educational outcomes with workforce needs, the advisory helps to prepare students more effectively for the job market, ensuring that graduates have the skills required by employers. The P-20 Executive Council membership includes representatives from Allegany County Public Schools, Garrett County Public Schools, Washington County Public Schools, Frederick County Public Schools, Mineral County Public Schools, and Bedford Area School District. Institutions of Higher Education include Frostburg State University, Allegany College of Maryland, and Garrett College.

WCPS also participates in the PDS Advisory Council, a group consisting of site coordinators, principals, program coordinators, and supervisors. The members meet each semester to review program-specific data and provide recommendations for program improvement. The collaboration opportunities involve joint program development, where WCPS works closely with educational institutions to tailor programs

that meet the district's specific needs and align with broader educational goals. Regular communication and feedback mechanisms are established to refine programs continuously. Additionally, WCPS provides practical training opportunities for students from these institutions, offering real-world experience that enrich their educational journey and enhance the school system's talent pool.

A challenge that Washington County faces is the geographic location (as noted in prior responses) on the border of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Therefore, there are many hires who have graduated from different states and live outside the WCPS/Hagerstown area. WCPS continues to seek and nurture partnerships with various colleges, both within and outside Maryland, recognizing the diverse geographical origins of its teaching staff, as well as unique opportunities for its students. WCPS is looking to expand partnerships with colleges in Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Post College and Career Readiness (CCR) pathways and CCR Support pathway
WCPS and Hagerstown Community College (HCC) have developed a robust partnership focused on enhancing dual enrollment opportunities for students. Central to this partnership is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines the responsibilities of all parties. To ensure the efficacy and evolution of this collaboration, WCPS senior staff participate in structured weekly meetings with HCC leadership to discuss and develop various aspects of the Early College Program. This communication facilitates discussions on a range of topics, including logistics, grading, mental health support, graduation requirements, and staff and family engagement. This ongoing dialogue has been vital in addressing immediate operational challenges and aligning shared educational goals.

Challenges within the partnership include addressing the needs of students who are not CCR, inconsistent messaging, and lack of established protocols. For example, systems lack guidelines on integrating students who do not meet the MCAP or 3.0 GPA criteria into the dual enrollment program. To tackle these issues, WCPS has instituted an MTSS support plan for students who are not CCR. To improve timely communication between stakeholders, WCPS and HCC are creating parent/student handbooks and adding additional information to both websites to ensure clarity and accessibility. Furthermore, biannual meetings between department heads from both institutions help scrutinize and align curriculum standards, ensuring educational offerings are both rigorous and relevant.

The partnership extends beyond administrative and curriculum alignment, focusing also on professional development and support for faculty. For instance, in the 2024-2025 school year, HCC will provide stipends for their staff to serve as advisors to WCPS staff teaching dual credit courses, fostering a direct line of communication and tailored support that transcends departmental boundaries. This system helps address the nuances of teaching different subjects across separate departments, which can be particularly challenging in diverse academic environments. Through these efforts, both WCPS and HCC are committed to creating a supportive and effective educational pathway for dual enrollment students, ensuring that all stakeholders are well-informed and that the programs continue to evolve to meet the needs of the community.

Teacher Induction Program
Through the valuation of the Teacher Induction Program, WCPS has noticed two challenges that are facing new hires (both experienced new hires and college graduates who are new to the teaching profession): 1) Using and implementing research-based instructional strategies in Tier 1 instruction that improve student learning and teacher practice, and 2) Establishing appropriate learning-focused relationships where expectations are set high and where everyone knows the routines and boundaries in the classroom. To overcome these challenges, WCPS is partnering with IHEs in online synchronous and/or face-to-face professional learning using the research-based walk-thru resources with new teachers

and pre-service teachers for the 2024-2025 school year. The Teacher Induction Program staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional strategies with first-, second-, and third-year teachers through collaboratively reviewing walk-through data.

Teacher Pipeline

WCPS engages in a collaborative placement process with colleges and universities to support the placement of teacher candidates during their student teaching. This partnership involves detailed coordination to match teacher candidates with suitable schools and mentor teachers within the district, taking into account the specific educational needs and foci of the candidates and the schools. Additionally, WCPS provides mentor teachers who guide the teacher candidates throughout their student teaching. The mentors are skilled educators who offer valuable feedback, support, and evaluations to help the candidates hone their teaching practices. A feedback loop is maintained where colleges, student teachers, and the district exchange insights on the effectiveness of the placements and the progress of the teacher candidates. This feedback is crucial for adjusting and improving future placements and teaching practices. Successful student teaching experiences often lead to job recruitment opportunities, and WCPS views these partnerships as potential pipelines for future teacher recruitment, thereby making these placements beneficial for long-term district staffing needs.

Bridging the short- and long-term solutions for WCPS is the codification of the Grow Your Own (GYO) program. While the district struggles to attract and recruit diverse candidates from outside of Washington County, the school system is fortunate to have a student population that is 46% non-white and rapidly diversifying. WCPS has seen its Multilingual (ML) student population grow by 65.1% since 2018 and is home to students from 58 countries outside of the U.S. who speak 34 languages other than English. Through a robust GYO program, WCPS will regularly promote education as a valued profession to current middle and high students through WCPS Career Coaches (further discussed in Pillar 4) and identify and cultivate future diverse educators through the Student Apprenticeship, Teacher Academy of Maryland, and Career and Technology Education programs (further discussed in prior responses and in Pillar 3). The GYO program is being designed to establish immediate opportunities for students and current staff. More importantly, it will create a self-sustaining system that will meet the district's employment needs well into the future. As noted in a prior response, students will be guided through the process of dual enrollment with Hagerstown Community College and then applying for related associate's or bachelor's degree programs and pathways to certification. The program is also designed to assist current employees who are pursuing professional development and encourages advancement through tuition reimbursement, career coaching, and consistent promotion of training and education opportunities.

Teacher Resident Program

The Maryland Accelerates Program is a collaborative initiative between Frostburg State University and WCPS. The program offers a unique teacher residency model aimed at addressing critical teacher shortages and enhancing the quality of education. The program provides a rigorous, accelerated pathway to teaching credentials, where selected participants commit to a year-long residency. During this period, residents are paired with mentor teachers in WCPS schools and complete their coursework through Frostburg State University. A significant feature of this program is the residency stipend ($35,000), which supports the participants financially throughout their training, enabling them to focus more fully on their professional development without the burden of financial constraints.

Upon successful completion of the program, residents who complete all requirements receive their teaching certification and a master's degree. In return for the educational and financial support provided, residents are required to commit to teaching in WCPS for three years. This commitment helps ensure that the district benefits from a consistent influx of well-trained, highly motivated teachers who are familiar

with the specific needs and environment of WCPS. This retention of trained educators supports long-term staffing stability and enhances the overall quality of education within the district.

The Maryland Accelerates Program strengthens the collaboration between WCPS and Frostburg State University, ensuring that the teacher training is closely aligned with the district's current and future needs. The partnership not only supports the direct infusion of new teaching talent into the district but also fosters an ongoing relationship that benefits both institutions. Continuous feedback between Frostburg and WCPS helps refine the program, ensuring that it remains relevant and responsive to the dynamics of educational demand. Thus, the program not only fills immediate teacher vacancies but also contributes to a sustained improvement in educational quality and outcomes for students in Washington County.

Advanced degree programs
As previously noted, WCPS has established a partnership with Bowie State University for an administrative certification program and a doctorate in educational leadership program. Collaborations with institutions such as Wilson College in Chambersburg, PA, enable teachers to pursue advanced degrees and National Board certification concurrently, enhancing their qualifications and professional development opportunities. WCPS partners with Frostburg State University to offer the Masters in Education Program. This program offers six concentrations: Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership, Interdisciplinary Studies, Literacy Education, School Counseling, and Special Education. WCPS partners with Mount Saint Mary and teachers can participate in the Center for Accelerated and Adult Education, Graduate School, and Center for Lifelong Learning. WCPS also has a partnership with Shepherd University. Staff can take courses through Shepherd University for certification or work towards a master's degree.

9. Educator Compensation

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 52 and 54
In March 2023, the LEA discussed how it intended to meet the requirements set forth in the Blueprint to improve teacher compensation.

The LEA's response was to ensure that teachers receive a minimum starting salary of $60,000 by July 1, 2026.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome to ensure teachers receive a minimum starting salary of $60,000 by July 1, 2026.

WCPS Response

March 2023 Submission Updates

In the March 2023 Submission, WCPS identified a 4.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for all teachers to be effective July 1, 2023. The adjustment would have ensured that all teachers received at least a 10% increase between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2024. However, the Washington County Board of County Commissioners did not fully fund the Board of Education's budget request. As a result, the salary resource pool for all bargaining units was significantly reduced, and WCPS was only able to provide a 1% COLA. As staff have analyzed the salary increase provided to teachers since 2019, an argument can be made that a new step 3 was added to the middle of the scale in FY2023, affecting any teacher with seven (7) or more years of experience. This effectively adjusted the midpoint of the scale. The adjustment to the midpoint of the scale, in conjunction with the 1% COLA in FY24, brought WCPS into compliance with the Blueprint requirement of a 10% increase. Despite the consideration just noted, the WCPS and Washington County Teachers Association (WCTA) negotiating teams have continued to work on this matter. At current, WCPS is waiting for the result of a ratification process that will increase the entire teacher scale by an additional 2% prior to the June 30, 2024 deadline.

April 2023- Present: Revisions and New Developments

Meeting the $60,000 Starting Teacher Salary Requirement

The current starting teacher salary is $57,557 (Data File 9-Compensation), which is 4.24% short of the $60,000 starting salary required by July 1, 2026. WCPS is currently in salary negotiations for the FY25 year and has budgeted to provide a 2.5% COLA for the 2024-2025 school year (pending full funding for the budget request from the county commissioners). With increased funding available in the per-student allocations in FY26 and FY27, WCPS does not anticipate any problems in meeting the proposed new starting salary. WCPS hopes to exceed $60,000 since, due to the teacher shortage, those who are offering the minimum will struggle to find new teachers.

The greatest challenge in meeting the $60,000 salary requirement is allocating the limited financial resources to the required salary increases for teachers while also meeting the other requirements of the Blueprint, including the 75% rule and providing equitable salary increases for support staff and administrators. While teacher salaries have increased considerably over the last five (5) years, salary increases for administrators have trailed. As a result, it will become increasingly difficult to recruit teachers into administrative positions, since the perceived value of taking on additional responsibility will be minimal.

WCPS has been challenged to keep pace with the significant growth in minimum wage. On July 1, 2009, the minimum wage in Maryland was $7.25 per hour. At that time, WCPS was paying its lowest-paid support employees $9.65 per hour, or 33% more than the minimum wage. Currently, the minimum wage is $15.00 per hour, and the starting wage for WCPS is $15.02, or 0.33% more than the minimum required by law. As a result, the pool of available hourly staff, such as paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodians, and food services staff, is significantly reduced, limiting what teachers can accomplish educationally without the proper staff support.

The Blueprint for Maryland's future established funding increases for teachers and doesn't directly address the administrators and support staff that must be available to support teachers in their work with students. If we are not also able to competitively attract administrators and support staff, teachers will not be able to meet the educational and emotional needs of students effectively.

Pillar 3: College and Career Readiness

10. College and Career Readiness in English Language Arts

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 57 - 76 and 81

In March 2023, the LEA described how it would ensure all students are proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade and Pre-K-5 students are on the path to becoming college and career ready in English language arts.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome ensuring all students are proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade and on the path to becoming college and career ready in English language arts. Note: LEAs must submit their final Pre-K-12 comprehensive literacy plans in alignment with the science of reading by June 28, 2024.

WCPS Response

WCPS staff, in collaboration with various stakeholders, developed a comprehensive literacy action plan to achieve the WCPS Literacy Vision. This plan underwent a thorough review process involving principals who provided valuable feedback, resulting in revisions to the comprehensive literacy action plan. This document was also revised after feedback from the Maryland Initiative for Literacy and Equity (MILE) and will be continuously adjusted as needed, serving as a guide for ongoing improvement efforts aimed at achieving the ambitious vision set forth by WCPS. Data analysis is also reflected in the context of the Comprehensive Literacy Action Plan.

The progress to support students in becoming college and career ready is evident in the following data:

DIBELS:

- Grade K - 2021, 49% at/above; 2022, 60% at/above; 2023, 68% at/above; 2024, 70% at/above
- Grade 1 - 2021, 50% at/above; 2022, 57% at/above; 2023, 61% at/above; 2024 65% at/above

MCAP:

- Grade 3 - 2019, 40.7% proficient; 2022, 46.2% proficient; 2023, 50.0% proficient
- Grade 4 - 2019, 41.7% proficient; 2022, 52.1% proficient; 2023, 50.7% proficient
- Grade 5 - 2019, 46.1% proficient; 2022, 44.8% proficient; 2023, 44.0% proficient
- Grade 6 - 2019, 44.7% proficient; 2022, 43.7% proficient; 2023, 52.3% proficient
- Grade 7 - 2019, 52.6% proficient; 2022, 48.1% proficient; 2023, 51.0% proficient
- Grade 8 - 2019, 53.6% proficient; 2022, 50.6% proficient; 2023, 54.7% proficient
- Grade 10 - 2019, 50.7% proficient; 2022, 59.1% proficient; 2023, 66.1% proficient

The goal is for 80% of students in grades K and 1 to be at or above the benchmark on DIBELS by the end of the 2024-2025 school year. The goal for students in grades 3-5 is to meet the ESSA percent proficient target for 2032, which is 68.42% proficient in grades 3-5, 71.51% proficient in grades 6-8, and 74.31% proficient in grade 10.

Progress Made to Support Students in Becoming College and Career Ready, Specifically in PK-5 ELA:
In 2023-24, the focus for supporting improvements in ELA included a focus on professional development, a culture of continuous improvement, and effective implementation of resources. Specifically, the district teams supported elementary schools with unit and lesson preparation protocols (Knowledge and Skills) using the newly selected high quality instructional materials, Core Knowledge Language Arts to internalize the primary focus objectives, understand the instructional routines, and determine how to use the materials to meet the various needs of students. We also provided instructional coaching using the WCPS Literacy Coaching Tool. Coaching was provided from the Amplify CKLA vendor, our strategic partners (TNTP), the elementary ELA Content Specialists, and the Elementary Literacy Achievement Coordinator. We also continued to build understanding of the Science of Reading through professional development, including the TNTP SoR Course that is offered to all staff preK-12.

WCPS also focused on increasing the knowledge and skills of school leaders to support effective year one implementation of CKLA. Every elementary principal engaged in two rounds of literacy learning labs in grades preK-5. The goal of these sessions was to develop a shared understanding of high quality teaching and to improve leadership practices by engaging in a shared learning experience and drawing on the expertise of others. Each lab included a pre-visit conversation to read and discuss the annotated lesson, observation of a full lesson in a District Literacy Lead Teacher's classroom, and debrief to calibrate understanding and determine next steps.

Another key strategy towards improvement was the focus on Multi-tiered Systems of Support for all students. This is detailed in questions 13 and 14.

New or Revised Strategies:
School year 2023-24 was the first full year of implementation of CKLA. It was important to have a consistent process to support teachers in internalizing the units and lessons. The unit and lesson preparation protocols (Knowledge and Skills) were new strategies used this year and are being revised for next year to best support teachers in efficient and effective implementation of CKLA. Leaders also needed resources to support their teachers in implementing CKLA. The WCPS Literacy Coaching Tool was provided for this purpose. The district leadership teams worked with schools using these resources throughout the year to deepen understanding and improve implementation. Many new and revised resources were shared to support MTSS and are detailed in questions 13 and 14.

For the 2024-2025 school year, ELA instructional priorities include a focus on high quality Tier 1 instruction with year 2 implementation of CKLA in PK-5 and year 1 implementation of Amplify ELA and StudySync in secondary, increased attention to high quality writing instruction across grade levels, and effective support of students needing additional support in Tier 2 instruction.

11. College and Career Readiness in Mathematics

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 82 - 100 and 105
In March 2023, the LEA described how it would ensure that all Pre-K-5 students are on the path to becoming college and career ready in mathematics.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA

encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.

- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome, ensuring all Pre-K-5 students are on the path to becoming college and career ready in mathematics.

Note: LEAs must submit their draft Pre-K-5 comprehensive math plans in alignment with the science of learning by September 15, 2024.

WCPS Response

Introduction

Proficiency with early numeracy, according to the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), is essential for providing each student with the opportunity to continue to have immediate access to grade-level mathematics instruction. Considering the significant role Algebra I plays in setting the foundation for future mathematical learning, achievement, and ultimately college and career readiness, it is imperative that each student is on track with grade-level mathematics by grade 3 and can access priority standards that are essential to Algebra 1 readiness in the intermediate elementary grades.

The challenge of returning to and exceeding proficiency rates from pre-Covid levels across elementary school students in grades 3-5 necessitates a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to remediation, acceleration, and support. WCPS plan, designed to increase student readiness and success in elementary mathematics, encompasses a detailed analysis of student-level data, organizational structures, excellent tier-one instructional practices, supplemental instruction, and ongoing professional development for teachers, teacher-leaders, and administrators, underpinned by the use of HQIM resources.

Mathematics Vision and Mission Statements

A good plan starts with a strong vision and mission. A partnership with TNTP began in January 2024, and it includes strategic planning support for the district mathematics team. This work began with a review of the original WCPS PreK-12 Math Vision statement, which read: *An excellent mathematics program that infuses daily opportunities for meaningful learning and ensures a deep understanding of mathematics for all learners.*

Through a reflective process, the team determined that a revision of the WCPS PreK-12 Math Vision statement was in order, and the following WCPS PreK-12 Math Vision statement was drafted in March of 2024: *All WCPS students have the right to be confident and proficient mathematicians. Through evidence-based instructional practices, all students will develop deep understandings, problem-solving, and mathematical reasoning skills to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.* This newly drafted vision is currently being shared with leadership teams for sense-making and feedback.

The WCPS mission is: *We are committed to continuously improving our implementation strategy to help us make progress over time toward our vision for excellence at scale for all students. We will measure our progress toward this vision with the following goals and measures and celebrate growth and success at every step.*

Math Data Analysis

Prior to the pandemic, WCPS met the ESSA Targets for math proficiency overall, but post-pandemic, it has failed to meet any of these benchmarks, indicating a significant setback in math achievement levels.

This setback is attributed to the disruption of consistent instruction during the pandemic. Furthermore, the school system faces disparities in math performance among various student subgroups. While WCPS saw a slight increase in MCAP proficiency rates in elementary math from 2022 to 2023, too many students are not proficient, and WCPS is not on track to reach ESSA targets for proficiency. The year-over-year decline in proficiency from grade 3 to grade 4 to grade 5 is concerning. WCPS conducted an Analysis of Math Data and noted the following trends overall in MCAP Math (grades 3-5) and for subgroups:

- Math proficiency in grades 3-5 increased slightly from 2022 to 2023, remaining relatively unchanged overall
- Pre-pandemic: WCPS met ESSA Targets for percent proficient in math
- Post-Pandemic: WCPS has not yet met any of the ESSA targets for math
- Overall:
    - Grade 3 - 2019, 41.0% proficient; 2022, 38.6% proficient; 2023, 39.3% proficient
    - Grade 4 - 2019, 37.1% proficient; 2022, 33.7% proficient; 2023, 34.7% proficient
    - Grade 5 - 2019, 38.6% proficient; 2022, 28.4% proficient; 2023, 30.3% proficient
- Students with Disabilities - not yet meeting ESSA targets:
    - Grade 3 - not yet returned to pre-pandemic proficiencies (14.2% proficient in 2019; 13.6% proficient in 2023). Continued challenge of a consistent improvement over time.
    - Grade 4—exceeding pre-pandemic proficiencies (6.7% proficient in 2019; 10.7% proficient in 2023); however, a decrease from 2022 (12.1% proficient) to 2023 (10.7% proficient). The continued challenge is a consistent improvement over time.
    - Grade 5 - exceeding pre-pandemic proficiencies, including an improvement each year (5.8% proficient in 2019; 6.3% proficient in 2022; 9.2% proficient in 2023)
- EL - not yet meeting ESSA targets:
    - Grade 3 - exceeding pre-pandemic proficiencies (14.5% proficient in 2019; 16.1% proficient in 2023)
    - Grade 4 - exceeding pre-pandemic proficiencies (10.9% proficient in 2019; 12.0% proficient in 2023)
    - Grade 5 - exceeding pre-pandemic proficiencies (6.4% proficient in 2019; 9.3% proficient in 2023)
- FARM - not yet meeting ESSA targets:
    - Grade 3 - exceeding pre-pandemic proficiencies (24.3% proficient in 2019; 27.7% proficient in 2023)
    - Grade 4 - relatively the same proficiency levels pre- and post-pandemic (21.6% proficient in 2019; 21.8% proficient in 2023)
    - Grade 5 - not yet returned to pre-pandemic proficiencies (22.1% proficient in 2019; 21.2% proficient in 2023).

WCPS Math Goals

Research in mathematics indicates the best strategy for recovery from COVID-19 is to provide access to grade-level instruction for all learners while addressing the most critical prerequisite skills just in time for tier 1 instruction (TNTP Elementary Math-Accelerate Don't Remediate). To that end, the priorities outlined in the March 2023 Blueprint Plan will remain in focus throughout the 2024-2025 school year, emphasizing two consistent goals towards enhancing math proficiency among all students.

Goal 1: Provide access to grade-level instruction for all learners while addressing the most critical prerequisite skills just in time for tier 1 instruction. This involves a committed effort to provide every student with an excellent tier 1 math classroom experience, characterized by well-planned and executed teaching strategies that incorporate elements of acceleration such as fostering strong teacher-student relationships, ensuring teacher clarity, providing effective feedback, and utilizing scaffolds.

Goal 2: Improve the academic performance of those students who need additional support, with a focus on closing the achievement gaps for special education, EL, and FARM students. All students will be provided a guaranteed multi-tiered system of support when demonstrating a struggle with mathematical content or practices. In K-5, math instruction occurs in a 90-minute math block, including 60 minutes of tier 1 instruction and 30 minutes of supplemental instruction. The structure of the 30-minute supplemental instruction time consists of two 15-minute, teacher-led small group instructional blocks that attend to the most critical prerequisite skills students need just in time for tier 1 instruction.

Addressing Feedback from the 2023 Blueprint Plan

The work toward achievement of the WCPS mathematics vision, mission, and goals is grounded by the investment in and effective use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). In the March 2023 Blueprint submission, the following feedback was provided for elementary mathematics: *While the plan indicates that new math curricular materials were adopted, it was less clear if and how these were being used in teacher training and student tutoring plans. It will be important for the district to quickly integrate and use the new math curriculum consistently. The rollout should be closely monitored.*

WCPS purchased HQIM, *K-5 Illustrative Mathematics* (IM) through Imagine Learning and *PreKindergarten Bridges* from The Math Learning Center and began their implementation in the 2021-2022 school year. Since implementation, all professional learning in elementary mathematics has been grounded in the HQIMs. Every kindergarten through grade 5 classroom teacher received twelve (12) hours of initial implementation professional learning from the vendor in August of 2021 and an additional three (3) hours in October 2021, including but not limited to (1) understanding the resources available at the curriculum, unit, and lesson level (IM Teach and Learn Part 1 Asynchronous Work), (2) navigating to key resources for instruction and planning, (3) supports to increase access for Students with Disabilities and English Learners, (4) understanding assessments, practice problems, and centers (IM Teach and Learn Part 3 Asynchronous Work), (5) collaboratively planning for Unit 1, and (6) in October 2021, reflecting on implementation to date and planning with a focus on pedagogy (Oct 14 PD Agenda 3-5 Teachers). Likewise, every prekindergarten teacher received initial implementation training and follow-up training with *Bridges* in August and October of 2021, respectively.

Although vendor-led professional learning has been depleted, the WCPS mathematics office continues to provide professional learning experiences that consistently integrate the use of the HQIMs through effective teaching practices. For example, in August 2023, WCPS provided professional learning to all classroom teachers to support the planning and implementation of Unit 1 for math using the Understanding by Design (UbD) process of planning with the end in mind. In addition, teachers were provided with learning around the Maryland modeling and reasoning evidence statements and MCAP rubrics by way of tasks in the HQIM (August 2023 Math Supervisor Led PD). WCPS also offers optional teacher professional learning throughout the school year based on modeling and reasoning in tier 1 instruction and supplemental instruction using the HQIM.

The HQIM implementation is monitored in several ways. Quantitatively, it is monitored through student performance on WCPS Math Interim assessments, which are aligned with MCAP, as well as through K-5 Illustrative Mathematics End-of-Unit assessments (EOU) and PreK student interviews and checklists. Qualitatively, HQIM implementation was informally monitored through school-based walk-throughs with district-level Math Content Specialists. While quantitative student performance data and informal walk-throughs are useful, it was determined after two years of implementation that additional monitoring and feedback to teachers regarding effective implementation was necessary. Therefore, starting in the 2023-2024 school year, the HQIM implementation is now also monitored more specifically through school-based walk-throughs using a look-for tool called the "WCPS PreK & K-5 Problem-Based Math Classroom Look-Fors" . The look-fors are adapted from the implementation expectations of the HQIMs

and designed to include effective teaching practices from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

In addition, implementation is monitored through the Classroom Focused Improvement Process (CFIP) at the school level and in coordination with the district Math Content Specialists - a cycle of collaborative planning using the HQIM Teacher Resource Guide, data analysis, looking at student work, and making adjustments to instruction accordingly to support student understanding. The use of this process allows for district and school-level insights into the integrity of the use of the HQIM and provides opportunities for feedback directly to teams of teachers.

The WCPS Essential Curriculum has been enhanced each year since year one of implementation of the HQIM to honor teacher feedback and to provide added clarity around implementation using the 90-minute math block, including 60 minutes of tier 1 instruction and 30 minutes of supplemental instruction (2023-2024 Elementary Math Grade2Unit4B). For example, during Summer 2023, the WCPS Essential Curriculum was enhanced to include specific ways to utilize the HQIM to support supplemental instruction (i.e., tutoring: teacher-led small groups of 4 or fewer students) and students who are at risk of falling behind in mathematics as designated by an Early Warning System (EWS) implemented in the Fall of 2023. The language of the EWS and guidance for addressing student needs through a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) using the HQIM was embedded into WCPS Essential Curriculum documents for the 2023-2024 school year (see page 6 of 2023-2024 Elementary Math Grade2Unit4B).

Introduction to New/Revised Strategies and Activities
In addition to the implementation of the HQIM and the new and/or revised strategies related to the HQIM described above, the WCPS mathematics team has continued to adjust other strategies and/or activities through organizational structures, tier one instructional practices, supplemental instruction, and ongoing professional development for teachers, teacher-leaders, and administrators.

New/Revised Organizational Structures
The WCPS Executive Director of Elementary Education, in coordination with content supervisors and content specialists, provides a structure for ongoing support to elementary school principals in relation to curriculum and instruction (2023-2024 Elementary Principal Supports). Prior to the 2023-2024 school year, these supports included monthly leadership meetings and cohort visits.

Monthly Leadership Council meetings with the purpose of (1) building a culture of learning focused around supporting each other and improving student achievement and (2) reinforcing teaching and learning as a primary lever of positive impact on student achievement by spending time analyzing data and determining instructional strategies that have high impact instruction to support student achievement.

Cohort Visits where the 26 elementary schools were broken down into smaller groups, or “cohorts”, of school with commonalities. The primary purpose of the cohort visits was to visit each school in the cohort and hold meetings in those schools in order to complete walkthroughs where administrators are able to grow and learn together based upon a common experience.

At the start of the 2023-2024 school year, it was evident, based on formal teacher observation data and feedback from principals, that the experiences visiting classrooms during Cohort Visits were not consistently grounded in common practices, and principal feedback to teachers was inconsistent. To provide an opportunity to calibrate effective instruction using the HQIMs, the Cohort Visits were replaced with WCPS Learning Labs in each of the content areas: math, ELA, science, and social studies. The purpose of the Learning Labs is for administrators to engage in a learning experience in order to develop a shared understanding of high-quality teaching and hone their leadership practices by drawing on the

expertise of others. The Learning Labs for Mathematics are described in more detail in relation to improving tier one instruction below.

In addition to replacing the Cohort Visits with Learning Labs, quarterly data meetings were added across the 2023-2024 school year for each elementary school. These data meetings are attended by the Executive Director of Elementary Education, a district-level math, reading, and special education specialist, and the school's instructional leadership team. The purpose of the quarterly data meetings is for the school to (1) provide a big picture view of data - celebrations and challenges, (2) provide individual student-level data - celebrations and challenges, and (3) collaboratively determine immediate district support as needed in order to make progress toward school improvement goals (2023-24 Quarterly Data Collaboration School Visits). Nearing the end of the first year of the quarterly data meetings, the response from schools has been positive in relation to the level of just-in-time support provided by the district team. The impact on student achievement in math, reading, and special education is yet to be determined based on Spring 2023 MCAP and beyond.

The elementary school schedule is a challenge when it comes to finding job-embedded time for teacher planning and collaboration for tier 1 and supplemental instruction. To address this challenge, WCPS is piloting a new elementary schedule at two schools in the 2023-2024 school year that allows for additional planning time for teachers. Some of this extra time is dedicated to teacher collaboration and professional learning around mathematics, as scheduled by the school's instructional leadership team and supported by the district-level Math Content Specialist. With the eventual implementation of the career ladder, WCPS hopes to expand job-embedded professional learning and collaboration into more elementary schools. In the meantime, for the 23-24 and 24-25 school years, WCPS has built seven (7) 2-hour early dismissal days into the school calendar to allow teachers time for collaboration, professional learning, and self-directed planning.

New/Revised Strategies for WCPS Math Goal 1 - Improve Tier One Instruction
Based on current MCAP math proficiency rates in grades 3-5 remaining below 40%, WCPS believes Tier 1 instruction is still the greatest priority. All students must have daily access to grade-level instruction. However, we know that students have gaps in learning, and research shows that small-group supplemental instruction is an excellent tool to close these gaps. As such, all K-5 math instruction occurs in a 90-minute math block, including 60 minutes of tier 1 instruction and 30 minutes of supplemental instruction. The structure of the 30-minute supplemental instruction time consists of two 15-minute, teacher-led small group instructional sessions that attend to the most critical prerequisite skills students need just in time for tier 1 instruction. All PreK math instruction occurs in a 60-minute math block.

A challenge in prekindergarten has been addressing the diverse needs of even the youngest learners in the 60-minute math block. WCPS addressed this challenge in two ways during the 2023-2024 school year. PreK paraprofessionals assigned to each classroom were trained in the WCPS essential curriculum for math and in the HQIM. WCPS purchased *Pre-K Bridges* from the Math Learning Center and initially implemented it in the 2021-2022 school year. As part of the implementation process, PreK teachers were provided with professional development for each of the nine mathematics modules included within this resource. However, paraprofessionals, who are an integral part of the instruction in PreK classrooms, were not a guaranteed part of this training. During the 2023-2024 school year, the district mathematics team maximized the new structure of the seven (7), 2-hour early dismissal days by providing all PreK paras with professional development specific to the mathematics essential curriculum and HQIM. Additionally, all PreK paras were provided with an abridged teacher's guide so that classes could be divided into smaller groups, with both the teacher and paraprofessional teaching the groups of students.

A challenge that persisted even with the implementation of *PreK Bridges* was a way for teachers to assess where students were performing on standards connected to the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

(KRA). To address this challenge, WCPS created an assessment using an interview format to diagnose specific areas of need. This assessment is given two times per year. Teachers use an alignment tool to design instruction appropriate to these needs. Both teacher and paraprofessionals provide direct instruction to students needing additional support during the 60-minute math block.

For all grade levels in mathematics, WCPS is working to strengthen principal feedback and coaching toward effective mathematics teaching practices using the HQIM through the Learning Lab structure described above. Each principal was provided with a choice of grade level to visit based on their professional development needs or teacher needs in their building. Principals had the opportunity to visit two different grade level model mathematics classrooms (hosted by the District Mathematics Lead Teachers) during the 2023-2024 school year with a focus on: (1) What specifically did the Problem-Based Classroom experience look like and sound like? (WCPS PreK & K-5 Problem-Based Math Classroom Look-Fors). What is the impact on student learning? (2) "How is the teacher providing access to grade-level learning?" (September 2023 Math Learning Lab). Principal feedback has been overwhelmingly positive as evidenced by specific action steps named and taken by each principal specific to their school math needs. WCPS plans to continue with Learning Labs in the 2024-2025 school year.

New/Revised Strategies for WCPS Math Goal 2 - Provide Supplemental Instruction
As mentioned previously, the second goal is to improve the academic performance of students who need additional support with a focus on closing achievement gaps for special education, EL, and FARM students. Multilingual learners (ML, formerly EL or English learners): To further support ML students, WCPS is offering professional development during the summer of 2024 to school-based leaders, classroom teachers, and ML co-teachers on the use of research-based Math Language Routines (MLR). These routines are embedded in the elementary math HQIM as equitable teaching practices for implementation (Math Language Routines - IM CERTIFIED® BLOG) and will be implemented with the intention of supporting any/all learners, including FARM students, with improving productive mathematical discourse. In addition, the district math team is collaborating with the district ML team to provide a hybrid workshop series during Summer 2024 through WIDA, entitled "Developing Language for Learning in Mathematics."

Students with Disabilities (SWD): To improve math outcomes for students with disabilities, WCPS is working to enhance instruction through the use of professional learning. WCPS provides monthly job-embedded professional learning to school-based special education case managers. The 2023-2024 focus of the work has been around common language and understandings between the math department and special educators for math problem-solving IEP goals and objectives and the best practice response(s) to meet the needs of individual students in the area of problem-solving. A challenge is consistency with special education IEP goals and objectives that are written as broad goals where instruction can be provided across a school year and aligned consistently with tier 1, grade-level instruction. To address this challenge, the district math team collaborated with the district special education team to develop one-hour, monthly professional learning opportunities specific to mathematics for elementary school Special Education Case Managers. The Spring semester of 2024 was used to provide learning to case managers around problem-solving in mathematics as aligned with MSDE grade-level evidence statements for the modeling cycle and aligned with resources provided in the HQIM (January 2024 Case Manager Math PD). A review of IEP goals and objectives will be conducted to determine the level of implementation from the professional learning. The district special education and mathematics leadership teams are continuing to work collaboratively to determine common language, messaging, and expectations around math calculation IEP goals and objectives with a focus on readiness for Algebra. This professional learning will be rolled out to case managers throughout the 2024-2025 school year. A plan for including classroom math teachers with similar professional learning will be developed in the 2024-2025 school year.

During the 30-minute supplemental instruction part of the math block, students receiving math intervention participate in an evidence-based acceleration-focused model of instruction. This instruction consists of the use of the Essential Curriculum and Supplemental Instruction resources and includes student-led practice, student-led supplemental instruction, and teacher-led supplemental instruction.

Student-Led Practice: Student-led practice is guided by resources from the HQIM and determined by the teacher as to what additional practice of tier 1 skills students need at the point of instruction.

Student-Led Supplemental Instruction: The transition from 60 minutes of whole class, tier 1 instruction, to 30 minutes of supplemental instruction, including teacher-led small groups, has been a challenge for teachers. Specifically, the students who did not work directly with the teacher struggled to stay on task and intellectually engaged. To support student-led supplemental instruction, WCPS enhanced the guidance provided in the Essential Curriculum documents and braided funds to purchase a new assessment called HMH *Growth Measure* in grades K-5. Students take this assessment three times a year (only twice for grade K), and the results of the assessment help educators refine their instructional next steps around math content. The five performance levels categorize student performance in the context of where each student is "now" at the time of test taking and provide a target for where they should be to reach grade level by the end of the school year. To align assessment results with meeting students with instruction at their level in order to attend to unfinished learning from the past in grades 2-5, an additional supplemental resource was purchased and included in the essential curriculum for the 2023-2024 school year and beyond - an individualized digital tool for grades 2-5 math, called *Waggle.* This tool provides an engaging way to address gaps in student understanding and does so individually, therefore providing students with additional engagement while not working directly with the classroom teacher during student-led supplemental instruction time. *Waggle* offers adaptive practice and instruction in math. It is designed to build foundational skills and accelerate math content growth through engaging, age-appropriate lessons, games, and multilingual support. One of the unique features of *Waggle* is its ability to use HMH *Growth Measure* scores for automatic student placement. This integration ensures that instruction is optimized for each student's needs and that progress is continuously monitored and adjusted. Professional development has been provided throughout this first year of implementation and will continue to be provided into the 2024-2025 school year to assist teachers in even higher levels of engagement with *Waggle* for students.

Teacher-Led Supplemental Instruction: Intervention is facilitated by classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and/or special education teachers. Students participate in small group instruction in increments of 15 minutes based on student needs as determined by ongoing classroom assessments aligned with the HQIM, WCPS Math Interims, and/or HMH *Growth Measure*. This form of tier 2 instruction is fluid based on ongoing progress monitoring by unit of tier 1 instruction. The more support a student needs, the more often the student will receive teacher-led supplemental instruction in small groups of four students or less. Because grades 2-5 teachers have the support of *Waggle*, it became evident that grades K-1 teachers needed some additional support with how to best address the early numeracy needs of students. To address this challenge, WCPS used TSI funds to purchase *Ready Set Math* by Math Recovery to further support supplemental instruction in grades K and 1. The content of this teacher resource series is organized into modules across a range of topics for teaching and learning number concepts and skills. The development of strong number knowledge is an important goal for all students and provides the foundation for learning across other domains of mathematics. The resource also includes hands-on materials for students. Professional development has been provided throughout the year, just-in-time by module for teachers and paraprofessionals. This supplemental resource provides teachers with additional support in diagnosing specific learning gaps in the early numbers while also providing the instructional sequence of learning to address those gap(s).

Progress monitoring allows teachers and administrators to identify who needs additional support quickly. Progress Monitoring of supplemental instruction occurs through the use of the early warning system (EWS) and the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) plans, which were newly purchased and used in the 2023-2024 school year through the WCPS Student Information System, Synergy. Progress monitoring using these systems is described in more detail in question #13.

New/Revised Professional Development
With a continued focus in 2023-2024 on the same two WCPS math goals from the previous year, but with new supplemental resources in place, it was important to provide principals and elementary Lead Teachers with ongoing professional learning. WCPS meets monthly with principals and LTs. The district math team provided an average of one hour of professional learning each month with an alternating focus between the two district mathematics goals, including explicit integration of how the HQIM directly supports the achievement of those goals. To further connect the district math goals with the school-based school improvement planning process, the district math team updated a sample school improvement plan (SIP) math goal and action plan (pages 2-3 of Sample Math SIP Goal and Action Plan). This sample goal and action plan provides schools with an example of one way to tie the SIP with mathematics assessments, including the newly purchased *Growth Measure* assessment, and with effective mathematics teaching practices based on teacher and student needs. To provide additional opportunity for continuity with goals, the district math team also created a sample teacher SLO using student results from the WCPS Math Interims as related to modeling and reasoning, as well as the newly purchased *Growth Measure* assessment. Sample SLOs are provided for grades PreK, K, and 1-5 (Sample Math SLO Grades 1-5). As evidenced by individual school SIPs, a majority of elementary schools chose to use some version of the sample math SIP goal and action plan. Likewise, many classroom teachers also choose to use the sample math-based SLO for their personal SLO. The student outcomes of these actions will be analyzed and adjusted after the 2024 MCAP Math results are released.

Based on walk-throughs of math classrooms in schools and principal and LT feedback, a challenge for school achievement of their SIP goals for math in grades 4 and 5 continues to be the depth of the classroom teacher's content knowledge of math. During the 2022-2023 school year, WCPS created and offered an MSDE course to all grade 5 teachers on using the HQIM (Illustrative Mathematics) to implement the five practices for orchestrating productive mathematics instruction. Each professional learning session included the unpacking of a lesson that would be coming up in tier 1 instruction, along with the explicit practice of the implementation of the content of that lesson using the five practices for orchestrating productive math instruction. Teachers would then implement in their classrooms and return to the next professional learning session to reflect and repeat the preparation for a new lesson. About 15% of grade 5 teachers participated in this MSDE course facilitated by a WCPS Math Content Specialist. To provide support to grade 4 teachers, a similar course was added for the 2023-2024 school year (Problem Based Teaching & Learning In the 4th Grade Classroom Course Outline).. Only about 10% of grade 4 teachers participated in the course. The depth of content knowledge aligned with effective teaching practices continues to be a challenge for grade 4 and grade 5 classroom teachers. WCPS intends to highlight the positive outcomes of these MSDE courses once MCAP results are realized, utilize teachers who have been through the course to advertise the advantages of the course and use teacher-leaders to facilitate the course in the future.

Equitable math instructional practices for teachers of all grade levels are a focus for the elementary mathematics team's long-range professional learning plan for leaders and teachers, including NCTM's effective teaching practices (specifically highlighting strategies for facilitating effective mathematics discourse) and developing strong math identities for leaders, coaches, teachers, and students. This work has been recently renewed and strengthened by the earlier-mentioned partnership with TNTP, which began in January 2024. This work began with district-level strategic planning and revision of the WCPS mathematics vision statement. In March 2024, the first professional learning experience supported by

TNTP was delivered to elementary Lead Teachers with a focus on their math identity and the impact of that math identity on coaching teachers in mathematics (March 2024 TNTP Math LT Session 1). The new WCPS mathematics vision statement was also shared. Lead teachers were asked to define the meaning of the vision statement by way of their math identity. This work with TNTP will be ongoing work through the end of the 2023-2024 school year and throughout the 2024-2025 school year with a long-range plan of building unit and lesson internalization protocols in common with ELA, as well as looking at student work protocols as tied to progressions in math content and effective instructional practices used in the HQIM.

Conclusion
Due to ongoing challenges to close gaps in student math understanding, the WCPS Mathematics leadership team continues to learn about the most effective strategies and leadership moves for ongoing district improvement in mathematics. Current learning includes, but is not limited to, K-12 team participation in UnboundEd's *Math Leadership for Grades K-12 Pathway*, MSDE Math Learning Lab in Worchester County and Achievement Network's *Professional Learning Communities professional learning pathway*, and Spring 2024 MSDE training with *The Ongoing Assessment Project* (OGAP). The team will synthesize learning during the Summer of 2024 in order to plan and make any adjustments to the current math plan.

12. **NEW - Algebra Readiness and Success:** Describe the LEA's plan to increase student readiness and success in Algebra I at both the middle and high school levels, including specific strategies and supports to intervene with students struggling with math. Discuss related challenges and data as needed.

Considerations:
- Analysis of student-level data by specific skills
- Intervention models and progress monitoring
- Training and professional development for teachers
- High-quality school day tutoring

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome of increasing middle and high school students' college and career readiness in mathematics.

WCPS Response
Algebra I is a critical subject in the field of mathematics, providing students with a foundation for advanced math courses and preparation for careers. The challenge of ensuring student readiness and success in Algebra I is pivotal for WCPS, especially considering the significant role Algebra I plays in setting the foundation for future mathematical learning and achievement. The decline in proficiency rates from pre-Covid levels across middle and high school students in Algebra I necessitates a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to remediation, acceleration, and support. WCPS's plan, designed to increase student readiness and success in Algebra I, encompasses a detailed analysis of student-level data, organizational structures, excellent tier-one instructional practices, supplemental instruction, and ongoing professional development for teachers, teacher-leaders, and administrators, underpinned by the use of HQIM resources.

Mathematics Vision and Mission Statements
As described in question #11, the revised WCPS PreK-12 Math Vision is: *All WCPS students have the right to be confident and proficient mathematicians. Through evidence-based instructional practices, all*

students will develop deep understandings, problem-solving, and mathematical reasoning skills to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

Math Data Analysis
Similar to elementary, Algebra I proficiency rates have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. The decline in Algebra I proficiency rates is attributed to the disruption of consistent instruction during the pandemic. Furthermore, the school system faces disparities in math performance among various student subgroups. WCPS has conducted an Analysis of Math Data and noted the following overall trends in middle and high school Algebra 1:

- Middle School: There was a decrease of more than 23% in proficiency from 2019 to 2022 (pre- and post-COVID), and there was an increase of about 2% from 2022 to 2023.
- High School - Grade 9 (majority first-time Algebra 1):
    - Decrease of about 20% proficiency from 2019 to 2022 (pre- to post-Covid). Increase of about 8% from 2022 to 2023.
    - SWD has rebounded to roughly pre-Covid percent proficient (7.7% proficient in 2019 and 7.3% proficient in 2023).
    - Continued Challenge—FARM: WCPS has not returned to pre-COVID proficiencies yet (20% proficient in 2019; 12.6% proficient in 2023).
- High School - Grade 10 (majority repeating Algebra 1; 2nd time):
    - Increase of more than 10% proficient from 2019 (8.7% proficient) to 2023 (18.8% proficient).
    - Algebra 1 subscores for proficiency in modeling and reasoning outpace that of proficiency in content.

Progress made in grade 9 and grade 10 proficiency in Algebra 1 from 2022 to 2023 is attributed to several new structures that were implemented in high schools in the 2022-2023 school year. WCPS implemented a 90-minute course period for all first-time Algebra 1 students. This instruction design is consistent with elementary and middle school instruction by providing 60 minutes of tier 1 grade-level instruction and 30 minutes of supplemental instruction.

In middle school, Algebra 1 results showed limited progress, with an increase of only about 2% proficiency from 2022 to 2023. Likewise, no growth, a slight increase, or a decrease in proficiency was seen from 2022 to 2023 in proficiency on grade 6, grade 7, and grade 8 MCAP for Math (Data tab 12-Middle School Proficiency by Year) and the year-over-year decline in proficiency from grades 5-8 is concerning (Data tab 12-Middle School Proficiency by PL). WCPS Middle School math data has not returned to pre-Covid proficiency rates and has yet to meet an ESSA target pre- or post-COVID. To ensure that WCPS meets the ESSA proficiency targets moving forward, several structures have been implemented in middle schools in the 2023-2024 school year. These efforts will mirror the changes in the math block structure made in the 2022-2023 school year in high school Algebra 1, which showed a marked improvement in student proficiency overall.

Organizational Structures: Staffing
It is important to understand the staffing and scheduling model in place to support math instruction to better understand how WCPS will increase student readiness and success in Algebra I.

There is one Middle School Math Content Specialist and one High School Math Content Specialist at the district level. These roles include the development, evaluation, and ongoing refinement of the middle and high school math curriculum to ensure alignment with both the Maryland College and Career Ready standards and the diverse learning needs of students. An integral part of these roles involves the selection of appropriate textbooks, digital resources, and the integration of technology into the curriculum. Additionally, both Content Specialists play a pivotal role in orchestrating professional development for

math teachers, offering training on HQIM materials, researched-based instructional strategies, effective assessment tools, and data analysis. This role also provides targeted coaching and performance evaluations for non-tenured teachers.

There is one District Math Lead Teacher (DMLT) at each grade level, pre-K-High School. The DMLT serves as a member of the district Mathematics Leadership Team, models WCPS best practices for effective mathematics planning, assessment, and instruction with the WCPS Essential Curriculum, provides support to elementary or secondary school teams and teachers as a host classroom and facilitator of mathematics professional learning opportunities (DMLT Job Description). The DMLTs provide model teaching opportunities through professional learning videos, classroom visits, and planning sessions with leaders and classroom teachers. All new middle and high school math teachers have the opportunity to visit a DMLT during their first year of teaching with the goal of learning, reflecting, and taking action. They are pivotal in spearheading professional development initiatives and organizing and delivering professional and in-service training in coordination with the district Math Content Specialists. Their involvement in curriculum development is instrumental, working to ensure that the math curriculum aligns with state standards while catering to the diverse learning needs of students alongside selecting and modeling appropriate use of textbooks and instructional resources.

Every WCPS school has at least one Lead Teacher. Lead teachers are not teachers of record for students. They primarily work with classroom teachers through coaching cycles to improve student achievement. Lead teachers play a crucial role in mentoring and guiding classroom teachers, as well as overseeing the development and implementation of curricula. This role often involves facilitating collaborative planning and school-based professional development.

Every middle and high school has a Mathematics Department Leader (DL). A significant part of the DL's responsibility involves modeling and/or mentoring best planning and teaching practices for effective instruction to support and monitor essential curriculum implementation. DLs facilitate professional development and the analysis of student performance data, as well as leverage the interpretations to drive instructional improvements and targeted interventions through collaborative planning with teams of math teachers (DL Job Description).

Organizational Structures: School Schedules

In 2022-2023, all high schools moved to a 90-minute, year-long Algebra I course for all first-time learners. Prior to this move, Algebra I courses were 49-60 minutes long. In the 2023-2024 school year, all middle schools moved to a year-long, 90-minute daily block for all middle school math courses, including middle school advanced courses and Algebra 1. Prior to 2023-2024, each middle school maintained its own master schedule and determined the amount of time needed by each content area.

A challenge of implementation of the 90-minute math block for middle school and for high school Algebra 1 has been to assist teachers with the adjustment to a new structure of 60 minutes of tier 1 instruction and 30 minutes of supplemental instruction. With school-based leadership collaboration, a reflection tool was developed during the 2023-2024 school year to support leaders and teachers with success criteria for the 90-minute math block and for effective instructional practices. This tool (Secondary Math Look-For Tool) is used for instructional leadership team walk-throughs and teacher self-assessment in order to assess the implementation of the WCPS essential curriculum.

To further support math classroom teacher implementation of the 90-minute math block structure and implementation of the HQIM, every middle and high school has weekly collaborative planning time and professional learning for teachers. Schools have prioritized scheduling common planning times by grade level or by course, prioritizing Algebra 1 at the high school level. These opportunities are built into the

teacher's 7.5-hour workday and are planned and implemented at the school level by school-based leadership teams, including principals, assistant principals, Lead Teachers, and Department Leaders.

WCPS Math Goal 1: Improve Tier One Instruction

Research in mathematics indicates the best strategy for recovery from COVID-19 is to provide access to grade-level instruction for all learners while addressing the most critical prerequisite skills just in time for tier 1 instruction (NCTM-NCSM Mathematics Learning 2021 and Beyond). Therefore, the top priority in WCPS for mathematics is to improve proficiency for all students by providing excellent initial instruction, a guaranteed tier 1 math classroom experience that is planned and implemented through components of acceleration (teacher-student relationships, teacher clarity, feedback, scaffolds), while using the formative assessment process to ensure students reach the desired results.

WCPS has braided funds to ensure all math teachers can utilize an HQIM resource. Middle School math courses and Algebra 1 in middle school are in year one of implementation with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's (HMH) *Into Math* and *Into AGA*. These resources include support for all tiers of instruction, including a screening assessment to identify students at risk of falling behind in mathematics and instructional resources to support identified students. Professional learning around the new HQIM has been developed throughout the year by way of collaboration between WCPS math leadership and the HMH teams. Professional learning has been provided to all math teachers and special education math content teachers during guaranteed, WCPS-identified supervisor-led professional days. Professional learning has been provided monthly to math department leaders to support implementation through a train-the-trainer model so that math department leaders can take additional training back to the math teachers at their school. In addition, each school was provided with a differentiated choice in a school-based professional learning experience one time during year one of implementation. WCPS will gather feedback from classroom teachers, EL co-teachers, and special educators as we near the end of the 2023-2024 school year and will use this feedback to inform summer 2024 enhancements to the WCPS EC for the 2024-2025 school year.

High School Mathematics for Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2 is in year three of implementation with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's (HMH) *Into AGA*. These resources include support for all tiers of instruction. Professional learning around the HQIM was developed throughout year one of implementation by way of collaboration between WCPS math leadership and the HMH teams. Professional learning has been provided to all math teachers and special education math content teachers during guaranteed, WCPS-identified supervisor-led professional days. Professional learning has been provided monthly to math department leaders to support the implementation of tier 1 instruction and supplemental instruction through a train-the-trainer model for math department leaders to take the training back to the math teachers at their school.

In addition to the HQIM resources, feedback provided by Algebra 1 teachers over time has indicated a need for explicit connections to the Maryland College and Career Ready (MCCR) evidence statements for math, specifically for modeling and reasoning. To address this feedback, teams of teachers, in coordination with the High School Math Content Specialist, have worked to adjust tasks provided by the HQIM in a way that more explicitly aligns with the language of the MCCRS. Similar work is anticipated during the Summer of 2024 in the WCPS middle school mathematics curriculum.

Part of improving tier one mathematics instruction includes progress monitoring instruction and student achievement. To assist, WCPS provides an assessment calendar as a guiding document for county-wide math assessments. This calendar (WCPS Testing Calendar 2023-24 Secondary) provides schools with timelines to monitor the progress of students in Math. WCPS provides Pearson SchoolNet as a data dashboard and warehouse for monitoring district, school, and disaggregated student achievement. WCPS Math Interims are given at each grade level (6-8) and in each high school mathematics course (Algebra 1,

Geometry, and Algebra 2) three times per year. These formative assessments provide information to teachers and to the district on student proficiency in recent grade-level learning. The average of the three interims has a positive alignment with MCAP Math results. In addition, at the high school level, formative Algebra 1 assessments are available through the Pearson SchoolNet platform for school-based teams to choose to implement for additional progress monitoring in between each WCPS Math Interim.

Due to the low levels of student achievement in middle school mathematics, according to MCAP, and due to the gaps in prerequisite math skills due to the pandemic, WCPS determined that something beyond the at-grade-level WCPS Math Interim assessments was needed in order to fully address students' needs. Therefore, WCPS integrated the use of the HMH *Growth Measure* assessment as a new tool during the 2023-2024 school year. *Growth Measure* is a digital, adaptive math screening tool given to students in grades 6-8 math courses three times per year. It provides information regarding math content knowledge far below, below, approaching, at, and above grade level, providing teachers with more detailed information about students who are at risk of falling behind in mathematics and specifically on which content standards.

WCPS Math Goal 2: Provide Supplemental Instruction
The second top priority is to improve the academic performance of those students who need additional support, with a focus on closing the achievement gaps for special education, EL, and FARM students. All students will be provided a guaranteed multi-tiered system of support when demonstrating a struggle with mathematical content or practices. WCPS uses an acceleration-focused approach to implement evidence-based models for tier 2 and tier 3 instruction by way of the 30-minute, math-block-embedded supplemental instruction time.

Principal and Lead Teacher professional learning around the purpose, structure, and resources of the 30-minute supplemental instruction time began with high schools during the 2021-2022 school year in order to intentionally support schools with the implementation of the 90-minute Algebra 1 block in the 2022-2023 school year. High Schools had common professional learning structures for each week, and schools prioritized at least one 45-minute common planning period in Algebra 1 teacher schedules. For middle school, principal and Lead Teacher professional learning around the purpose, structure, and resources of supplemental instruction began during the 2021-2022 school year and continued through the 2022-2023 school year in order to intentionally support schools with the implementation of the 90-minute math block in the 2023-2024 school year. (March 2023 Lead Teacher PD)

Qualitative monitoring of the implementation of supplemental instruction is done through walk-throughs and teacher self-assessment at the school level in coordination with the 4 A's process (Assess, Analyze, Act, Adjust) to assess the implementation of supplemental and intervention supports. The observable indicators are used to set goals, track progress, and make adjustments as part of a continuous school improvement process. (Success Criteria - MS Supplemental Instruction & SLP)

During supplemental instruction, students receiving tier 2 math intervention participate in an evidence-based acceleration-focused model of instruction. This instruction consists of the use of the Essential Curriculum and Supplemental Instruction resources (Algebra 1 Supplemental/Intervention Resources), including student-led practice, student-led supplemental instruction, and teacher-led supplemental instruction.

Student-Led Practice: Student-led practice is guided by resources from the HQIM and determined by the teacher as to what additional practice of tier 1 skills students need at the point of instruction.
Student-Led Supplemental Instruction: The transition from 60 minutes of whole class, tier 1 instruction, to 30 minutes of supplemental instruction, including teacher-led small groups, has been a challenge for secondary math teachers. Specifically, the students who did not work directly with the math teacher

struggled to stay on task and intellectually engaged. To support student-led supplemental instruction, WCPS braided funds to purchase an individualized digital tool for grades 6-8 math, called *Waggle,* to provide an engaging way to address gaps in student understanding. *Waggle* offers adaptive practice and instruction in math. It is designed to build foundational skills and accelerate math content growth through engaging, age-appropriate lessons, games, and multilingual support. One of the unique features of *Waggle* is its ability to use HMH *Growth Measure* scores for automatic student placement. For high school Algebra I courses, WCPS purchased *Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces* (ALEKS) to support student-led supplemental instruction time. *ALEKS* supports high school Algebra I courses by using adaptive technology to identify students' individual strengths and weaknesses, providing personalized learning paths with targeted practice and instruction. This approach helps fill in knowledge gaps and reinforces understanding, supporting students in achieving mastery of the math content of Algebra I.

Teacher-Led Supplemental Instruction: Tier 2 Instruction is facilitated by classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and/or special education math content teachers. Students participate in small group instruction in increments of 15 minutes based on student needs as determined by ongoing classroom assessments, WCPS Math Interims, and/or HMH *Growth Measure*. This form of tier 2 instruction is fluid, based on ongoing progress monitoring by unit. The more support a student needs, the more often the student will receive teacher-led supplemental instruction in small groups of four students or less. Because grades 6-8 math teachers have the support of *Waggle* and high school Algebra 1 teachers have the support of *ALEKS*, middle school Algebra 1 teachers became challenged with the best ways to determine any prerequisite content skills that their advanced learners may be missing. To address this challenge, some grade 8 Algebra 1 teachers are currently piloting the use of *Growth Measure* for Algebra 1 to determine if the data provided can better support teachers with prioritizing prerequisite skill needs for advanced learners who may have unfinished learning from Covid-19. A decision will be made in the Summer of 2024 as to the next steps for the 2024-2025 school year.

Tier 3 intervention is used by Special Education Math Content Teachers to support the implementation of a student's IEP math goal(s). Instructional content includes grade-level domains of content and sometimes skill-level content (i.e., content below grade level) in order to address the diverse needs of students. Content and problem-solving instruction are combined with calculator use to support math calculation goals for students with a calculator accommodation. Instruction includes various levels of systematic and explicit instruction. Instruction is designed in 15 to 30-minute blocks to align with the most critical prerequisite skills aligned to tier 1 instruction, providing a just-in-time and coherent model for learning (Grade 8 Math RTI At-A-Glance;Grade 8 RTI HMH Unit 3). Student progress is monitored quarterly according to the IEP goals and objectives. Evaluation of effectiveness occurs through a measurement of growth from a pre- to a post-assessment. This information is used to determine student success toward meeting IEP math goals and objectives. A comprehensive review of student performance is conducted to determine if a student no longer requires this intervention.

To improve mathematics proficiency for students with disabilities, the district math team and the district special education team have collaborated throughout the 2023-2024 school year, determining common language and understandings for math problem-solving IEP goals and objectives and the best practice response(s) to meet the needs of individual students in the area of math problem-solving. A challenge is consistency with special education IEP goals and objectives that are written as broad goals where instruction can be provided across a school year and aligned consistently with tier 1, grade-level instruction. To address this challenge, the district math team collaborated with the district special education team to develop one-hour, monthly professional learning opportunities specific to mathematics for middle and high school Special Education Case Managers. The Spring semester of 2024 was used to provide learning to case managers around problem-solving in mathematics as aligned with MSDE grade-level evidence statements for the modeling cycle (March 2024 Case Manager Math PD). A review of IEP goals and objectives will be conducted to determine the level of implementation from the professional

learning. The district special education and mathematics leadership teams are continuing to work collaboratively to determine common language, messaging, and expectations around math calculation IEP goals and objectives with a focus on readiness for Algebra. This professional learning will be rolled out to case managers throughout the 2024-2025 school year. A plan for including classroom math teachers with similar professional learning will be developed in the 2024-2025 school year.

Progress monitoring allows teachers and administrators to identify who needs additional support quickly. Progress Monitoring of supplemental instruction occurs through the use of the early warning system (EWS) and the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) plans. Progress monitoring using these systems is described in more detail in questions #13 and #14. Supplemental instruction, and therefore progress monitoring, is not only provided to grade-level 6-8 students and high school Algebra 1 students but also to any students in need of additional support in an advanced middle school math course or middle school Algebra 1. Every student is a part of the EWS, and every student has an opportunity to receive 30 minutes of supplemental instruction on a daily basis. To this end, and in the first year of supplemental instruction at the middle school level, the Math Supervisor and Middle School Math Content Specialist provided professional learning to principals and to math department leaders on the new CCR standard and the importance of Algebra 1 proficiency. Renewed efforts were put into Spring of 2024 by way of data analysis of the EWS to ensure that all advanced students were receiving any support needed in order to demonstrate they are on track for CCR (February 2024 Middle School Math Principal PD). In addition, advanced middle school math course placement recommendations for students will be provided to middle school principals to assist with the scheduling process as aligned with the updated CCR standard (2024-2025 Grade 8 Algebra 1 Scheduling Recommendations).

A challenge is that the middle and high schools with the greatest FARM rates have significantly lower proficiency rates in math than other schools. This means these schools need additional support. To improve mathematics proficiency for middle and high schools with the highest rates of FARM students, WCPS maximized funding requirements of the Blueprint by reallocating resources to hire thirteen (13) Supplemental Instruction Teachers and four (4) math tutor paraprofessionals to support supplemental instruction during the 2023-2024 school year. These staff members are supporting one high school and four (4) middle schools during the 30-minute supplemental instruction block of time (Support Staff Sample MS Schedules). These staff were trained by the Middle and High School Math Content Specialists on best practices of supplemental instruction through content, modeling, and reasoning, as well as by way of using data to monitor student progress.

To improve mathematics proficiency for multilingual learners (ML, formerly EL or English learners), the district math and ML departments collaborate to determine students eligible for supplemental language resources (i.e., Spanish workbooks for the HQIM) and those eligible to receive the WCPS math interim assessments in Spanish (grades 6-Algebra 2). In addition, there are beginner and intermediate scaffolded versions of math assessments for MLs to take grade-level, end-of-unit assessments in Algebra 1 that are aligned with the HQIM. To further support classroom teachers, the district math team is collaborating with the district ML team to provide a hybrid workshop series during Summer 2024 through WIDA entitled "Developing Language for Learning in Mathematics." Follow-up will be conducted throughout the 2024-2025 school year to evaluate implementation and the next steps needed to continue supporting math teachers with a growing number of ML students in WCPS.

Ongoing Professional Development

Professional development supports the two WCPS math goals mentioned above. A train-the-trainer model is used to provide monthly professional development to principals, lead teachers, and math department leaders to support implementation, analysis, and action planning through the School Improvement planning process. Leaders use their learning to provide support to specific teachers/teacher teams based on the action plan. School Improvement Teams (SIT) meet to adjust the action plans based

on the data. The district math team supports schools with their individual action plans, as well as uses the data to plan professional learning opportunities. The table below outlines how WCPS provides secondary mathematics professional development opportunities for different employee groups:

Employee Group	Grade Level(s)	Name of Training	Total Number of Hours	Time Period for Completion
Principals	6-8, Algebra 1	Leadership in Mathematics – Planning for Continuous School Improvement based on timely data: ● Tier 1 instruction ● Supplemental Instruction	17	August-June
Lead Teachers	6-8, Algebra 1	Mathematics Coaching for Continuous School Improvement through collaborative planning: ● Tier 1 instruction ● Supplemental instruction	17	August-June
Math Department Leaders	6-8, Algebra 1	Mathematics Coaching for Continuous School Improvement through collaborative planning: ● Tier 1 instruction ● Supplemental instruction ● Modeling & Reasoning with MCAP rubrics	17	August-June
Special Education Case Managers	6-8, Algebra 1	Case Manager Mathematics Interventions and Supports	8	August-April

Math Teachers	6-8, Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2	● HQIM implementation and collaborative planning ● Constructed Response Scoring Calibration: Modeling and Reasoning using MCAP rubrics ● Math block structures and routines	18	August, November, March, May
Secondary Math Tutor Paraprofessionals (5)	6-8, Algebra 1	● Tier 2 and 3 math intervention resources and best instructional practices ● Progress monitoring	30	August-April
District Math Lead Teachers	6-8, Algebra 1	● HQIM implementation ● Effective mathematics teaching practices ● Modeling and Reasoning	17	August-June
Supplemental Instruction Math Teachers (13)	6-8, Algebra 1	● Tier 2 and 3 math intervention resources and best instructional practices ● EWS and MTSS ● Scaffolds to support striving learners	18	August, November, March, May

Conclusion
WCPS's plan, designed to increase student readiness and success in Algebra I, encompasses a detailed analysis of student-level data, organizational structures, excellent tier-one instructional practices, supplemental instruction, and ongoing professional development for teachers, teacher-leaders, and administrators, underpinned by the use of HQIM resources. This structured approach, especially during the critical 90-minute math block across Grades 6 through 8 and Algebra 1, underscores the dedication of WCPS to fostering a supportive and rigorous learning environment that meets the needs of all students, setting them on a path to success in mathematics and beyond.

13. High-Quality School Day Tutoring

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 77 and 101
In March 2023, the LEA discussed how it leveraged high-quality school day tutoring to accelerate instruction and provide additional support to students in literacy and math.
Responses included considerations related to the LEA's organization of the school day, collaboration with external partners, and alignment of resources (e.g., Transitional Supplemental Instruction Aid).

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

WCPS Response
WCPS began taking steps towards providing Supplemental Instruction (school day tutoring) in all schools for all students not meeting grade level expectations in 2021-22. This has been a challenge in WCPS. The WCPS Division of Curriculum worked with school principals and has taken several steps to adjust structures and improve systems and processes to provide supplemental instruction for all students at risk for reading and/or math difficulties. Structures are in place for high-quality school day tutoring to occur in every elementary, middle, and high school in Washington County by way of a trained professional. Supplemental instruction is *in addition* to Tier 1 instruction and follows a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) approach to closing achievement gaps.

Elementary Schools
In elementary schools, schedule expectations include 30 minutes per day dedicated to supplemental instruction for reading and 30 minutes per day dedicated to mathematics. The teacher-led supplemental instruction is structured with small groups of four students or less (Elementary Master Schedule Recommendations) using high-quality instructional materials. In addition to classroom teachers, paraprofessionals have been trained to provide instruction to students, focusing on identified learning gaps. The ELA and mathematics Content Specialists continue to train and support 16 Reading Tutor paraprofessionals in 13 schools and 17 Math tutor paraprofessionals in 10 schools across the district. In the eight WCPS Title I schools, all kindergarten classrooms were provided a full-time paraprofessional to support instruction throughout the day, including supplemental instruction. We also have special education paraprofessionals across the county who support supplemental instruction. These various paraprofessional positions are funded by the braiding of funds from ESSER, TSI, Title I, Special Education, and the Tutoring Grant. In addition, WCPS continues to hire, train, and support Reading Tutor Apprentices. The Reading Tutor Apprentice position began as a strategy under the"Grow Your Own" initiative within MDLeads. We have 36 Reading Tutor Apprentices providing cross-age tutoring services in 21 schools. These tutors are trained to use research and evidence-supported interventions with students to support improved literacy.

Revised strategies since the 2023 submission include:

The 17 Math tutor paraprofessionals continue to work with acceleration-focused small groups (1-3 students) using Building Fact Fluency (by Graham Fletcher and Tracy Zager, Stenhouse Publishers) to support grade-level computational fluency in addition/subtraction or multiplication/division using tool talks, image talks, real-world tasks, and games. However, with the updated purchase of the Growth Measure screening tool discussed in question #11, the effectiveness of this intervention has been updated from the use of Math Inventory to Growth Measure. In addition, the Growth Measure assessment, along with tier 1 assessments, provide insights into current grade-level content in which students need additional support. Therefore, during the 2023-2024 school year, math tutor paraprofessionals were also trained to implement differentiated math centers that come with the tier 1 HQIM. TSI funds were used to purchase the hands-on center materials for all K-3 classrooms. Tutors worked with students in small groups of 2-4 students.

The 16 Reading tutor paraprofessionals continue to work with students requiring supplemental instruction. In the past, tutors used Google Docs to communicate progress monitoring data and anecdotal notes to the classroom teachers. The use of Google Docs was time-consuming, and it was challenging for teachers to find the time to analyze and use the data. Therefore, during the 2023-24 school year, the reading tutors received professional development to add progress monitoring data (including intervention minutes and assessment data) directly into the student MTSS plans. This adjustment results in the vested school staff having access to the information in a timely manner. The MTSS information is used to adjust interventions and schedules to best meet the needs of students.

Middle Schools
In middle schools, the schedule was adjusted for the 2023-24 school year to be a consistent eight-period schedule in every middle school. Every ELA and mathematics class is a double period that provides 90 minutes of instruction. These classes use 60 minutes of instructional time for Tier 1 instruction and 30 minutes of instructional time for teacher-led Supplemental Instruction (Tiers 2 and 3) and student-led practice. The teacher-led supplemental instruction is structured with small groups of four students or less using high-quality instructional materials for English and math (23-24 WCPS Middle School Supplemental Instruction Guidelines). The new HQIM for math, including resources to support teacher-led supplemental instruction and student-led practice, is described in detail in question #12. After a pilot experience this school year, WCPS has adopted Amplify ELA as the HQIM for grades 6-8 English. Our first year of full implementation will be next school year, 2024-25. In an effort to ensure continued progress, WCPS plans to use the support and supplemental resources provided by Amplify ELA to better align instruction in teacher-led supplemental instruction and student-led practice.

There are four middle schools in WCPS that have a higher percentage of students who are not yet proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics when compared to other middle schools. Due to this, meeting the needs of students and providing additional support to groups of four or fewer students has been challenging. In order to address this issue, additional staffing has been provided. WCPS has hired ten (10) ELA and ten (10) Math Supplemental Instruction teachers at these four middle schools. The responsibility of these teachers is to collaborate with classroom teachers and support the 30-minute supplemental instruction time during ELA or mathematics by meeting with additional small groups of students. The Support Staff Sample Middle School Schedule was provided in the spring of 2023 to help schools plan for and maximize their available staff and address the need to provide supplemental instruction to all students in need of additional support. In addition to the supplemental teacher positions, WCPS also utilizes five (5) paraprofessionals as ELA and/or math tutors.

High Schools
WCPS is in the second year of operating under an adjusted eight-period schedule in all high schools. This schedule allows schools the flexibility to block some classes and provide supplemental instruction to support students not yet CCR (WCPS High School Supplemental Instruction/Intervention Guidelines

2023-2024). One WCPS high school has higher percentages of students not yet proficient in ELA and mathematics than the other WCPS high schools. As such, the ability to meet the needs of students and provide additional support was challenging. In response to the need for additional staffing in order to provide supplemental instruction in groups of size four or fewer students, three (3) Math Supplemental Instruction teachers were hired. The responsibility of these teachers is to collaborate with Algebra 1 classroom teachers and support the 30-minute supplemental instruction time during the Algebra 1 class by meeting with additional small groups of students. The focus during this time is based on the most critical prerequisite math skills just in time for tier 1 instruction using the high-quality instructional materials provided in the WCPS essential curriculum. Additionally, two (2) ELA Supplemental Instruction teachers were hired to support students in small groups and collaborate with ELA teachers to target specific reading gaps in high school students. More information about this instruction is included in question 14.

Challenges
Some secondary teachers found the transition to 30 minutes of supplemental instruction to be challenging. To further support teachers and staff, success criteria were developed (Supplemental Instruction Success Criteria), and additional professional development was provided to all middle school ELA and math teachers in November 2023 around the best structures, routines, and effective instructional practices (Math SI and SLP PD; ELA SI And SLP PD). Supplemental instruction will continue to be a top priority for WCPS in the 2024-2025 school year.

WCPS has also refined our guidance for Supplemental Instruction since the 2023 submission. WCPS discovered that there were many different intervention resources throughout the schools to support literacy. Not all schools had the same resources and were not using a consistent process for determining the best interventions for specific learning gaps. WCPS provided additional guidance on resources that should no longer be used, as well as interventions that were recommended for each literacy learning gap. There were also inconsistencies in assessments used to monitor progress. The guidance was refined to include the specific common progress monitoring tools that should be used for each literacy learning gap. The various guidance documents shared in the 2023 Blueprint submission have been refined to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of supplemental instruction in reading and mathematics. The 4As process has been refined in literacy and mathematics to assist schools in using assessment data to support continuous improvement. The Literacy If/Then and Mathematics If/Then guidance has been refined to support schools in the 4As process in acting on the data using research-supported interventions.

Prior to the 2023-24 school year, WCPS used Google Sheets to monitor supplemental instruction. This was not an efficient system and needed improvement to be more effective. To overcome this challenge, WCPS purchased an Early Warning System (EWS) as part of Synergy, the WCPS Student Information System, to provide easier access to student data that clearly identifies students in risk levels. WCPS provided training and created Literacy and Mathematics documents that explain the data included in the EWS.

Research supports that when screening data indicates a student has a concern in literacy and/or mathematics, improvement can be made if a specific learning gap is identified, a research-supported intervention is used to target instruction, and progress is monitored regularly. In order to follow these steps more efficiently, WCPS purchased the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) as part of Synergy, to provide a tool for creating and monitoring the progress of MTSS plans for all students at risk for reading and/or mathematics difficulties. We trained staff on this tool in the summer of 2023 and have provided ongoing professional learning throughout the 2023-24 school year. The following documents support schools in using MTSS:

- Creating Literacy Plans: Elementary, Middle, High
- Creating Math Plans: Mathematics If/Then

- MTSS FAQ
- MTSS Plan Monitoring
- Creating an MTSS Plan in Synergy

The decline in TSI funds and the elimination of ESSER and MD Leads funds have made it challenging to continue to employ literacy and mathematics tutors and reading tutor apprentices who assist with tutoring during the day. In the 2024-2025 school year, WCPS will have to reduce the number of tutors who support supplemental instruction due to a reduction in TSI funds and the expiration of ESSER and MD Leads funds. In addition, new guidance from MSDE does not allow community school funds to support tutoring during the school day. This guidance poses a challenge in WCPS because we have been unable, despite valiant efforts, including the provision of transportation, to engage students who need tutoring support before or after the school day. WCPS is overcoming this challenge by braiding funds to keep some mathematics and literacy tutors in elementary schools. In addition, WCPS has proposed moving the funding for the 17 supplemental teachers to the general budget. WCPS remains committed to ensuring all students are proficient in reading and math by the end of 3rd grade and on the path to becoming college and career-ready in English language arts and mathematics by the end of 10th grade.

14. Support for Students to Demonstrate College and Career Readiness in High School

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 109 - 110 and 112 - 115

In March 2023, the LEA described the services and support provided to students identified as not on track to graduate in 9th grade and/or not demonstrating college and career readiness (CCR) by the end of 10th grade.

Responses included creating and implementing student support pathways, collaborating with institutions of higher education partners, developing individualized CCR plans for each student, and engaging families in supporting student success.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome of providing support to students identified as not on track to graduate in 9th grade and/or not demonstrating college and career readiness (CCR) by the end of 10th grade.

WCPS Response

9th Grade

WCPS is performing well on the Maryland Report Card, with 71.92% of all students demonstrating 9th-grade readiness, highlighted by a high score of 93.33% among Asian students. However, a closer examination of subgroup data reveals significant disparities, as readiness rates are notably lower for African American students at 57.98%, economically disadvantaged students at 56.76%, and particularly students with disabilities at only 36.53%.

Group Title	Percentage of Students on Track
All Students	71.92%
Asian	93.33%
African American	57.98%
Hispanic/Latino of Any Race	64.86%
White	77.98%
Two or More Races	65.22%
Students with Disabilities	36.53%
Multilanguage Learner	64.71%
Economically Disadvantaged	56.76%

The Blueprint outcome of providing support to students identified as not on track to graduate in 9th grade is multifaceted and involves several strategic actions aimed at identifying and addressing the needs of these students early in their high school journey. Recognizing the critical nature of the 9th-grade year as a predictor of high school success, WCPS has created an early warning system (EWS) system to start the 2023-2024 school year in the student information system (SIS): The EWS is a real-time data-driven system that assigns risk based on attendance, course grades, and assessment data. EWS is accessible in the teacher's gradebook. EWS helps teachers and school administrators evaluate students' progress in meeting CCR in English and/or math. This system allows teachers, student support team members, and administrators to intervene early and provide support to help students stay on track.

WCPS creates individualized MTSS plans to track the progress of all WCPS students who are not college and career ready and are not on track to become college and career ready. Each plan identifies an area of concern and learning gap and tracks a targeted intervention to address the specific learning gap. WCPS has provided both job-embedded professional development and after-school support to teachers to learn how to target specific needs and track progress with progress monitoring data. School counselors and career coaches collaborate with parents/families for students who are not on track to graduate and/or not progressing towards reaching the CCR standard by the end of 10th grade.

Parents play an important part in their child’s academic success. Parents can see important testing history in their ParentVue account. In addition, WCPS sends home score reports after state and select local assessments. The parent/guardian will be invited to participate when a student is identified for an MTSS plan. The MTSS plan includes the identified area(s) for concerns, goals, intervention, progress monitoring, and important timelines.

School staff will send letters home to families when students are struggling to meet CCR standards. Families will be invited to meetings to discuss the concerns and for the school to offer support for the student. Support may include academic and/or behavioral health support at the school, in addition to behavioral health support through community partners. School staff will meet with the student on a consistent basis to provide additional support and encouragement to meet academic and CCR standards.

In addition, the benefits of college and career readiness and post-high school opportunities (college and career counseling) will be shared with the student and family.

To directly support students, schools have expanded tutoring and counseling services, focusing on academic support, socio-emotional skills, and career planning. Supplemental academic programs, both during the school year and over the summer, offer targeted instruction in core subjects, while after-school programs provide a safe space for homework help and enrichment activities. Teachers use marking period recovery to allow students to demonstrate mastery of skills not passed during the failed marking period. In the three largest schools, WCPS has a 9th-grade transition program where identified students can earn credit over the summer, establish early connections with key staff, and focus on preparing them for high school.

English Language Arts
In an effort to enhance English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency among high school students, WCPS introduced a comprehensive strategy in the 2022-23 academic year, marked by the implementation of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Support Course in English. This innovative approach led to a notable increase in student performance, with proficiency in the ENG10 MCAP climbing from 59.1% in 2022 to 66.1% in 2023. Particularly commendable were the strides made among vulnerable student groups: economically disadvantaged students saw their proficiency rates jump from 43.4% to 53.8%, and English Learners from less than 5% to 10.8%.

To provide further strategies for success, an MTSS plan is created and monitored for all students not proficient in ENG 10 standards. To support these plans, 653 students enrolled in A100R Literacy Acceleration in the 2023-24 school year. In 2023-24, WCPS used the Odell Core Literacy Program to develop the curriculum for the CCR Support Courses in English. Teachers use this curriculum to target instruction in grade-level comprehension and writing. They also provide targeted instruction in small groups based on fluency needs.

A challenge in English, particularly with the addition of MTSS plans in grades 9 and 10 in the 2024-2025 school year, is the sheer amount of MTSS plans needing to be created and monitored by teachers. To initially assist with a large number of plans, school-based administrators tied to each grade level will initiate MTSS Plans in the Synergy system by identifying the area of concern (literacy) and the learning gap under the guidance of the district ELA office through the use of MCAP ELA data and Lexile levels. After the MTSS Plan is initiated, the teachers will provide supplemental instruction and monitor student progress throughout the support course as identified above.

WCPS offered professional development opportunities for secondary teachers and administrators to gain foundational knowledge of the Science of Reading and its implications for the secondary classroom. To date, 37 secondary staff have participated in the full course. Feedback from the course indicates changes in thinking and practice to better align with research. We are offering the full course to secondary teachers again during the summer of 2024. After a pilot experience this school year, WCPS has adopted McGraw Hill StudySync as the HQIM for grades 9-12 English. The first year of full implementation will be next school year, 2024-25. In an effort to ensure continued progress, WCPS plans to use the support and supplemental resources provided by StudySync to better align instruction in the 100R Literacy Acceleration course to the credit-bearing grade-level English courses. In addition, based on feedback and evidence from data, WCPS will explore opportunities through Hagerstown Community College to collaborate on additional support pathways for students who are not yet CCR in English.

Math
Algebra I is a critical subject in the field of mathematics, and it provides students with a foundation for advanced math courses and preparation for careers. For these reasons, ensuring students are proficient in

Algebra I remains a top priority for WCPS. In the 2022-2023 school year, WCPS prioritized Algebra I content standards by ensuring all Algebra I classes were year-long and taught for 90 minutes daily, providing the opportunity for 60 minutes of daily tier 1 instruction and 30 minutes of daily supplemental instruction. This course supports a proactive approach to meeting CCR, as the typical student enrolls in Algebra 1 in grade 9. This innovative approach led to a notable increase in student performance, with proficiency on the Algebra I MCAP for students in grade 9 climbing from 10.3% in 2022 to 18.0% in 2023. Particularly commendable were the strides made among vulnerable student groups: economically disadvantaged students saw their proficiency rates jump from less than 5% to 12.6%. Building on this success, WCPS continued the 90-minute, grade 9 Algebra I structure into the 2023-2024 school year and plans to continue to do so into the 2024-2025 school year.

WCPS recognizes the need to continue to grow the math proficiency of students in Algebra I and recognizes that although the new 90-minute structure supported growth, teachers are challenged by the shift to 30-minute supplemental instruction time with small groups of students while other students are working independently of the teacher. To support teachers with students working independently of the teacher, for the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS invested in ALEKS (ALEKS Parent Letter). ALEKS is an artificially intelligent learning and assessment system that determines each student's precise knowledge of Algebra I. Based on the assessment results, ALEKS creates a custom pathway to create a continuous cycle of learning and assessment (ALEKS Reports). To further support the classroom teacher with the 30-minute block of supplemental instruction time, essential curriculum teams are continuously gathering feedback from teachers and providing resources and structures within the Essential Curriculum planning documents (pages 8-9 of Algebra 1 Unit 4). In addition, moving into the 2024-2025 school year, grade 9 students receiving supplemental instruction and who are not on track to be CCR will be monitored through MTSS Plans.

WCPS introduced a new course in the 2023-2024 school year to support students in grade 11 who are not yet CCR. With the transition to the new CCR standard in the 2024-2025 school year, WCPS has revised the course description for the Math Support course to solely focus on proficiency with Algebra 1, and the course will now be open to grade 10 and grade 12 students (not only grade 11 students as in 2023-2024) who are not on track to be or are not yet CCR, respectively. The updated course description for the CCR support course, Math Support, is: “The Math Support course is a semester-long mathematics course designed to hone skills developed in Algebra I. Students will review and build upon priority algebra concepts for success in future mathematics courses.” This course is designed to be semester-long, 45-minute per day, tier 2 support to students striving to meet CCR while concurrently enrolled in a grade-level, credit-bearing mathematics course. If Math MCAP achievement does not meet CCR standards, a student can access the Math Support course more than once. Each time, the student’s learning will be individualized to student skill gaps in mathematics as determined by the MCAP sub-scores (content, modeling, and reasoning) and additional formative assessment data gathered by the math teacher. The structure of this 45-minute math block is to have a whole class opening and closure (approximately 10-15 minutes) and two 15-20-minute teacher-led supplemental instruction groups of four or fewer students working on targeted content skills, modeling, and/or reasoning (Math Support Course Structure). To support students working independently of the teacher during supplemental instruction time, WCPS invested in ALEKS, providing students with a personalized pathway and immediate feedback. The success of this course is yet to be determined as we await 2024 MCAP Algebra I data. In the meantime, we are gathering feedback from Math Support teachers and school-based leaders in order to make curriculum adjustments in Summer 2024 (Math Support Course Curriculum). In addition, based on feedback and evidence from data, WCPS will explore opportunities through Hagerstown Community College to collaborate on additional support pathways for students who are not yet CCR in math.

A change in the CCR standard from being able to use the Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II MCAP has posed a challenge as we determine a different structure to support students in grade 10 for the 2024-2025

school year. In 2023-2024, a student in grade 10 who has passed the Algebra 1 course but failed the corresponding MCAP assessment will be taking a Geometry course with a corresponding Geometry MCAP. Given that the CCR standard is moving to Algebra I MCAP, for the 2024-2025 school year, a student who has passed the Algebra I course but failed the Algebra I MCAP will move into a semester Math Support course where the focus will be on moving to proficiency with Algebra I skills and understandings. The student will then take a Geometry course in the opposite semester of the Math Support Course. The 2024-2025 High School Program of Studies has been updated to reflect this change. In addition, moving into the 2024-2025 school year, grade 10 students in the Math Support course will be monitored through MTSS Plans.

During the 2023-2024 school year, if a student had a challenge to embed the Math Support course into their regular school day, then the student could engage with additional math support in an after-school setting, all while continuing to take the appropriate grade-level courses during the school day. Two challenges have risen with this model over the year: (1) There was inconsistent attendance in the after-school support sessions, and students were not prepared to retake an MCAP assessment. WCPS is addressing this challenge in the 2024-2025 school year by prioritizing additional Math Support classes during the school day or during Summer 2024. (2) Teachers struggled to prioritize Algebra 1 content in the time provided after school. To address this challenge, the district math office collaborated with Algebra 1 teachers to provide resources and explicitly prioritized lessons (Before-After School Math Guidance).

Similar to English, a challenge in mathematics, particularly with the addition of MTSS plans in grades 9 and 10 in the 2024-2025 school year, is the number of students who are not on track to be CCR who should be monitored by teachers. To initially assist with the large number of potential MTSS plans, teachers will focus on plans for "high-risk" students as identified in the EWS (and as described in question #13). To further support teachers, school-based administrators tied to each grade level will initiate these MTSS plans in the Synergy system by identifying the area of concern (math) and the learning gap (content and/or reasoning/modeling) under the guidance of the district mathematics office through the use of MCAP math data and WCPS Math Interim data. After the MTSS Plan is initiated, math teachers will then be able to identify specific math content learning needs of students using the assessment provided in ALEKS, provide supplemental instruction, and monitor student progress throughout the support course as identified above. Schools are providing teacher planning time within the structure of the school day to monitor data and adjust MTSS plans as needed.

A majority of students score a performance level of 2 on the Algebra 1 MCAP, and many rest on the "cusp" of a level 3. WCPS's goal is to effectively implement the strategies described above to maximize the number of students growing into a level 3 on MCAP Algebra 1, providing greater access to college and careers for students.

15. Access to Post-CCR Pathways

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 118 - 122 and 128 - 133

In March 2023, the LEA discussed how it would ensure every student has access to post-CCR pathways, including college preparatory programs (IB Diploma Programme, Cambridge AICE Diploma Program, and Advanced Placement Program), dual enrollment programs, middle and early college high school programs, and CTE programs that include opportunities for apprenticeships and other industry-recognized credentials.

The LEA's response included descriptions of current offerings and proposed expansion plans if applicable, strategies to recruit students representative of the school system's demographics, and plans to overcome barriers for student enrollment such as transportation, scheduling, entry requirements, or inadequate academic support.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

WCPS Response

Introduction

Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) recognizes the importance of preparing students for success beyond high school. Therefore, the district is committed to providing a variety of post-CCR (College and Career Ready) pathways for students to explore. These pathways are designed to help students earn early college credits and industry-recognized career credentials, as well as gain real-world, hands-on learning experiences through apprenticeships or work-based learning opportunities. By offering these pathways, WCPS empowers students to pursue their interests and passions while building the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college and in their careers. Whether a student is interested in pursuing a career in the trades, healthcare, technology, or any other field, there are opportunities available to them within the district. Furthermore, the district's commitment to providing these pathways ensures that students are equipped with the tools and resources they need to make informed decisions about their future. With access to a variety of post-CCR pathways, students can explore different career options, gain valuable experience, and ultimately position themselves for success in their chosen field.

Developing Robust CTE Programs

WCPS has implemented a strategic planning process in CTE that enables us to plan five years ahead and work backward to the present with an emphasis on enhancing the student experience, ultimately leading to the achievement of the WCPS Blueprint goals. The first part of this strategic plan was to create robust CTE programs that benefit students and community partners. WCPS collaborates with local advisory committees, business partners, community organizations, students, parents, and other stakeholders twice a year to determine the interests and needs of Washington County. Guided by this collaborative effort, WCPS establishes priority levels and develops strategic goals while putting CTE programs in place to support student learning. A focus area for WCPS is to expand the CTE pathways available to students based on local workforce needs. One new method to support that vision was to introduce a new position of Career Coach at all high schools and middle schools. The Career Coaches are responsible for providing students with soft skills training related to jobs and employment, as well as creating awareness of CTE programs, job employment pathways, and apprenticeship opportunities that will support student achievement. Career coaches support the development of post-secondary plans for all students related to a future career path. Career Coaches provide individualized career exploration opportunities through events, guest speakers, and workshops.

An additional challenge to building robust CTE programs continues to be the ability to renovate current school space and install necessary equipment. Using the Perkins Grant, WCPS has implemented outside-the-box thinking to expand WCPS CTE programs and increase learning opportunities for students. Starting in August 2024, WCPS will introduce a Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) pathway. The program will be housed in a Perkins-funded, tailor-designed mobile classroom trailer at

North Hagerstown High School and will provide students with the education needed to become proficient in HVAC content, engage in an apprenticeship, and earn industry-related credentials in high school. The mobile classroom trailer will also enable WCPS to shift the learning center to different schools quickly as the levels of student interest fluctuate.

Participation in CTE Programs

Washington County Public Schools has seen a steady rate of participation in all CTE completer programs. Williamsport High School (WHS) has recently expanded its Aerospace program under Project Lead the Way Aerospace and has 35 students as part of its starting cohort for the 2023-2024 school year. Due to the high level of interest in this program, WHS plans to maintain a similar number of 9th graders for each subsequent cohort. In addition, WCPS has reported an increase of 15 students in the first year of the Certified Nursing Assistant concentration program offered by the Allied Health Programs at Boonsboro High School and Smithsburg High School. Meanwhile, the Environmental, Agriculture, and Natural Resources career cluster has the highest student participation and completion rate, with over 636 students enrolled in the final sequences of those completers.

The following table is a list of career clusters, students in the final sequences of those completers, and those set to graduate 2023-2024 school year in those career clusters.

Career Cluster	Students enrolled in completer per the concentrator course	Students enrolled to complete the completer in the 2023-2024 school year
Arts, Media & Communication	153	64
Business Management & Finance	172	64
Construction & Development	303	174
Consumer Services, Hospitality & Tourism	361	110
Environmental, Agriculture & Natural Resources	636	262
Health & Biosciences	238	81
Human Resource Services	307	137
Information Technology	113	41
Manufacturing, Engineering & Technology	25	15
Transportation Technologies	102	47
Career Research & Development	315	195
Apprenticeships	135	125

Growing CTE Programs

In the 2025-2026 school year, WCPS plans to introduce two new pathways to its existing curriculum to meet local industry needs. The first pathway is the Aviation Maintenance pathway, which will be added to the Aviation Completer under Project Lead the Way Aerospace. This program will enable students to gain mechanical skills related to the aviation industry by building an airplane at their high school. The plane will be certified by the Federal Aviation Administration during construction, and students will work with the teacher and industry mentor partners during the two-year build project. The second pathway is the Mechatronics pathway, which will be introduced under the Mechanical, Manufacturing & Automation Engineering Academy Completer. Students will focus on the design, analysis, and maintenance of mechanical systems, including robotic arms and automated machinery. Graduates of both pathways will earn industry certifications, build a strong local network of industry contacts, and develop practical skills for the Washington County workforce.

Over the next five years, WCPS will also introduce new programs and CTE elective courses that will support current and future student needs in the coming years. Some of these programs include cabinet-making courses for schools with carpentry programs, a specialized focus on robotics and artificial intelligence for schools with computer science programs, and mobile learning classrooms for plumbing and welding programs. These initiatives aim to provide students with industry-certified skills and increase their chances of securing apprenticeships and job opportunities with local industries.

Expanding Apprenticeships

The second part of this CTE strategic plan is to provide students with direct work experience related to the training they have had within their CTE Completer pathway. Over the past year, the enrollment of students in apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities has significantly increased in WCPS. Despite facing several challenges, such as the absence of compensation funds provided to businesses that hire apprentices in previous years, WCPS has managed to increase the number of student apprentices by 54. This has brought the total of WCPS apprenticeship opportunities to 135 for the 2023-2024 school year, up from 81 the previous school year (167% increase). To counter the loss of apprenticeship opportunities this school year, WCPS has made the Apprenticeship Coordinator position permanent. Under the current coordinator, the school system has continued to see growth in the number of apprenticeship opportunities facilitated. The coordinator has actively sought out new business partners, forging new relationships, and simplifying the process of partnering with WCPS to make it easier for prospective partners.

Teacher Retention Strategies

Lastly, despite the ongoing efforts made by WCPS to implement programs for recruiting and retaining teachers, the organization still faces challenges due to the unwillingness of individuals with the necessary skill sets and expertise to leave their industry and work in a school environment for less pay. However, WCPS has been successful in overcoming this hurdle in certain programs by partnering with the community to identify potential teaching candidates and adapting recruiting practices to focus on each candidate in a personalized fashion instead of a standardized approach.

Where these strategic recruiting practices can’t be applied, WCPS is developing two strategies to help mitigate these challenges. The first strategy involves collaborating with industry partners to develop a pipeline that will bring in experienced workers to guide students interested in CTE programs. The second strategy involves expanding the current student tutor/mentor program into the world of CTE tutoring and mentorship. This initiative has seen significant success with high school students working with younger students in reading, and it will be extended to seniors in CTE programs to engage in a mentorship capstone.

The goal of these strategies is to encourage students to consider education as a career and pull them back into the system within a few years. However, the expansion of a CTE tutor/mentor program will require

extensive planning and stakeholder involvement in the coming years. Moreover, it might take four to five years after the implementation of the program to see its tangible results.

Advanced Programs
In the 2022-2023 school year, WCPS's Program of Studies included 30 approved AP courses.
During the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS added two new AP courses, AP Pre-Calculus and English 10: AP Seminar. Over the summer, WCPS trained 19 Pre-Calculus teachers and 11 English 10: AP Seminar teachers. The Pre-Calculus course was offered in eight of nine high schools. Although the English 10: AP Seminar is only offered at three WCPS high schools, the teachers who were trained gained valuable strategies to utilize in their classrooms. These new courses allowed students more access to AP programming. Even with these two additional courses, AP enrollment dropped by 429 enrollments. This is attributed to the large increase in the number of students enrolled in dual credit courses.

Course	22-23 Enrollment	23-24 Enrollment	Change in Enrollment
AP Seminar 10		143	143
AP Precalculus		200	200
Total Enrollment	**2780**	**2351**	**-429**

One challenge that WCPS has encountered is that some students may face difficulty in choosing between Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual credit courses. WCPS is working to address this challenge by providing students with information to help them make informed decisions about their post-CCR pathways. This includes providing guidance and counseling services to students and working with local colleges and universities to ensure that students have a clear understanding of the benefits and requirements of each program. Another challenge is to ensure schools have enough qualified staff to teach AP and dual credit courses. To address this challenge, WCPS provides professional development opportunities for existing staff to become certified to teach AP courses. Additionally, schools continue to explore creative scheduling options to ensure that students have access to these courses, including before or after-school offerings, online courses, or summer programs.

At North Hagerstown High School, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program is a challenging curriculum designed to foster critical thinking, international-mindedness, and a deep understanding of various subjects. The program is open to all WCPS students in grades 9-12 and encompasses a wide range of courses across six core areas, including language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics, and the arts. Central to the IB philosophy are the three core components: the Extended Essay, Theory of Knowledge (TOK), and Creativity, Activity, and Service (CAS), which aim to cultivate students' research skills, encourage critical reflection on knowledge and experiences, and promote engagement with the community. North Hagerstown High School's IB program is designed to prepare students not only for academic success at the university level but also to become thoughtful, informed citizens of the world.

To ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from the IB program, Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) has implemented key strategies to enhance accessibility and support student success. Recognizing transportation as a critical factor in program accessibility, WCPS provides transportation services to students throughout the district, enabling them to attend North Hagerstown High School regardless of their residential location. In addition to logistical support, WCPS facilitates

information sessions, preparatory courses, and dedicated counseling to guide students and their families through the IB enrollment process and curriculum decisions. Through these comprehensive support mechanisms, WCPS aims to open the doors of the IB program to a diverse cohort of students, fostering a rich educational environment where all learners can thrive and achieve their full potential.

For the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS has adjusted one of the magnet elementary school's focus from Technology to, more specifically, Computer Science (CS). The students in this magnet program in grades two through five receive an hour of dedicated computer science skills instruction each week. Computer science is also integrated into other content areas with MicroBits, Ozobots, Sphero robots, and Finches. The library media program expands this work with a 9-week CS Module. In addition, there are after-school opportunities to use VEX Robotics to expand CS further. This comprehensive program develops an early pathway for students in computer science at the elementary school level. Additionally, two Title 1 schools expanded computer science with an additional CS staff position serving as an encore rotation for grades K-5: Bester Elementary (Aug. 2024) and Pangborn Elementary (Jan.2024). Instruction is framed around skills courses using the Code.org curriculum with scaffolds to address EL learners.

Dual Enrollment Program
In addressing the transformative efforts within Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) over the last year, a significant emphasis has been placed on expanding and refining the Dual Enrollment program in partnership with Hagerstown Community College (HCC). The goal of these expansions is to provide high school students with an opportunity to earn college credits prior to graduation, thereby enhancing their college readiness and reducing the time and cost associated with obtaining a college degree.

Progress in Dual Enrollment Implementation
WCPS has made notable strides in increasing the accessibility and attractiveness of the Dual Enrollment program to students. Through the MOU with HCC, WCPS has ensured that its teachers with Master's degrees can teach dual enrollment courses in high schools, thus expanding the range of courses available to students. This initiative aligns with the district's goal to provide a diverse array of dual credit opportunities across various disciplines, catering to the broad interests and career aspirations of students. Expanding dual credit courses to all of WCPS high schools has been a critical factor in the program's expansion. By integrating these courses into the school day, students can more seamlessly participate in dual enrollment without feeling overburdened by additional coursework.

Year	Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Courses Taken	Total Cost
2021-2022	1129	2006	$160,193
2022-2023	1255	2301	$606,659
2023-2024	2994*	8544	$2,750,000*

*Although these numbers are close to being finalized, the academic year has not concluded

Year	Number of dual credit courses offered in high schools
2022-2023	23
2023-2024	59

2024-2025	69

Challenges Encountered
WCPS's Dual Enrollment program has witnessed significant advancements, but there have been several challenges in its further expansion. The program's success and accessibility require thoughtful strategy adjustments and innovations. The challenges that WCPS has faced include curriculum alignment, academic preparedness and CCR requirements, faculty qualifications, communication, and scheduling flexibility. Overcoming these hurdles is crucial to understanding the comprehensive approach that WCPS is employing to enhance the educational landscape.

Adapting Strategies for Dual Credits
To mitigate these challenges and enhance the Dual Enrollment program, WCPS is implementing several strategic adaptations. First, the district is intensifying its efforts to raise awareness about the Dual Enrollment program among all student demographics through a New Program of Studies. In addition, WCPS has updated its website to include more information for stakeholders. Career coaches, counselors, and teachers are working with students to ensure they are aware of dual credit opportunities. By making information about the program more accessible, WCPS aims to demystify the enrollment process and highlight the benefits of participating in dual enrollment.

Academic Preparedness and CCR Requirements
One significant challenge has been the varying levels of academic preparedness among students interested in dual enrollment. CCR requirements for these courses include MCAP scores, GPA benchmarks, and prerequisite coursework, which can exclude students who might benefit from early college exposure. In response, WCPS has initiated support pathways for all juniors who are not CCR. These support pathways include tutoring, support courses, and HCC remedial courses that are designed to help a student become CCR. In addition, WCPS is allowing students who are not CCR to take advantage of dual credit courses, provided they are concurrently enrolled in a support pathway.

Curriculum Alignment
Ensuring that dual enrollment courses align with the Maryland College and Career Ready and HCC standards has been a learning experience. Both partners want to ensure the credits are transferable to other institutions of higher education. To tackle this, WCPS and its higher education partners have engaged in detailed curriculum mapping and have an articulation agreement. These efforts ensure that dual enrollment courses provide meaningful progress toward both high school diplomas and future college degrees, addressing concerns about the relevance and value of these courses in students' educational trajectories.

Faculty Qualifications
The expansion of dual enrollment also hinges on the availability of qualified faculty to teach college-level courses to high school students. Challenges related to faculty qualifications include the need for master's degrees in specific content areas for dual enrollment instructors. HCC has helped WCPS overcome this hurdle by accepting a master's degree in education and, in some cases, a master's equivalency. This has allowed additional WCPS teachers to teach dual credit courses in the high school setting and on the HCC campus.

Scheduling Flexibility
Scheduling flexibility remains a critical challenge. Balancing high school schedules, including extracurricular activities, with college course offerings can limit students' ability to participate in dual enrollment due to time conflicts. To address the challenge of scheduling flexibility, WCPS has been collaborating with Hagerstown Community College (HCC) to create common grading deadlines that align

with the WCPS school calendar. This will make it easier for students to attend college-level courses without disrupting their high school schedules. Additionally, WCPS is offering dual credit courses in high schools to ensure that students have easy access to these courses within their familiar learning environment. However, WCPS recognizes that some students may prefer to take courses on the HCC campus to gain a more authentic college experience. To support these students, WCPS is working with HCC to provide support services, including transportation and advising, to help students navigate the enrollment process and succeed in their college-level courses.

Conclusion

Addressing these challenges head-on, WCPS is adapting its strategies to strengthen the Dual Enrollment program, making it more robust, accessible, and aligned with student needs and educational standards. Through proactive measures and a commitment to continuous improvement, WCPS is working to ensure that dual enrollment serves as a valuable stepping stone in students' academic and career pathways, reflecting the district's dedication to providing high-quality educational opportunities.

Pillar 4: More Resources to Ensure All Students Are Successful

16. Engagement and Communication with Multilingual learner (ML) families

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Question 137

In March 2023, the LEA described how it would engage and communicate with Multilingual learner (ML) families, also known as English learners (EL), including leveraging the EL family coordinator position.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

WCPS Response

April 2023- Present: Revisions and New Developments

EL Family Coordinator

WCPS has made significant progress in implementing a comprehensive approach to family engagement, family literacy (Partnership Expectations document), Adult ESL classes, enrollment, orientation to the United States school system and WCPS, transcript and immunization equivalencies, and digital communication strategies. The ML Teacher and Family Liaison (the WCPS version of the EL family coordinator) has spearheaded initiatives and led the WCPS International Welcome Center (IWC), fostering communication and cultural understanding between the community, local agencies, schools, school staff, and multilingual families to create a more inclusive educational environment.

In response to the escalating demand for support services, WCPS prioritized enhancing resources at the IWC. Staffing was increased from two to three Multilingual Liaisons, and services were relocated to a larger facility furnished with modern equipment, reflecting a proactive effort to accommodate the increased number of staff and the families enrolling students. (IWC new space Tweet and photo). Notably, WCPS ML enrollment surged from 614 in October 2021 to 1127 in March 2024 (Data Report), warranting the need for these program enhancements. The significant increase in enrollment can be attributed to several factors, including the allure of affordable living costs, promising economic opportunities, family connections, and quality education.

WCPS streamlined interpretation and translation services by transferring all requests through the IWC, which utilizes digital communication resources, such as Smore Newsletters, Blackboard, and Remind, to ensure that multilingual families can access essential school information in their native languages. Previously, all requests went to the ESOL and World Languages Supervisor at the district's central office and then delegated to staff in various locations who could provide direct support. The outcome of providing interpretation and translation services for ML families is improved communication and engagement between schools and families, leading to increased understanding, involvement, and support for the educational journey of ML students. This centralized coordination and maintenance enhance efficiency and effectiveness in communication, ultimately fostering a more inclusive academic environment. Additionally, providing enhanced support to schools through in-house staff coordination and contracted services ensures that the needs of multilingual students and families are met, facilitating

smoother operations and better alignment with school requirements. Overall, these efforts contribute to bridging language barriers and empowering ML families to participate actively in their children's education.

The ML Teacher and Family Liaison organizes parent engagement opportunities (Collaborative Event with community schools), to engage families and support them in playing a critical role in their children's language, cultural, academic, and socioemotional growth. The IWC has supported ML School events, increasing from eight in 2022-2023 to 16 in 2023-2024. Events included Parent/Teacher Conferences, Back-to-school nights, ParentVue (grade book), Remind trainings, food pantries, clothing drives, fall festival, socio-emotional nights, Reading and Math nights, ML registrations, and seasonal events. The ML Teacher and Family Liaison provided two 'ACCESS for ELLs' trainings to ML parents with the outcome of growing parents' understanding of ACCESS testing, ML proficiency and language testing. (Parent Event Artifacts: ML Parent Event 1, Parent Event 2, Parent Event 3, Parent Event 4, Salem Ave Parent Sign in Sheet for Family Academic Training, Salem Avenue Welcome Slide Deck, EL Connection Family Night Sign In)

The ML Teacher and Family Liaison collaborates with several departments and organizations. Title I, where most ML students are enrolled, also funds Title I Pre K MLs. The IWC collaborates with Student Services to support enrollment, vaccinations, and school support. Hagerstown Community College (HCC) provides Adult ESL Courses in WCPS schools (planning document and photos) in collaboration with the IWC to empower families with language skills essential for communication, education, career advancement, and community integration. The IWC and ESOL Supervisor engage in Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors (MAFSA), a network of educational professionals, including counselors, ML teachers, and administrators, to ensure comprehensive support and collaboration in determining grade placement and evaluating academic records for international students in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and Maryland and Virginia. As members of the Maryland English Language Learning Family Involvement Network (MELLFIN), WCPS collaborates with educators, families, and community stakeholders to increase parental involvement, better understanding of ML needs, and, ultimately, enhance academic success and socio-emotional well-being for MLs. The ESOL supervisor also joined the Maryland Association of Colleges of Teacher Education to discuss K-16 articulation in meeting the needs of MLs. (MACTE Flyer for Webinar)

Furthermore, the ML Teacher and Family Liaison regularly meet with community organizations to provide more information on how to enroll in school, what school readiness looks like for their children, and connect families with Head Start, the Washington County Health Department, the Department of Human Services, and the Washington County Free Library. Families with students enrolled in Community Schools participated in family engagement activities (Family Literacy), in which reading materials and language activities were provided to students and families to engage with at home. The IWC, Pre-K team, and Title I Pre-K EL Family Liaison arranged neighborhood enrollment sites to make school resources more accessible.

Participating in MELLFIN (Conference Photos) has provided ideas for expanding the IWC's support to multilingual families. For example, the IWC began a check-in practice where parents received calls two to three weeks after their child's enrollment, allowing parents to share any concerns to date and a chance to share future academic and community events. As members of the WCPS Homeless Steering Committee, the IWC has expanded services to homeless multilingual families.

The IWC has conducted cultural competency training sessions for teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals at the WCPS Summer Summit. School counselors, Pupil Personnel Workers, and registrars received professional development on understanding diverse cultural backgrounds and effective strategies for working with multilingual families. This led to increased culturally responsive interactions

with ML students and families and collaboration with the ML Teacher and Family Liaison. Supporting the socioemotional learning of MLs and their families involves creating an inclusive environment where cultural and linguistic backgrounds are valued. WCPS staff in schools encourage peer collaboration and interaction to foster a sense of belonging and support social-emotional development. When a student passed away this year, the school administration, IWC, and ML staff arranged for targeted support to MLs particularly affected by the student's tragic loss. The school had the IWC and Spanish-speaking staff on hand to interpret and connect students to crisis team resources. Bilingual counselors were arranged to follow up with individualized support and counseling.

The surge in enrollment of Multilingual Learners (MLs) has heightened the number of students facing exclusion from school or experiencing enrollment delays due to vaccination delays, which can lead to academic setbacks, social isolation, and emotional distress, particularly for families relying on school-based services such as meals or childcare. In response, Family Healthcare of Hagerstown (FHH) will deploy a Family Navigator at the International Welcome Center (IWC) alongside the WCPS ML Teacher and Family Liaison. The Family Navigator will collaborate with parents to explore community immunization providers, facilitate appointments, administer necessary vaccinations, and offer initial immunizations at the IWC or FHH facility, ensuring adherence to the 20-day appointment requirement and timely school enrollment for affected students. Despite the comprehensive strategies outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between WCPS and FHH, including the provision of a Family Navigator position and coordination of immunization appointments with community providers, the delay in filling the Family Navigator role presents a significant obstacle in meeting immunization requirements and addressing enrollment delays.

In conclusion, WCPS has made significant strides in implementing a holistic approach to family engagement and support services for MLs and their families. Spearheaded by the ML Teacher and Family Liaison, the IWC initiatives have fostered communication, cultural understanding, and inclusivity within the educational environment. Efforts to enhance resources at the IWC, including increased staffing and a larger facility, have effectively accommodated the growing number of multilingual families enrolling students in WCPS. Streamlined interpretation services and digital communication resources have further improved accessibility to school communication for multilingual families. Additionally, the IWC has organized numerous parent engagement opportunities and collaborated with various departments and organizations to provide comprehensive support to MLs and their families. Through participation in initiatives such as MELLFIN and collaboration with community partners like Family Healthcare of Hagerstown (FHH) and Hagerstown Community College, WCPS remains committed to addressing the diverse needs of multilingual learners and fostering their academic success and socio-emotional well-being.

17. Supporting Multilingual Learners and Increasing Language Acquisition

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 138 - 139

In March 2023, the LEA described how it would support Multilingual learners (ML), also known as English learners (EL), and implement the recommendations of the ML workgroup to increase English proficiency for ML students.

Responses included strategies to increase language acquisition and ensure the alignment and investment of resources.

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome of increasing English proficiency for Multilingual learner students.

WCPS Response

WCPS has embarked on a journey of innovation and dedication to meet the evolving needs of its ML population. Despite improvements in English Language Proficiency compared to other Maryland counties on Maryland Report Card, obstacles still need to be overcome, particularly in writing and reading proficiency on ACCESS for ELLs, ML English and Mathematics MCAP achievement, and long-term ML exiting ML services. MSDE also identified Western Heights Middle School as a TSI school for EL. WCPS will align its initiatives with the MSDE EL Blueprint Final Committee report by introducing specialized accelerated courses designed specifically for long-term multilingual learners. Additionally, WCPS will expand professional development opportunities for all educators, promote collaborative teaching approaches, augment staffing, launch a two-way immersion pilot program, and ensure equitable access to college and career readiness pathways.

Despite efforts to support MLs, the overall number of students exiting the program with proficiency decreased from 12% in 2022 to 10% in 2023. WCPS ELP exits ranked 6th among Maryland LEAs and surpassed the state exit average of 7.8%. Particularly concerning is the challenge of students with disabilities to exit the program or meet their targets, resulting in some becoming long-term MLs. WCPS collaboratively supports MLs with special education needs through individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to each student. ML teachers and the ESOL supervisor regularly attend IEP and Child Find Meetings to support testing and identify needs and strengths guided by the USDOE Toolkit's checklists and tools. The ESOL Supervisor also meets with Special Education administrators to discuss processes and strategies to meet dually identified students' language and academic needs. WCPS includes providing culturally responsive teaching, language support in both native languages and English, and collaboration with special education professionals. WCPS also engages parents and families, offers professional development for staff, and advocates for equity and inclusion. Through ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Early Warning Systems, IEPs, and ACCESS data, WCPS ensures that interventions are effective and support ML students' academic and social-emotional growth.

According to the 2023 Maryland Report Card, WCPS middle schools achieved a noteworthy milestone, ranking first among all Maryland middle schools, with 40% of students meeting their growth targets in English Language Proficiency (ELP). Remarkably, WCPS stands out as the sole school system in Maryland, where middle school MLs attained the accountability growth target for 2023. Notably, WCPS's middle school ELP ranking surged from second place in 2022, with 48%, to claim the top spot in 2023, albeit with a slight decrease in achievement to 40% (ELP and Enrollment Data).

Similarly, in 2023, WCPS high schools ranked second in the state, with 48% of students achieving their ELP targets, compared to holding the top position in 2022 with a 55% ELP rate. Meanwhile, elementary schools maintained a respectable ELP rate of 76% in 2023, positioning WCPS at fifth place statewide, down from second place in 2022 with an 84% ELP rate. However, high and elementary schools needed to

meet their MSDE accountability targets, indicating a stagnation in progress compared to the previous year.

WCPS data underscore achievement gaps among Multilingual Learners (ML) across various subjects, as highlighted by ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies scores on the Maryland Report Card. WCPS did not meet the annual targets for any of the eight subgroups, and achievement for English learners in mathematics was 15.7% in elementary school and less than 5% in middle and high school. However, English Learners have improved from last year. While English Language Arts data showed that achievement and improvement increased for nearly all subgroups, English Learners were the only subgroup that did not make any improvement for elementary, middle, or high school and was one of two subgroups not meeting their targets. ELA achievement was 22.9% for elementary, 17.4% for middle, and 7.1% for high school. Therefore, WCPS created scaffolded content assessments across multiple subjects for beginner and intermediate proficiency levels. Science and social studies Content Specialists and Supervisors collaborated to design evaluations that provide appropriate levels of support and challenge for MLs at different stages of language acquisition. Based on teacher feedback and student success, plans were made to expand the availability of scaffolded assessments in the upcoming academic year, further enhancing support for MLs across the curriculum. Spanish versions of K-12 WCPS interim mathematics assessments were also created for bilingual students to provide equitable and valid assessments for MLs.

WCPS has made notable strides in addressing the needs of secondary long-term multilingual learners (LTMLs). However, challenges persist in achieving language proficiency, particularly in writing and reading, as indicated by data from the ACCESS for ELLs assessment. Progress can be attributed to specialized accelerated ML courses tailored to their literacy needs in reading and writing, as evidenced by ACCESS scores. WCPS's specialized courses were strategically designed to integrate high-interest subject-matter content in reading and writing. Through engaging instructional materials and targeted teaching strategies, LTMLs were provided with the necessary tools to enhance their language proficiency. Additionally, WCPS developed a comprehensive support framework for LTMLs by scheduling Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions based on an Early Warning System and Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). This proactive approach ensures that LTMLs receive targeted assistance tailored to their needs. Educators utilized data-driven insights to identify at-risk students and implement evidence-based interventions to address academic gaps and promote progress. By closely monitoring student performance and providing timely interventions, WCPS aimed to maximize the potential for success among LTMLs beyond the ML program.

To address these challenges and monitor progress effectively, WCPS will conduct school-wide quarterly data meetings at Western Heights Middle School, particularly to address individual student concerns. At all schools, students will be monitored through an Early Warning System and Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) plans. EL teachers will hold student goal conferences, and teams will analyze achievement data from local and state assessments. These measures are crucial for identifying areas of improvement and implementing targeted interventions to ensure the success of ML students. However, encouraging progress has been observed among MLs who are not classified as long-term learners, evidenced by advancements in internal content assessments, Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA), Math Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) assessments, and ACCESS ELP data.

Continuing to address the content achievement and increasing ML student population, WCPS established co-teaching arrangements in English/ELA and Mathematics 12 classrooms to provide targeted support to MLs. This collaborative approach paired content teachers with EL specialists to deliver instruction that addressed the unique linguistic and academic needs of MLs while simultaneously providing job-embedded professional development opportunities for content teachers. By integrating co-teaching into the master schedule for the upcoming academic year, WCPS ensures continuity and sustainability more

than the conventional approach of English Language Development specialists working in isolation. Instead, a more holistic approach to support ML students necessitates collaborative efforts among educators. WIDA's research underscores the transformative impact of professional collaboration and co-teaching on student performance and teacher learning, pivoting away from fragmented and segregated approaches towards inclusive practices and integrating ML students through in-class support rather than pull-out programs. This shift towards collaboration and integration has prompted WCPS to invest in comprehensive professional development, job-embedded support, and coaching, focusing on co-teaching and co-planning strategies. (EL Updates to All Teacher Specialists Slide Deck).

Recognizing that English proficiency should not be a prerequisite for meaningful participation in the core curriculum, WCPS emphasized viewing language development as an integral aspect of the learning process. This paradigm shift underscores the shared responsibility of all teachers in engaging diverse learners in the core curriculum and fostering essential language skills.
In line with this vision, the WCPS ML department has provided professional development (Co-teaching PD slides,, Co-Teaching PD, Co-Teaching PD Evaluation, Co-Teaching 101 Summer Workshop Evaluation) and articulated a clear vision statement for co-teaching (WCPS Co-Teaching Vision Statement Elementary and Secondary Co-Teaching Vision for 2024-2025); WCPS is poised to expand collaboration with the special education department and early learning. This collaborative effort aims to align special education, ML, Pre-K, and Kindergarten under a consistent delivery model, ensuring equitable access to support and resources.

A notable rise in WCPS enrollment (see question 16), 2023-2024, witnessed the addition of 22 ML teacher positions, with a further 17 positions slated for 2024-2025. WCPS is committed to developing and growing highly qualified ESOL-certified educators for the 17 additional ML teaching positions in the upcoming academic year. This proactive approach underscores WCPS's dedication to providing support and resources for ML students and educators, fostering a culture of educational excellence and equity within the district. In light of the ongoing teacher shortage crisis, WCPS prioritized professional development and coursework to attract and cultivate ML staff. In alignment with *Recommendations 5a: All Teachers Prepared to Serve English Learners and 5c: Teacher Pipeline,* ESOL Praxis certification courses and SIOP coursework were offered throughout 2023-2024 to expand "grow your own" programs and other research-based efforts to recruit and train ESOL educators.

To enhance content teacher expertise, WCPS will provide professional development opportunities for educators to improve their capacity to support multilingual learners effectively. (WCPS Summer Summit and ML PD offerings) Analysis of the ACCESS for ELLs assessment data reveals that while listening scored highest among the four domains, writing recorded the lowest average scores. WCPS will focus on writing in EL professional development in the spring of 2024 through the 2024-2025 school year. Through targeted workshops and training sessions, educators will receive specialized instruction on writing, implementing co-teaching methodologies, delivering explicit language and content instruction, and employing rigorous standards-based language instruction strategies. With over 30 hours dedicated to Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (SIOP PD Eval), 15 hours to co-teaching, and 15 hours of ESOL Praxis Coaching and Preparation (ESOL Praxis Course Evaluation) and Spanish for Educators (Spanish for Educators course evaluation, Spanish for Educators Enrollment and Meeting Dates), educators were equipped with the skills and knowledge to meet the diverse needs of MLs.

Despite the growing diversity within educational settings, there are gaps in ML college enrollment. This disparity underscores a systemic challenge in providing equitable access to higher education opportunities. In the upcoming 2024-2025 academic year, WCPS will launch a pilot program to enhance the educational experience of Spanish-speaking Multilingual Learners (MLs) through a two-way immersion initiative. This innovative program integrates English and Spanish for content and literacy instruction, catering specifically to the needs of ML students per *Recommendation 3a: Scale Two-Way*

Immersion Programs and *Recommendation 1: Support and Sustain Multilingualism by Promoting an Asset-based Approach;* and *Recommendation 8: Equitable Access to College and Career Readiness (CCR) Curriculum and Pathways.* This initiative will promote bilingualism and biliteracy among students with Spanish language proficiency. The implementation will be a two-way immersion dual enrollment pilot program for 2024-2025 in collaboration with Hagerstown Community College. Spanish 201EX and 202EX will parallel English 101E. By offering dual enrollment opportunities and fostering language proficiency, WCPS will support MLs through enhanced access to college and career readiness pathways. This pilot program addresses the writing needs of Multilingual Learners (MLs) by introducing English 101E, a specialized course to enhance college-level writing skills (Dual Enrollment Plan and Rationale). Co-taught by an ML specialist and an English teacher, English 101E focuses on critical analysis, research methodologies, and composition development, aiming to improve MLs' writing proficiency. Additionally, Spanish 201EX and 202EX, led by a certified Spanish instructor, offer MLs the opportunity to develop Spanish literacy skills and cultural competence while preserving their cultural identity, ultimately preparing them for academic and professional success.

The overarching goal of the two-way immersion pilot program is to facilitate MLs' seamless transition from K-12 education to postsecondary endeavors. To gauge the program's effectiveness, student progress will be monitored through various metrics, including academic performance, enrollment in dual enrollment courses, improvements in ELA and math achievement on standardized assessments, and attainment of the Maryland Seal of Biliteracy.

To that end, WCPS provides MLs and Reclassified MLs the opportunity to take the STAMP proficiency assessment at no cost. This initiative supports and sustains multilingualism by promoting an asset-based approach and celebrating multilingualism by enabling MLs to earn the Maryland Seal of Biliteracy. The results are promising, with MLs achieving proficiency and earning the Seal of Biliteracy in Italian, Hindi, French, and Spanish. Notably, the percentage of ML students earning the Seal of Biliteracy increased from 20% in 2022 to 25% in 2023, highlighting the positive impact of the initiative in promoting multilingualism and academic achievement among MLs.

In conclusion, while WCPS has made significant progress in addressing the needs of secondary long-term multilingual learners (LTMLs), challenges persist in achieving language proficiency, particularly in writing and reading. Despite efforts aligned with Recommendation 5a of the EL Blueprint Final Committee report, challenges remain in meeting proficiency targets and addressing achievement gaps, particularly for students with disabilities. To overcome these challenges, WCPS will continue to prioritize data-driven interventions, professional development, and collaborative approaches such as co-teaching in English/ELA and Mathematics. Additionally, WCPS will launch a pilot program for Spanish-speaking MLs to enhance their educational experience through a two-way immersion initiative, fostering bilingualism and biliteracy while preparing students for college and career readiness pathways. By implementing targeted strategies and initiatives, WCPS is committed to supporting the diverse needs of multilingual learners and promoting their academic success and linguistic proficiency.

18. Improve Education for Students with Disabilities

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 140 and 142

In March 2023, the LEA described how it would improve education for students with disabilities.

Responses addressed supporting general and special education teachers in the implementation of effective classroom instructional practices and increasing and aligning investments in talent, time, and resources.

Considerations included:

- Strategic staffing to implement a co-teaching model that allows for two teachers to share all responsibilities for a single classroom
- Professional development to support all teachers in differentiating instruction effectively
- Scheduling models to support collaboration and co-planning between general and special education teachers

Based on implementation of the LEA's plans over the last year, discuss the district's progress in transforming its systems and practices and achieving the intended outcomes of the Blueprint. Responses must address the following questions.

- What progress has been made in implementation related to both planned activities and anticipated outcomes? If progress has been limited, what challenges has the LEA encountered? Consider, identify, and refer to available data as needed to demonstrate progress.
- How is the LEA adapting its plans to mitigate challenges and/or ensure continued progress and future success? Which strategies are not working that the LEA will no longer implement, and which new strategies does the LEA intend to implement? Include the rationale for adjustments.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome of improving education for students with disabilities.

WCPS Response

April 2023 - Present: Highest Priorities, Progress, & Challenges

WCPS has been actively working to improve the education of students with disabilities through implementation and continuation of co-planning, co-teaching, professional development, and support for all staff supporting students. WCPS is committed to supporting general and special education teachers in the implementation of effective classroom instructional practices and increasing and aligning investments in talent, time, and resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in special education services and needs, including a growing need for intervention-based/supplemental instruction, an emphasis on identification and compliance, and mental health support. The mental health needs, exacerbated by the pandemic, have resulted in avoidant behaviors and trauma responses among students. As a result, there is a growing need for additional mental health and support professionals experienced in meeting the unique needs of students. These realities require additional staff members and additional resources. Due to a strain on resources and funding challenges, WCPS has been unable to navigate these changes efficiently. However, WCPS continues to work strategically to systematically ameliorate programming for all students, particularly those with special needs.

Co-Teaching

Beginning in 2021-2022, the WCPS special education team initiated collaboration with school-based staff to plan for the implementation of a co-teaching model in Pre-K classrooms at five elementary schools (5 classrooms total) with the goal of improving performance on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is administered in the first two months of the school year to all students entering kindergarten. The KRA measures the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of students in math, English/Language Arts, Social Foundations, Physical Well-Being, and motor development. The goal for fall 2023 administration of the KRA was to have at least 50% or more percent of students with disabilities achieve scores reflecting the range of 'approaching' to 'demonstrating' readiness for kindergarten. In fall of 2023, the KRA scores of kindergarten students with disabilities at the five elementary schools implementing the co-teaching model reflected 54% or more of

students with disabilities performed in the range of 'approaching' to 'demonstrating', exceeding the goal of 50% (data table 18-SWD KRA).

The success can be attributed to WCPS's universal implementation of successful co-teaching strategies that were rooted in professional development and collaborative practices among educators. Co-teaching, as a universal instructional delivery model, was introduced as a method to support the inclusion of students with disabilities. After the pilot at the five elementary schools, WCPS began district-wide implementation of co-teaching in pre-kindergarten classrooms for the 2022-2023 academic year and expanded to kindergarten classrooms for 2023-2024. The following practices were implemented in the 2023-2024 school year to support co-teaching:

Professional Development: WCPS conducted quarterly or bimonthly professional development sessions involving administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, related services professionals, and Birth-5 staff. These sessions aimed to enhance understanding and provide opportunities to share resources for skills related to co-teaching, co-planning, scheduling, and regrouping practices.

Tools & Resources: WCPS purchased tools (i.e., The Goalbook Toolkit and Vector Solutions Inclusive Instruction and Intervention course and Special Educator Essentials Bundle for WCPS Special Education) to support the enhancement of professional learning and training for special education teachers, case managers, and paraprofessionals. The training includes, but is not limited to, supporting the development of standards-based IEPs, differentiated instruction, inclusive practices and strategies, and support for students.

Peer Observations & Sharing Practices: Ongoing opportunities were provided for co-teaching professionals to engage in peer observations and share instructional practices. This approach fosters collaboration and allows educators to learn from one another's experiences and expertise.

School Visits & Reflective Discussions: Co-teaching professionals participated in school visits and engaged in reflective discussions. These activities provided opportunities to observe co-teaching models in action in different contexts and to reflect on their own practices, contributing to the development of more inclusive teaching and learning environments.

WCPS has encountered several challenges in expanding co-teaching to all schools and grades. The challenges include budgetary constraints and scheduling difficulties. Limited financial resources and a small candidate pool (as referenced in pillar 2) have hindered WCPS's ability to hire qualified teachers to support the co-teaching model at every grade level and in every school. WCPS will continue to work strategically and collaboratively to address the needs and craft plans and structures to do what is best for students.

Co-Planning

One strategy that continues to be a priority and opportunity for improvement is a scheduling model that increases opportunities for special education and general education teachers to co-plan (including planning for interventions at a time least disruptive to core academic instruction with peers). At the elementary level, WCPS is leveraging a 30-minute intervention block, and continues to work on the development of a universal scheduling model that supports the requirements of the Blueprint and supports teacher collaboration and co-planning.

WCPS continues to identify strategies for co-teaching and co-planning for general education and special education teachers to meet the needs of students in inclusive classroom settings. General education and special education teachers involved in co-teaching at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten levels at the five elementary schools meet quarterly. The meetings focus on sharing and discussing best practices,

including, but not limited to, the implementation of co-teaching models that maximize instruction (Co-Teaching Presentation 2023-2024); engaging in collaborative problem-solving; scheduling and grouping practices, and co-planning using curriculum resources (PRE-K 5 ELA Knowledge Unit Preparation Protocol).

WCPS teachers have experienced some notable benefits and challenges with co-teaching and co-planning. Staff have reported the co-teaching model has allowed more time for small group instruction, and individualized time is maximized to support the high academic and behavioral needs of certain students. Co-planning has afforded teachers the opportunity to share the planning workload and learn from each other about curricular content, implementation of specially designed instruction, and strategies to accommodate students. Teachers have reported frustration with student behaviors that are disrupting the learning process of the other students, difficulty addressing students with various needs in the same classroom, and juggling case management responsibilities and teaching responsibilities.

Moving forward in future school years, WCPS plans to continue to refine the expectations for co-planning and co-teaching opportunities and to plan for expansion of the co-teaching model beyond kindergarten. Furthermore, WCPS is exploring ways to utilize support staff (such as paraprofessionals and behavior specialists) to provide additional assistance in working with students with high behavior needs. To support special education teachers, WCPS will continue to explore ways to streamline case management responsibilities (i.e., technology platforms for documentation and communication) and to free up more time for instructional activities and continued opportunities to provide professional development sessions specifically focusing on differentiated instruction and behavior management techniques. By implementing these strategies and fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, elementary staff can address the challenges associated with co-teaching and co-planning while maximizing the benefits for teachers and students in inclusive classroom settings.

Instructional & Programmatic Changes
The Reading Inventory (eRI) results show reading levels on the Lexile Framework for Reading Scale with a slight increase in scores for students with disabilities from Spring 2023 to Fall 2023, except for eighth grade. A multifaceted approach has been taken to achieve these results. The implementation of a common standards-based curriculum likely played a significant role in providing students with a structured and comprehensive framework for learning reading skills. Additionally, the tiered reading intervention instruction tailored to students' individual needs demonstrates a commitment to addressing specific challenges and providing targeted support where necessary. Furthermore, the provision of summer learning opportunities for selected students indicates a dedication to continuous improvement and addressing learning gaps in an effort to support student growth and achievement.

The math interim, a standards-based assessment aligned to MCAP, demonstrates significant decreases in students with disabilities' performance in grades 3, 5, and 8 from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023 and Winter 2023 to Winter 2024 in grades 1-10. The decreases may be attributed to the lack of awareness of the most effective accommodations to support math instruction and the challenges that students experience with problem-solving. Furthermore, budget constraints inhibited additional special education staffing to support classroom instruction, which would have reduced the teacher-to-student ratios and increased opportunities for more small-group instruction. Addressing these challenges may require a multi-faceted approach, including:

- Providing professional development opportunities for educators to increase awareness of effective accommodations and instructional strategies for supporting math instruction.
- Training to support the implementation of accommodations through use of the Maryland Assessment, Accessibility, and Accommodations Manual (MAAAM).
- Implementing targeted interventions and support systems to help students develop problem-solving skills.

- Advocating for increased funding or reallocating resources to support additional special education staffing, particularly for providing small group instruction and individualized support.

By addressing these factors, schools can work toward improving student outcomes in math instruction and providing all students with the support they need to succeed academically.

Professional Development & Implementation of Best Practices

WCPS has provided increased opportunities for staff to engage in differentiated professional learning and professional development to strengthen their abilities to co-develop and co-implement specially designed instruction for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

As part of professional development programming, WCPS has implemented professional development opportunities and communities of practice for case managers, principals, new teachers, special education central office staff, and paraprofessionals. Case managers attend monthly professional development meetings that include a focus on content knowledge and skills necessary to ensure students' access to new curricular resources. The monthly focus has also included the Wilson Reading System, prior written notice, the referral review process, transition planning training, functional behavior assessments, tutoring to support intervention instruction, and a deeper dive into assessments.

New teachers received ongoing training to support their understanding and implementation of specially designed instruction, including collaboratively designed and co-led training on aids, co-Implementation, high leverage practices, specially designed instruction, school review process, Blueprint, special education case management: data - impact & present levels - goals.

Special education central-office staff attended bi-weekly training meetings to help enhance the work and support to schools, including sessions on co-teaching, digital accessibility, compensatory services, progress monitoring, emotional regulation/trauma, and compliance leaders. Special Education paraprofessionals attend quarterly professional development, which has included topics such as ECO-mapping, embracing ed tech, engaging reluctant learners, fine motor skills: typical development and strategies, total language approach, building positive relationships with challenging students: art or science?, fading instructional supports in the classroom: The Houdini Paraprofessional, managing behaviors in the secondary classroom, ELA Training: Language Studio, Sound Partners and Stepping Stones, Math Training: Do the Math, Ready Set Math.

Based on a growing need to support students with significant reading challenges such as dyslexia, professional development has been provided on the implementation of Tier 3 interventions: The Wilson Reading System, 4th Edition, and Bowman's Orton Gillingham Plus. Currently, 27 special education and general education professionals have been trained on the Wilson Reading System, 4th Edition, and seven have been trained on Bowman's Orton Gillingham Plus.

Principals received an overview of case manager and district-level training geared toward general and special education teacher audiences, including Appendix A and Intellectual Disability Eligibility Training. Special Education staff created a voluntary Communities of Practice for special education and general education professionals every other week. Examples of collaboratively led trainings include: Wait! Does this student qualify for special education services?, Let's Revisit Goals and Objectives while we talk about initial IEP development, My students need accommodations and supplementary aids to access, Writing IEP ELA Goals and Objectives, Writing IEP Math Goals and Objectives.

WCPS has purchased several tools (i.e., The Goalbook Toolkit and Vector Solutions) to support the enhancement of professional learning and training for special education teachers, case managers, and paraprofessionals, including supporting the development of standards-based IEPs and differentiated instruction and support to students. Examples of Vector Solutions training for paraprofessionals include

Strategies for Managing Small Groups, Assisting and Supporting Instruction, Behavior Management Basics, Roles and Responsibilities, and Strategies for Instructing Small Groups.

As a result of these professional opportunities and strategies, WCPS staff have been increasing their pedagogical and practical knowledge to address the achievement needs of students throughout WCPS.

Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities Pursuing Alternate Learning Outcomes

The WCPS MCAP Alternate Results 2023 show that students pursuing ALO have not met the intended, overall target of 50%, in the areas of English/Language Arts (ELA), math, and science. The largest gap exists in ELA, where only 31.7% of students met or exceeded the target compared to the expected 50%. This is a concerning shortfall of 18.3 percentage points. While math performance is better than ELA, it still falls short with 35.6% meeting or exceeding the target, 11.4 percentage points below the goal. Science performance shows the smallest gap, with 41.1% meeting or exceeding the target, but still 8.9 percentage points below the target.

Based on FY2023 assessment data from Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM), of the students pursuing alternate learning outcomes (ALO), 35.6% met or exceeded the target in reading, which was 14.4 percentage points below the expected goal of 50%. In math, 31.7% of students met the target, which is 18.3 percentage points below the expected goal of 50%.

Efforts have been made to support students pursuing ALOs in literacy instruction. Utilizing the Alternate Education Framework, along with resources such as Comprehensive Literacy for All and Readtopia, WCPS has demonstrated a commitment to providing comprehensive and tailored literacy instruction for students with significant disabilities. Comprehensive Literacy for All, aligned with the Science of Reading (referred to in Pillar 3), offers evidence-based strategies and approaches to literacy instruction beneficial for students with diverse learning needs. Readtopia is a special education instructional curriculum offering engaging and accessible materials specifically designed to support students with significant disabilities in developing their reading skills. The specialized approach includes differentiated instruction, visual supports, and other accommodations to meet the diverse needs of learners pursuing ALOs. By implementing these resources and frameworks, special education teachers can provide meaningful and effective literacy instruction that supports the unique learning needs of students with significant disabilities, empowering them to develop their reading skills and achieve their academic potential.

Specific supplemental programs are being utilized by special education teachers to support students with ALOs in math. Math Builder is a comprehensive resource aimed at teaching essential functional math skills, covering a range of topics from basic arithmetic to more complex concepts like decimals, fractions, time, and money. For secondary students with significant cognitive disabilities, Access Algebra and Access Geometry provide specialized curriculum materials tailored to student needs, ensuring access to math instruction that is both engaging and appropriately challenging. These programs offer differentiated instruction and various supports to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students with significant cognitive disabilities. By implementing these supplemental programs, special education teachers can better address the unique learning requirements of students with ALOs in math and provide differentiated, tailored instruction to ensure the math success of all students, regardless of their learning needs.

Adequate and ongoing professional development, which includes peer reviews and observations, has been an area of opportunity for WCPS special education professionals. Professional development has been provided for new teachers, which included a beginning of the year training, followed by quarterly curriculum implementation training; time with peers to engage in research presentations using strategies

and planned lessons that have worked for them throughout the year; and opportunities to demonstrate how students with significant cognitive disabilities are included in the general education setting, not just for related arts, but for academic learning, have not been provided to all educators. Staffing changes and the focus on supporting new teachers have likely diverted resources and attention away from providing continued professional development for experienced educators.

WCPS recognizes the need to address this imbalance so all staff members have the necessary support and resources to meet the diverse needs of their students effectively. Moving forward, WCPS plans to increase the opportunities, from 4 to 6 times per year, for teachers to engage in professional development on curriculum implementation, peer collaboration, and inclusion strategies while increasing the support and opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to engage in peer reviews and observations.

Historically, there has not been a big emphasis in science instruction. Science was embedded in ELA instruction, but was not comprehensive. During the summer of 2024, WCPS is developing a scope and sequence that reflects the general education scope and sequence. By developing a comprehensive scope and sequence aligned to general education standards that outlines the progression of science topics and skills across grade levels, WCPS is taking proactive steps to address the historical underemphasis of science instruction. This will allow for more targeted and inclusive science instruction. Regular adjustment and progress monitoring will be key to sustaining these efforts over time.

WCPS will continue to incorporate best practices that include a root cause analysis to determine the underlying factors contributing to the lower-than-expected achievement levels across ELA, math, and science; intervention strategies, including revising instructional methods, providing additional services, or adjusting curriculum delivery as needed; and using assessment data to inform decision-making, including the use of appropriate interventions that are responsive to student needs. Additionally, we will increase opportunities for educators, administrators, and parents to discuss findings, solicit input, and garner support for implementing effective solutions.

WCPS has emphasized accurate identification of students who may benefit from ALOs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. Professional development on the updated identification tool for ALOs has been a positive step toward ensuring accurate identification. Providing school-based administrators and special education case managers with professional development ensures consistency and proficiency in using the tool. The goal of utilization of ALO professional development is to improve the accuracy of identifying students who require ALO and preventing over-identification or under-identification. This approach aligns with the goal of providing appropriate support and resources to students based on their individual needs, and promoting equity and inclusivity in our schools.

Early Intervention Services in the Birth-to-Kindergarten Program

The Birth-to-Kindergarten Program provides comprehensive, holistic care and support for children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. The program offers a range of services from assessment to therapy and support networks that are crucial to ensure the children receive the care they need to thrive. If found eligible, a child can receive early intervention services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and, in some cases, when the child turns 3, they may qualify for an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). In the 2022-2023 school year, 567 children (66 more than the 2021-2022 school year), were referred to WCPS for early intervention services through the Birth-to-Kindergarten Program. Given the rise in referrals, it was crucial for the team to engage in regular professional development to enhance their expertise, refine their techniques, and stay informed about the latest research and evidence-based practices.

Staff, including related service providers, specialists, and supervisory staff, participate in bimonthly sessions to ensure that they have consistent opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, which ultimately benefits the children and families they serve. Trainings on the inclusion of specific models and processes like the Routines-Based Interview (RBI), which allows these professionals to gather valuable information about a child's daily routines and activities, which can inform intervention plans tailored to the child's specific needs; the Primary Source Provider (PSP) Model, emphasizes collaboration and coordination among providers, ensuring a cohesive approach to supporting each child's development; and the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process and Early Learning Assessment (ELA) helps track children's progress over time and ensures that interventions are effective in promoting growth and development.

Recognizing the importance of addressing mental health and social-emotional needs in young children and their families, the proactive decision to implement the Pyramid Model for Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children reflects a commitment to providing comprehensive support that goes beyond academic development. Training in the implementation of the Pyramid Model, which is a well-established framework for promoting healthy social-emotional development in young children, and its integration into the Birth-to-Kindergarten program, was extended to case managers, specialists, paraprofessionals, social workers, and other related service providers. This holistic approach to supporting children's development not only benefits the individual children and families being served, but also contributes to a positive and inclusive culture. By prioritizing social-emotional competence alongside academic skills, a strong foundation is established for the overall well-being and success of the children, which is aligned with the WCPS School Culture and Climate initiatives.

The ultimate goal is to ensure that the Birth-to-Kindergarten Program can adapt to changing needs and challenges, ultimately improving the overall quality of care and support provided. Continued investment in professional development benefits the professionals providing early intervention services and translates to better outcomes for the children and families being served.

New Developments & Revised Strategies

Improving education for students with disabilities will continue to be an important priority for WCPS. In the spring of 2023, WCPS hired a new Director of Special Education who has completed a strategic planning process to analyze critical needs and establish clear priorities and goals. To address the multifaceted challenges, including compliance and academic outcomes for students with disabilities, WCPS has adopted a comprehensive approach that encompasses short- and long-term strategies. District leadership recognized that the path forward must start with self-reflection and internal refocus. The leadership team created a vision statement to drive the work moving forward: “Recognize the uniqueness of every learner to create proficient readers, writers, & thinkers who achieve their life & career goals”. As a result, the district is focused on seven key areas to transform systems and practices that will enable the district to ensure that all students who qualify for special education and/or other services meet annual expected progress targets (as defined in IEPs and 504 plans). The seven areas are: vision for service delivery, process development & accountability, intervention & instructional delivery, coaching & professional development, staff investment & culture, staffing model, and support for mental health & behaviors. Special education supervisors and leadership meet weekly to focus on short and long-term improvements. The Special Education Department created a strategic plan with goals, measures of success, key strategies, and multi-year action plans that will intentionally create a school system where the special education department ensures consistent, high-quality special education programs in all schools.

WCPS Department of Special Education is planning key actions for the 2024-2025 school year. Key actions include developing a culture of inclusion and providing professional development for all staff to support the ability of students with disabilities to make growth towards meeting grade level standards;

developing staff capacity related to writing high quality IEPs; and rethinking systems of accountability and monitoring progress.

WCPS has begun to develop a service delivery vision and model that outlines and codifies the services, interventions, and programs that can and will be used to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The vision will support integrating best practices and promoting equity and inclusion to ensure successful academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students with disabilities. This is a top priority because of the many programs and strategies available and the current inconsistencies across the district. As a part of the process, WCPS will develop a handbook that systemizes processes and sets expectations for compliance procedures to support students with disabilities. The handbook will include the process for setting and monitoring IEP goals and services, developing and implementing 504 plans, utilization of MTSS, and other processes tied to compliance. WCPS will then be able to establish systems for monitoring progress and feedback to increase accountability by utilizing current implementation and legal challenges to determine which processes and systems need to be prioritized.

WCPS is continuing to refine strategies for co-teaching and co-planning for general education and special education teachers to meet the needs of students in inclusive classroom settings. General education and special education teachers involved in co-teaching at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten levels at the five elementary schools meet quarterly to share and discuss best practices, including but not limited to the implementation of co-teaching models that maximize instruction; engage in collaborative problem-solving where they brainstorm solutions, share successful strategies and seek advice from colleagues who have faced similar challenges; and co-plan using curriculum resources PRE-K-5 ELA Knowledge Unit Preparation Protocol.

Teachers have experienced notable benefits and challenges with co-teaching and co-planning. Teachers have reported that having more teachers in the classroom has allowed more time for small group instruction and individualized time is maximized to support the high academic and behavior needs of certain students. Co-planning has afforded these teachers the opportunity to share the planning workload and learn from each other about curriculum content, the implementation of specially designed instruction, and strategies to accommodate students. Teachers have reported that high behavior needs students are disrupting the learning process of the other students, having difficulty juggling high needs and average needs in the same classroom and juggling case management responsibilities with teaching responsibilities.

WCPS plans to create and support the development of expectations for co-planning and co-teaching opportunities with general education teachers, as well as a plan for the expansion of the co-teaching model beyond kindergarten. Furthermore, WCPS is exploring ways to utilize support staff, such as paraprofessionals or behavior specialists, to provide additional assistance in managing students with high behavioral needs; explore ways to streamline case management responsibilities for special education teachers to free up more time for instructional activities (including the use of implementing technology platforms for documentation and communication); and continued opportunities to provide professional development sessions specifically focusing on differentiated instruction and behavior management techniques. By implementing these strategies and fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, elementary schools can address the challenges associated with co-teaching and co-planning while maximizing the benefits for both teachers and students in inclusive classroom settings.

WCPS will continue to identify areas of opportunity to expand the capacity and quality of implementation with a more comprehensive professional development program across all roles, including general education. WCPS staff intend to identify skill and knowledge development priorities for staff based on the service delivery plan, processes, and implementation guidebook(s) to adequately and accurately support students with disabilities. WCPS will also develop scope and sequences for professional development by specialized services staff role and identify and design a coaching program when needed.

WCPS plans to establish a system for monitoring outcomes of training/coaching and identify new challenges or gaps in compliance/fidelity. As a part of this process, WCPS will establish a cadence for revisiting professional development needs and developing new schedules.

A key to success will be addressing the culture challenges currently facing the district. WCPS will implement strategies and a stakeholder engagement plan that develop and foster a supportive culture for all students, a sense of shared responsibility for all students, and a "one team" approach. WCPS will foster a culture of investment in staff knowledge and skill, along with teamwork, which will result in enhanced staff retention. One of the additional challenges that WCPS must overcome is the inequity in staffing and allocations by school. WCPS will redefine the staffing model to create an equitable distribution of resources for special education and specialized services staff for students. Currently, finances do not allow for the ideal staffing model. WCPS plans to craft a scaffolded plan to address inadequate and inconsistent staffing models across schools within the district and identify financial considerations.

WCPS will continue the mental health & behaviors working group with a focus on outlining existing and needed programming, along with training and funding needed to best support staff and, ultimately, students struggling with mental health and/or behavior challenges. WCPS will continue to build relationships with community partners and collaborate with organizations and stakeholders to ensure that students and family needs are met and that teachers have access to the necessary support for the classroom.

19. Disproportionate Identification and Disciplinary Practices:

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Questions 141, 143

Discuss the LEA's plan to improve education for students with disabilities through accurate screening and disciplinary practices.

- Provide an analysis of current data related to both the under- and over-identification of students with disabilities and
- disproportionality of student discipline during the pre-referral process or once identified as a student with a disability.

Identify affected student groups and areas of disproportionality, the root causes for the disproportionality(ies), and the specific strategies the LEA uses or intends to use to mitigate and eliminate such occurrences at individual schools and across its system of schools.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome to mitigate disproportionate identification and disciplinary practices.

WCPS Response:

Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) has developed systems, structures, and collaborative consultative processes to mitigate under and over identification of students with disabilities and those enrolled in special education services to improve education for students with disabilities through accurate screening and disciplinary practices. As a result of these ongoing efforts, the over and under identification of students through accurate screening and identification has not been determined to be an imminent need.

Success Measures, Analysis, and Precipitating Factors

Recent data reported by MSDE on WCPS's Annual Data on Plan B Indicators, Notice of Performance for July 2021-June 2022, shows that a disproportionate representation of students with disabilities ages 6-21 special education by race/ethnicity as a result of inappropriate identification *was not* identified WCPS Annual Performance Data on Part B Indicators.

Aligned Professional Development and Implementation of Best Practices
WCPS has provided increased opportunities for staff to engage in professional development and collaborative processes to proactively address and ensure that inappropriate identification, specifically by race, is not occurring.

Student Support Teams: Each school has a multidisciplinary Student Support Team designed to support students with academic and/or behavioral needs to determine the root cause and design a plan of action to mitigate needs prior to a referral for special education.

Pre-referral to Special Education: This is a systematic approach taken by educators and professionals to address concerns about a student's academic or behavioral performance before a formal referral for special education services is made. Pre-Referral to Special Education Process.

Data Review Meetings: Elementary school teams (consisting of the Executive Director of elementary schools, Curriculum Math and ELA Specialists, Special Education department, and Lead Teachers) meet on a quarterly basis to collaboratively analyze and review individual and "big picture" group data to determine progress towards ELA and math goals. Determining student progress on targeted math and ELA areas based on the implementation of supplemental instruction is a focus. Progress is documented individually for students with IEPs using the MTSS or by IEP goal using a modified format.

Aligned Professional Development: Training and professional development are provided to case managers, general education, and special education teachers on the process of Child Find / Screening and determining eligibility. Specific trainings have included topics like:

- Special Education Eligibility
- Wait! Does this student qualify for special education services?

Alternative Programming: WCPS provides continued monitoring and oversight of students eligible for alternate programming and assessment. Case managers and school-based administrators received training on the revised *Appendix A: Participation Criteria and Checklist*. The ALO Coordinator and Specialists attend meetings and provide guidance during meetings where school teams consider students for eligibility for the Alternative Assessment tool.

Stakeholder engagement: Findings from staff and parent stakeholder discussions and feedback captured during a SECAC meeting (September 27, 2023) showed that families lacked the awareness of the resources to support students with disabilities. At that meeting, many parents reported not knowing enough information about special education, the referral process, and resources to support their children. As a result of this understanding, each meeting has been dedicated to providing an information session related to special education processes, programming, and resources to support families. A Special Education Parent Workshop and Disabilities Resource Fair was held on April 20, 2024.

As a result of these ongoing efforts, the over-and-under identification of students through accurate screening and identification has not been determined to be an imminent need.

Success Measures, Analysis, and Precipitating Factors
Recent data reported by MSDE on WCPS's Annual Data on Plan B Indicators (Notice of Performance for July 2021-June 2022) show that a disproportionate representation of Black/African American students ages 6-21 in special education are being suspended or expelled at a higher rate than other students WCPS Annual Data on Part B Indicators. The data is largely due to the inconsistent implementation of the training and awareness of alternatives to suspensions and the impact that suspensions and expulsions have on students with disabilities Indicator 4B Improvement Plan.

Aligned Professional Development and Best Practices
WCPS utilizes and implements various systems to mitigate discriminatory discipline practices for students with IEPs.

Behavior Support Teams: This multidisciplinary Behavior Support Team is designed to support students exhibiting significant behavior challenges that may have resulted in suspension or even expulsion from school. The team meets weekly (or more often) to strategize and develop behavior plans and crisis and safety plans to support students' immediate behavior needs and transition some back to school.

Tier 1 Behavior Supports: WCPS designed behavior training and support for schools that provide guidance on appropriate responses. Tiered behavioral interventions are strategies used in schools to support students' academic, social, and emotional success. Best practices suggest consistent implementation of Tier 1 Behavior Supports prior to trialing more intensive interventions.

Behavior Training: WCPS provides an array of professional development to support the needs of students experiencing social-emotional and behavioral challenges. Training topics have included:

- Crisis Prevention Intervention
- Tier 3 Behavior Supports Cohort Training
- School Climate District-Wide Training
    - Principal Leadership Council Trainings - Manifestation Determination, FBA/BIPs, and reporting of restraints Principal Council: Manifestation Determination
    - Department of Special Education Training - LRP conference to support legal compliance, including but not limited to, manifestation determinations and crisis prevention related to restraint and seclusion.

Alternative 2 Transfer Committee (ATC): The Antietam Academy program offers Tier 3 intervention for students who are demonstrating chronic, severe behavior and/or social-emotional challenges that are interfering with their school success. When the school teams believe that they have exhausted all building-level behavior support for students, a referral for ATC is made to determine if Antietam Academy is a viable option. The ATC consists of multiple disciplinary teams, including but not limited to a special education teacher, central office executive leadership, the district-level equity and excellence supervisor, social workers, and school-based administrators. If the student has an IEP, an IEP meeting is held to determine if services can best be provided at Antietam Academy.

Review of District-Wide Discipline and Suspension Data: WCPS has found that a focus on evidence-based and data-driven decision-making is critical for overcoming challenges with disproportionality across students with disabilities. In order to help position data at the forefront of decisions to identify areas for improvement, WCPS has created the following opportunities:

Time Out School Data presented at Principals Leadership Council. In August 2023, each school principal was given the opportunity to analyze their own school's "time out of school data" to include expulsion and suspension data and develop plans for the school year Principals Council: Restraint and Seclusion. Time Out of School Data was shared mid-year (January 2024) with the Department of Special Education and separately with the supervisor of equity and excellence and director of special education to determine the current state and address any ongoing issues. Discipline Data was shared and discussed collaboratively across offices, including The Department of Student Services and the Department of Special Education, and the Supervisor of Equity and Excellence was included to determine identified needs. Future meetings are being scheduled to develop proactive strategies to avoid discriminatory practices in disciplining students.

20. NEW - Effective Community Partnerships:
How does the LEA support students attending community schools where there is a higher concentration of poverty by supporting their community schools through a collective impact approach? Describe how the LEA ensures its schools align partnerships to their needs assessments and collaborate with partners to share leadership, establish goals, and increase accountability for achieving intended outcomes in service of a specific community and its students.

WCPS Response
WCPS supports students in community schools by contacting and meeting regularly with community partners to identify needs and programs offered to support the identified needs of WCPS students. Through advisory boards at each community school, there are members from community organizations who participate and collectively develop programming to support school and community needs. Responses from the school-level needs assessment are collected, along with surveys from families following school events throughout the school year, to provide feedback on current programming and assess additional needs. These needs are analyzed to identify the highest needs from each school and collectively as a community, aligned with either the goals in the implementation plan and/or the School Improvement Plan.

Each school has an attendance and academic goal that guides the creation of initiatives and is shared through the advisory committees and school leadership teams. Schools receive feedback on their student, staff, and family surveys. This includes the request for programming before and after school and adult learner classes. WCPS partners with community organizations to develop partnerships to support initiatives that provide the best services to students and families. This provides expertise and increases access in a variety of areas to address the numerous needs identified. In establishing the partnership, WCPS and the community partner identify goals that meet the needs of both organizations. Continuous meetings are held prior to and during the collaboration to ensure the programming supports the students and families based on their needs and within the scope of services.

At the district level, to support community schools, two of the initiatives that have been derived from analyzing the needs assessment and communicating with community partners have been the Adult English Learner (EL) classes and extended learning program. Washington County has one of the fastest growing EL populations within the state of Maryland. With this data, as well as the feedback on the needs assessment of approximately 20% of all community school families requesting the need for adult learner classes. In communication with Hagerstown Community College (HCC), they saw a need to support the EL community as well. The shared goal of each organization was to support the EL community with the learning of English so that they can effectively communicate their needs and/or support to us. This partnership began with two classes being provided and now has expanded to over five classes being offered throughout the entire school year. Each school is servicing 10-15 parents. To continue supporting EL families, WCPS enhanced its current partnership with HCC to provide adult EL programming in conjunction with the extended learning program. This enhanced program now incorporates a family component in which the students and parents work together to learn English and the curriculum together.

In addition to partnering with HCC, WCPS extended learning programs collaborate with multiple partners (Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Girls Inc, Maryland State Youth Soccer Association, Hagerstown Police Athletic League, Girls on the Run, and Washington County Fine Arts Museum), to provide enrichment activities to students in addition to the academic activities within the program. WCPS began to implement extended learning programs as an initiative when it received feedback from over 50% of students and families about the need for extended learning opportunities. Initially, the goal of these programs was to focus on an academic component. However, we have shifted the goal to focus more on improving student

attendance and/or behavior. Through team meetings, WCPS has seen that students participating in the extended learning program typically have a higher attendance rate and reduction of behavioral incidents compared to the rest of the school. These enrichment activities range from musical and theater arts to athletic clubs. Through these partnerships, we have been able to increase the number of students who participate in these programs. The increase in students has been due to effectively communicating with students and families about the program, along with adjusting the timing of the program to better meet the needs of families. WCPS has improved communication with families through a variety of methods such as mailings, robo, personal phone calls, social media posts, and providing information in multiple languages. In addition to the communication, WCPS has identified partners that provide programming based on student interests, which are collected from surveys given at the conclusion of each extended learning session.

Through advisory meetings and community partner meetings, WCPS develops criteria for success and outcome data that support and address the student/family needs. These are monitored on a monthly basis and are adjusted to ensure that students are gaining the skills and support through the delivered services. Community schools hold monthly advisory committee meetings that may include both WCPS staff and family members and community partners. In addition to these meetings, WCPS district personnel meet individually with the Community School Specialists to review weekly data and then with the school's leadership team to ensure the program/resource is aligned with the School's implementation Plan and/or Community Goals.

One common outcome that WCPS monitors is student overall attendance to address the connection to school and community. Attendance transparency assists in supporting students and families who may have chronic absenteeism, which promotes academic progress. The attendance data points are monitored through the student information system by weekly/monthly/quarterly reports to evaluate and assess the attendance rate. In reviewing data, WCPS has two schools that utilize their extended learning program as an attendance initiative by providing high interest activities to students with the support of community partners. Community partners are providing programming during extended learning time in the areas of athletics, performing arts, SEL, and cooking classes. WCPS data showed approximately a 3% higher attendance rate for students who are participating in the extended learning program compared to those who are not. In addition to providing high interest activities, community partners have been provided access by families to the school to share information with them regarding their family status. By sharing this information, community partners are able to connect families to their resources and/or programming that can be offered outside of school time.

21. NEW - Expanding Behavioral Health Support:
Discuss how the LEA will enhance and expand behavioral health support for students, including how it leverages the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports to provide services to students and communities.

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome to enhance and expand behavioral health support for students.

WCPS Response
Behavioral Health Data Analysis
WCPS is committed to prioritizing students' behavioral health needs. WCPS has been working to enhance and expand support for students through the analysis of behavioral health data from multiple sources. Services are leveraged through WCPS staff and collaborative efforts with community partners. WCPS coordinates services with the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports through grant funding. From a comprehensive analysis of various data sources, including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Threat Assessment reports, Referrals for Dangerous Substances, Mental Health Referrals, Consortium

Stakeholder Data, Home and Hospital Teaching for emotional conditions data, Community Health Needs Assessment, and others; the following critical trends and needs have emerged:

- Increase in depressive symptoms and anxiety among middle schoolers, especially females;
- Increase in substance abuse, including vaping and edible (food products infused with marijuana) consumption, among adolescents;
- Increase of 43% in student behavior referrals that led to an in/out-of-school suspension for alcohol, inhalants, and controlled substances, as indicated by 171 incidents in 2021-22 to 244 incidents in 2022-23;
- Inadequate number of qualified community behavioral health providers for all students, including those with English as a second language, students who were born addicted to a controlled substance, and those who struggle with substance abuse;
- Barriers to access to community behavioral health providers such as restrictive admission criteria, transportation, lack of in-person providers, early childhood providers, providers who are restricted by insurance, high co-pays, and deductibles, providers with evening hours;
- Growing demand for mental health support services impacting academic engagement, attendance, and discipline;
- Concerns regarding students with cognitive impairments and behavioral challenges, particularly in K-2;
- Increase in externalizing behavior that disqualifies students from outpatient services;
- Challenges in engagement and follow-through with parental support and stable home environments, based on data from MOU provider surveys and stakeholder reports;
- High demand for therapeutic support as indicated by an average of 600 new referrals by school staff for mental health support per year for the past two years;
- Urgent needs for unaccompanied students living in shelters or without parental support;
- Increase of 49% in substantive threats and demand for increased risk evaluations from 74 in 2021-22 to 110 in 2022-23; and
- The number of students approved for full-time Home and Hospital Teaching for Emotional Conditions increased by 17% from 87 in 2021-22 to 102 in 2023-24 as of March 1, 2024.

Enhancing and Expanding Behavioral Health Supports

In response to these identified needs and trends, WCPS makes data-informed decisions in developing a multi-faceted approach aimed at enhancing and expanding behavioral health support for students by providing relevant professional development for staff, working with community providers, and applying for grants. The data sources used to assess the professional development needs of staff include:

- School data on the number of referrals for outside mental health agencies and for wrap-around services;
- Feedback from behavioral health monthly newsletter surveys of staff;
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey;
- School Climate Survey;
- Surveys after trainings and monthly behavioral staff meetings for additional supports needed;
- Community schools needs assessment;
- Community Health Needs Assessment;
- Community agency feedback on emerging trends;
- Legislative requirements and licensure requirements;
- MOU behavioral partners annual surveys

These data sources provide information on emerging trends among our students and families as well as areas that our staff have shared they need more support in when working with students.

WCPS staff works with the following community partners who assist with training for our staff and/or provide feedback and information to support our understanding of growing needs among our students and families to gain training in. The following are those community partners: Shephard Pratt mobile crisis team; Meritus Behavioral Health; Washington County Mental Health Authority; Washington County Hospice; CASA; Washington County Health Department; and the following Consortium grant members – Shephard Pratt, Achieving True Self; Hospice; and Family Health Care of Hagerstown.

WCPS staff applied for and was awarded and/or partner with agencies who have been awarded the following grants to enhance behavioral health supports for students:

- Stronger Connections Grant
- Safe Schools Fund Grant
- Title IV Grant
- Behavioral Health FY 24 Grant
- Consortium Grant
- Grants awarded to Washington County Health Department

Community Awareness and Engagement: WCPS organizes an annual Mental Health Fair, in collaboration with the local mental health authority, to raise awareness among students and parents. Additionally, WCPS advocate for additional services through community provider outreach. WCPS works closely with the Mental Health Authority, and Health Department (Local Addiction Authority).

WCPS actively participates in Consortium grants and applies for other grants to meet behavioral health needs. These grants have facilitated staff expansion, training programs, transportation support, and more. WCPS has added behavioral health positions to staff, including counselors, social workers, BCBAs, etc., to provide additional support for students at schools. In the spring of 2023, WCPS applied for MSDE's competitive *Stronger Connections Grant* and was awarded nearly 4 million dollars to improve school conditions for student learning by providing integrated mental health services for students during the school day. Having the trained staff to deploy to underserved and high-need areas of the county improves equity, inclusion, attendance, safety, and community. Through this grant, WCPS is able to provide professional development to school security assistants and school resource officers, WCPS is able to increase the number of schools trained in restorative practices and hire additional social workers, a BCBA, behavior intervention specialists, and a pupil personnel worker (PPW). More specifically, in FY24, WCPS added one PPW, three social workers, two counselors, and five BCBAs. PPWs work closely with staff at assigned schools to identify and provide responsive services, support, and programs for struggling or at-risk youth. Social workers provide therapeutic support and interventions along with connections to resources. School counselors provide a comprehensive school program to support academic, personal/social, and career understanding, development, and growth for students. BCBAs collaborate with schools and staff in the development, implementation, and assessment of behavior plans and appropriate learning strategies in order to support students in accessing instruction and making academic progress in the least restrictive environment.

WCPS has established dozens of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with additional community partners to support various student needs, resulting in an increase in the number and types of services offered. These partners include but are not limited to Advanced Behavioral Health, Behavioral Framework, Brook Lane Health Services, BTST Services, Citizens Assisting and Sheltering the Abused Inc., Creation Clinical Services, Hospice of Washington County, Innovative Therapeutic Services LLC, Kevin P. Geis PHD LLC, KTS Mental Health Group INC/Thrive, Rise Counseling and Wellness Group LLC, QCI Behavioral Health LLC, San Mar Children's Home Inc., Sheppard Pratt, Mental Health Center, Way Station, Willow Tree Counseling Center, Family Healthcare of Hagerstown, Achieving True Self Inc., Adaptive Teaching and Learning Autism Services, Mental Health Center Mobile Treatment, Progressive and Learning Autism Network, Potomac Community Services Inc., Washington County

Health Department, and Sheppard Pratt Mobile Crisis. WCPS works closely with community providers, vetting proposals, establishing referral procedures, and ensuring alignment with student needs and outcomes.

WCPS offers robust professional development opportunities for staff. Data drives the type and amount of professional development for staff to meet needs and address trends. Professional development for staff has included but is not limited to suicide risk assessment, safety planning, youth mental health first aid, creating inclusive classrooms for LGBTQ+ Youth and also for neurodivergent learners, safeTalk, ASIST, Behavioral Threat Assessment, ADHD in the classroom, Life Space Crisis Intervention, ACES, Managing Anxiety in the School Setting, Forward Facing Professional Resilience, Trauma Basics for Educators, etc.

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Incorporating the Work of the Consortium of Coordinated Community Supports

WCPS has demonstrated its incorporation of the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports in behavioral health programming through several specific actions:

- WCPS staff actively participates in the vetting of provider proposals and extend support by writing letters of endorsement.
- Clear and efficient referral processes are established to facilitate access to behavioral health services for students.
- Key stakeholders are regularly updated on new opportunities via newsletters, flyers, and meetings, including gatherings specifically designed for counselors and social workers.
- Grantees are invited to engage in WCPS's behavioral health professional development sessions, tailored to address pertinent topics such as managing anxiety, SafeTalk, and addressing school avoidance.
- WCPS staff actively seek opportunities for training from the Consortium, ensuring alignment with best practices and current trends in behavioral health.
- WCPS diligently monitors and supports the implementation of grant-funded programs within schools, ensuring adherence to objectives and desired outcomes.
- Regular reviews of student data are conducted to assess the effectiveness of services provided, informing ongoing improvements and adjustments as necessary.
- MOUs clearly outline each provider's services and responsibilities, promoting accountability and alignment with WCPS's vision.

Examples of services anticipated through the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports include individual and family therapy, early intervention groups, case management, medication management, social-emotional learning initiatives, bereavement and grief services, peer grief support groups, staff training, in-home wraparound families services, and parent engagement services, provided by organizations such as Sheppard Pratt Health Systems, Family Health Care of Hagerstown, Achieving True Self, Boys & Girls Club of Washington County, Hospice of Washington County, and San Mar Family and Community Services.

WCPS is dedicated to addressing the behavioral health needs of students through evidence-based strategies, collaborative partnerships, and data-driven decision-making. By leveraging the services provided by the Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports and prioritizing the expansion of behavioral health services, we aim to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Pillar 5: Governance and Accountability

22. Stakeholder Engagement

Initial Blueprint Implementation Plan Reference: Question 161

In March 2023, the LEA discussed how it would engage and represent the voices of stakeholders in the development and implementation of its Blueprint Implementation Plan, an essential element for the 2024 submission as well. Discuss the LEA's strategy or framework for successfully engaging multiple stakeholder groups for varied purposes during this process, including empowering stakeholders to provide meaningful input into developing and implementing its Blueprint Implementation Plan. Describe how the LEA determines success in this area, including lessons learned and adjustments needed.

Provide specific examples of where stakeholder input has been incorporated into the plan and explain why stakeholder input was critical for each example.

Considerations:

- Key stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, community members, LEA Executive Team including the superintendent)
    - Engaging educators across subject areas (e.g., social studies, science, fine arts)
- Vision building and goal setting; Collaborating to create and refine plans
- Communicating (to educate and inform) about Blueprint implementation (e.g., the Career Ladder)
- Establishing feedback loops
    - Successful strategies and opportunities for improvement
- Data collection and analysis; Reporting and sharing progress
- Engaging underrepresented groups
- Leveraging strategic facilitators and Blueprint coordinators

WCPS Response:

During the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS began the initial stages of engaging a consultant to develop a strategic plan that would complement and align with the district's Blueprint Implementation Plan. In light of this, WCPS focused on targeted and specific engagement initiatives that were relevant to advancing the Blueprint goals but ensured these efforts would not be redundant to engagement and outreach that would be part of the strategic plan process, which is now underway. This approach allowed community stakeholders to provide meaningful feedback while preparing them to be involved to a greater extent in the development of the strategic plan.

Educating the Community

WCPS recognizes that if feedback is to be meaningful and well-informed, community members must be aware of the Blueprint's goals and purpose. Thus, communications that are shared system-wide and community-wide have been focused around making Blueprint initiatives real and relevant by telling authentic stories through the eyes of students, staff, and community stakeholders.

For example, in the 2023-2024 school year, WCPS leveraged the experience of Alyssa Miller. Alyssa is a recent graduate who, as a student experiencing homelessness, made a significant turnaround in her senior year. She had a passion for working with children and became a reading tutor apprentice, working with elementary-aged children who were identified as struggling readers. After graduating from high school, Alyssa was hired as a full-time kindergarten paraprofessional in a WCPS Title I classroom and is pursuing college credits to earn her Bachelor's degree, fulfilling her dream to become a fully certificated teacher. The video, highlighted in a Smore, was shared community-wide and demonstrates how the

individualized support and programming Alyssa received in high school contributed to her success and transition to post-secondary programming and eventually, the workforce.

WCPS utilized this story-telling approach to inform broad and diverse audiences, provide context to the pillars, and demonstrate Blueprint initiatives in action as they contribute to student success and achievement.

Communications and Engagement Timeline:
In September 2023, the Washington County Board of Education determined four leading priorities for guiding their decision-making in the FY25 General Fund Budget consideration process. They include:

- Salary and compensation for recruitment and retention of staff
- Safety and security and mental health/behavioral supports
- Meeting the requirements of the Blueprint
- Combating inflation

Given that the top three priorities align with the Blueprint pillars, staff developed a communications and engagement strategy that promoted and sought feedback for these topics, both in an effort to inform the community of Blueprint goals and to incorporate stakeholder input to support the Board's considerations for the budget.

WCPS launched the Mental Health/School Safety Survey in December of 2023. The survey sought feedback regarding mental health supports, behavioral interventions, and school safety measures across the entire WCPS learning community. The survey was distributed by email, and a link was sent via text message directly to all WCPS parents and staff. It was also publicized on the WCPS website and social media platforms to reach a broader group of community members. Nearly 2,500 responses were received. The feedback provided via the survey was considered as the draft FY 2025 budget was developed. The survey results also helped to identify areas in which more communication would be beneficial in helping to raise awareness about mental health and behavioral supports available to students. For example, about 45% of the respondents indicated they were "not very aware" or "not aware at all" of mental health resources WCPS has available for students. As a result, WCPS is now pursuing a partnership with Care Solace, an organization that supports school districts in connecting students and staff with mental and physical health resources.

In October 2023, WCPS distributed an Employee Engagement Survey, which had not been a previous practice of the district. This confidential survey sought feedback from all WCPS employees on various aspects of the workplace, including communication, collaboration, professional growth, and inclusivity. The return rate of 36% (1,349 of a possible 3,763 respondents completed the survey) is on par with an initial effort, according to WCPS' benefits contractor. The information collected will be helpful as WCPS continues work to attract and retain employees and meet the requirements outlined in Pillar 2 of the Blueprint - High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders. WCPS has reviewed the data with Senior Leadership and Human Resources administrators, and staff has scheduled engagement sessions to review the collective responses at a district level with administrators and supervisors this spring. The sessions will be designed to serve as a mechanism for school and department leaders to provide input regarding what WCPS is doing well and where there are opportunities for improvement in terms of workforce satisfaction and fulfillment. WCPS senior leadership will use the feedback from the sessions to define specific actions the organization will take to improve employee experience and improve employee retention. In May 2024, the WCPS Communications team will share a message with all staff summarizing insights from the engagement survey and detailing actions derived from the survey to promote employee engagement and retention. WCPS senior leadership believes in being transparent in the sharing areas for growth with staff, and the commitment of WCPS to improve will promote stronger response rates when an employee engagement survey is administered in the future.

The WCPS Student Career Readiness Survey is another example of direct feedback from stakeholders through a survey process. This survey sought specific feedback from the Washington County business community regarding how well WCPS prepares students for college and/or workforce success. Although just 10 responses were received, the feedback has been used to help inform ongoing efforts to grow partnerships within the local business community in order to enhance student learning, expand apprenticeship opportunities, and ultimately, help to develop a highly-skilled workforce to respond to the needs of the business community. Increasing the response rate for surveys such as this has been identified as an area for improvement. Enhanced communications, outreach, and working to better explain the benefits of providing feedback through such a survey will be points of focus with future similar efforts in order to boost engagement and the overall response rate. In addition, employers may be more responsive to surveys if questions are provided at the conclusion of a student apprenticeship opportunity and sent from the Apprenticeship Coordinator, who has an established relationship with the employer.

The Superintendent presented his recommended FY25 General Fund Budget in January of 2024. As part of his presentation to the community and the Board of Education, WCPS produced a strategic video series highlighting Blueprint initiatives that were implemented as part of the budget process during the 2023-2024 school year. These videos demonstrated the high impact of these strategies in building buy-in and support for upcoming blueprint and budget funding measures. The series included priorities to fund safety, security, and mental health supports; promoting salary enhancements to recruit and retain high quality and diverse staff; providing resources for student support; and establishing a co-taught pre-k model.

In March of 2024, the Board of Education approved a contract for WCPS staff to engage a consultant for the development of a five-year strategic plan that includes academic programs (pedagogy, technology, professional development, etc.), parent and community partnerships, system accountability, and business operations to support teaching and learning.

The district strategic plan, described for stakeholders as "Empower. Innovate. Succeed: Mapping our Future," will be grounded in stakeholder engagement and feedback, which will be collected in multiple ways, including a community forum on April 18th that initiated the process (Superintendent's post). The district strategic plan will also be guided through focus groups and individual one-on-one discussions. A 50-member design team that includes WCPS students, staff, and community partners, and a steering committee that includes members of WCPS Senior Leadership, will guide and oversee the process. Community members were invited to attend the community forum through multiple outreach modalities including a Smore, WCPS website banner, and text messages. After the community forum, a community survey was widely shared with the community to gain more specific input on priority initiatives that will shape the district strategic plan. See strategic planning overview document for more details.

Understanding Stakeholder Assets:
WCPS leadership believes strongly in using the experiences and feedback from stakeholders to drive decision-making. As such, WCPS has developed a draft stakeholder engagement framework to ensure we are intentional in using student, staff, parents, community, and partner feedback as part of the strategic plan implementation process. Stakeholder engagement ultimately requires the district to not only analyze data and present compelling logical arguments, but to understand who cares about the change and why and how they should be engaged authentically. Stakeholders would be actively engaged to not only shape the direction of a project or initiative, but also to ensure increased buy-in on the outcome of the project or initiative. The stakeholder engagement framework will allow WCPS decision-makers to know the assets of stakeholders and leverage those assets in the work (*Stakeholder Engagement Framework*).

The draft stakeholder engagement framework serves as a guide for regular, consistent communications to inform stakeholders of Blueprint updates and progress while also providing an avenue for input opportunities. This structured approach identifies key stakeholders, determines the most effective methods of engagement, and establishes channels for ongoing communication and feedback throughout the school year. Ultimately, the framework will help ensure WCPS that the Blueprint Implementation Plan and project initiatives are informed by a comprehensive understanding of shared aspirations, challenges, and priorities, leading to more inclusive and impactful outcomes. While the schedule may need to be adjusted due to competing priorities of the school system or available time and resources, the framework provides a roadmap for including the diverse perspectives and needs of all stakeholders involved. These efforts will help WCPS gain valuable insights, build trust, and foster collaboration throughout the Blueprint implementation and beyond.

Facilitation Strategies:
WCPS utilizes the Smore platform, which helps staff create digital communications that are visually engaging, accessible, and easily translated into multiple languages. In addition to sending these communications to all WCPS staff and school families, the Communications Office sends messages to targeted audiences through established listservs, including elected officials, community partners and leaders, and organizations that serve underrepresented individuals.

In regards to wider communications regarding the Blueprint, WCPS makes Blueprint information accessible on the WCPS website, maintaining a web page with a wide variety of information, from a document that provides an overview of each pillar and how WCPS is supporting the goals of the pillar, to the actual draft of the district's approved Blueprint Implementation Plan. These resources cater to a diverse community, offering general information that is universally understood as well as highly detailed materials. The content is easily reached from the homepage of the site with one click through a dedicated global navigation. WCPS is currently in the process of redesigning the WCPS website, which will provide greater access and ease of navigation when the site launches for the 2024-2025 school year.

WCPS department leaders provide ongoing updates to the Board of Education regarding Blueprint initiatives in public meetings, which are accessible for in-person attendance as well as through livestreams, live broadcasts, and archived recordings. Topics range across all Blueprint pillars and include substantive data to demonstrate student success.

In reflecting on these campaigns and determining the communications strategy moving forward, the WCPS Communications team recognizes that the vast majority of systemwide messaging aligns with Blueprint initiatives and should be accompanied with the district's Blueprint branding and supporting details. In addition, staff will more purposefully include Blueprint language to connect with common language and ensure that the district strategic plan stakeholder engagement, monitoring, and implementation are tightly aligned to Blueprint initiatives.

WCPS will distribute four Smore communications each school year that are centered around the Blueprint Implementation Plan. Each communication will include one to three updates about each of the five pillars and will be developed to be universally understood by a diverse audience. These messages will be distributed in September, December, March, and June. For the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year, a Blueprint update was sent to all WCPS staff, school families, and community stakeholders in April that highlighted WCPS' progress in implementing the Blueprint initiatives across the district. These concise, easy-to-read updates will also be posted on social media for wider promotion across Washington County.

The update also included an opportunity for stakeholders to provide direct feedback regarding WCPS' Blueprint implementation by way of a survey that includes a Leichert scale question for each pillar followed by an optional long response to quantify suggestions or feedback for each pillar's initiatives.

This survey will live on the WCPS web page dedicated to the Blueprint as an open means to receive continual input on the overarching goals and measures to support the Blueprint implementation in WCPS.

Summary of the Feedback:
WCPS is continuing its efforts to more effectively engage with all community stakeholders and to respond to the feedback received through the engagement process. Concurrently, WCPS is finalizing and preparing to execute a plan that will enhance its engagement efforts through a strategic planning process that is currently underway.

Based on a review of the analytics for Smore campaigns, WCPS exceeded national open rates and click-through rates, indicating the messages were engaging and effective. Furthermore, viewing times on YouTube exceeded the average viewing length for comparable videos.

Meaningfully engaging with underrepresented groups and community organizations that serve underserved and underrepresented populations continues to be an area of focus. WCPS has established a Family Engagement Workgroup to help address the need to improve family engagement across the district. The group has developed a vision for what family engagement should look like in Washington County and will also be developing a detailed rubric to equip school-level leaders with a means to assess community engagement efforts at their schools. The workgroup also intends to provide ideas, information, and training to help schools expand engagement efforts. Underrepresented populations are a special focus of this workgroup as there are indications that it is an area with the greatest potential for growth and the greatest potential return on investment.

In order to more effectively monitor the diversity of community members providing input on the WCPS Blueprint Implementation Plan, the Communications team will identify ways of collecting demographic information in engagement efforts. For example, surveys will include optional demographic questions regarding gender, race, and ethnicity - all with an option of "*prefer not to say*." The survey will explain that this information is only being gathered to ensure a broad variety of voices and perspectives across our community are being represented in the stakeholder feedback that is being collected. Should WCPS determine there are groups that are not being represented through our engagement efforts, Communications staff will work with the Office of Equity and Excellence to engage established community leaders and influencers among these identified groups to determine the most effective means of outreach.

The 2023-2024 school year marked a significant period of progress and engagement for WCPS as we embarked on the development of a strategic plan complementing the Blueprint Implementation Plan. Through targeted initiatives and meaningful stakeholder engagement, we ensured that our community's voices were heard and valued in shaping the future of our district. From sharing authentic stories of student success to launching surveys and engagement sessions, we've worked strategically to foster transparency, collaboration, and inclusivity. Moving forward, we remain committed to leveraging stakeholder feedback to drive decision-making and achieve our shared goals.

23. NEW - Blueprint Funding and Resources:

Discuss the process the LEA uses to assess budgetary needs and make critical decisions about the allocation of new resources and the reallocation of existing resources to implement its Blueprint Implementation Plan. Include estimated funding allocations by pillar and program. Provide specific examples and the rationale for the allocation and reallocation of resources.

Considerations:

- Budgeting annually and over multiple years
- Funds following students to their schools (Education Article § 5-234)
- Targeted funds (e.g., Transitional Supplemental Instruction Aid, Concentration of Poverty grants, State Aid Funding for CCR, etc.)

Required Data Analysis: Through an analysis of data, discuss progress towards meeting the Blueprint outcome to ensure resources are aligned to meeting student needs at the school level.

WCPS Response

Use of New and Existing Resources

In preparation for the FY25 Budget, the WCPS finance team established a much more refined assessment of school expenses. Additional financial resource transfers are proposed for FY25 to continue to close the gap on resource allocations within the set of schools that educate a more diverse set of students (Budget Projection 75%).

Over the next six to nine months, the finance team will work on a forecasting tool to evaluate future needs by school, based on anticipated enrollments from the planning supervisor and historical trends of enrollments of Multilingual and Special Education students. The WCPS planning department forecasts total enrollment by grade but does not forecast specific subgroups. The projection of ML enrollments may be difficult based on the graduation rate, the transient nature of ML students and current growth rates of the WCPS ML population. Through internal forecasting, the senior leadership team and finance team can project and plan for expected funding and expenses to ensure long-term compliance with the funding requirements of the Blueprint. The senior leadership team is currently exploring the procurement of budgeting and forecasting software for use in FY26 and beyond.

The greatest challenge with the expected resource allocation is that more affluent and less diverse schools will likely see rises in class size due to less available funding. Washington County has schools with free and reduced meal rates as low as 30% and as high as 88%. This variance will drive significant differences in the financial resources available at individual schools and will be a stark contrast to what the community is accustomed to. Specifically related to targeted funding for ML and Pre-K services, WCPS ensured compliance with the 75% rule with the start of the FY23 fiscal year. During each subsequent year, Finance staff determine the new 75% threshold and program staff make recommendations to the superintendent to allocate the resources across schools based on student enrollments and system needs.

Multi-Year Budgeting Plan by Pillar

Pillar 1: Budget for Early Childhood Education

In the Draft FY2025 budget, WCPS has allocated slightly more than $10M for Pillar 1 (approximately 81.2%) of the $12.3M received in Pre-K funding. As has been done over the last two fiscal cycles, WCPS will minimally earmark 75% of new Pre-K funding for Pillar 1 to ensure compliance with the 75% rule.

Pillar 2: Budget for teacher salary and career ladder
In the Draft FY2025 Budget, WCPS has allocated $127.1M for initiatives associated with Pillar 2. This allocation represents 35.6% of the projected budget. As teacher salaries rise, additional staff are needed to ensure the planning time requirements are met, and as the number of teachers achieving NBCT continues to grow exponentially, allocations for Pillar 2 will be significant. Historically, staff raises have comprised the largest budgetary increase from year to year. In the Draft FY2025 Budget, wage increases for staff account for 52.37% of all budget increases.

Pillar 3: Budget for instructional systems, dual enrollment, CCR Pathways, CTE
In the Draft FY2025 Budget, WCPS has allocated approximately $10.9M towards CCR Pathways, CTE programming, dual enrollment expenses, and other programming that support preparing students to be college and career ready after their completion of their PreK-12 education. This expense is significant when compared to the revenue received for CCR students ($604,847) and the foundation allocation for the workforce development board of $1,400,000. WCPS has been providing up to 60 credits under the dual enrollment program and MOU. In evaluating student scheduling, staff foresee the dual credit expense is near its highest level barring an increase in the cost per credit hour by our educational partners. Therefore, future increases in allocations for Pillar 3 are likely minimal.

Pillar 4: Budget for targeted resources to ensure all students are successful
In the Draft FY2025 Budget, WCPS has allocated approximately $58M for programs to ensure educational success for all students. Expenses in this category include providing education staff and resources for students in special education, multilingual learning environments, behavioral supports classrooms, and non-traditional supports (i.e. virtual education, alternate smaller group instruction or family services). WCPS has significant growing needs in supporting special education students, multilingual students and students with behavioral needs who are not demonstrating success in the classroom. Over the next several years, allocations to this area will likely continue to grow and are expected to be the second-highest proportional increase in the proposed budgets.

Pillar 5: Budget for Governance and Accountability
In the Draft FY2025 Budget, WCPS has allocated $836,000 plus the cost of benefits for the staffing of the financial services team. This team ensures that state and local allocations are budgeted appropriately and that the resulting expenses are accounted for in the right category to meet the requirements of the Blueprint. WCPS has added three staff members to this team over the last three years, representing a 25% increase in full-time equivalent employees (FTE's). WCPS expects allocations for Pillar 5 to be stable over the long-term.

As noted in the previous section, new forecasting and budgeting tools will enable the finance team to drill deeper into the allocations to provide more specific dollar value or proportional increases to each of the pillars. To make future projections prior to having the new tools would not be accurate or effective.

Strategies to Increase Schools Meeting Minimum Funding Requirements
During the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, the WCPS accounting team has modified its accounting code structure to enable the tracking of all revenues and expenditures to the student level. The goal of the overhaul of the prior accounting structure is to comply with the 75% rule. To that end, WCPS grew the account code structure from approximately 5,000 to 70,000 codes to enable the tracking of revenues and

expenditures for the 46 schools and for central office departments. In planning for the FY 24 budgeting process, senior staff, with assistance of the finance department, developed a very rough assessment of the school system's compliance with the 75% rule. As a result, decisions were made to reduce classroom instructional staffing in some secondary schools, and to transfer those resources into secondary schools that needed additional staff to increase student achievement and move toward the goals of the Blueprint funding formula.

As WCPS continues to work through the budgeting process for FY25, staff have aimed to educate the Board of Education and the Board of County Commissioners on the funding requirements of the Blueprint including providing examples of what the resource allocation would look like under the 75% rule and forecasting local share of blueprint funding for FY25-FY27 (Feb 2024 Budget Work Session).

WCPS has historically spent more in special education services than the funds received. For example, in FY2024 WCPS the Blueprint formula provided $21,260,974 in special education funding from both state and local sources. WCPS budgeted $30,610,773 in expenses exceeding revenue by $9.35M or 44%. The challenge to balancing this funding is matching the funds to the school where the student is education. As required, WCPS reports the enrollment of special education students based on their home school location which is based on their address, but some special education students attend other WCPS schools, due to the decision(s) of the IEP team(s). Therefore, the funding allocation based on student enrollment will never match where the expense is realized until enrollment is reported to MSDE based on the school in which the student is enrolled (rather than reported based on geographic attendance zone).