

MSOC LEA Member Profile Part III: Narrative

The Baltimore City Public School System

In its second year of participating in the MSOC project, the Baltimore City Public School System is just beginning to offer related online courses. There is great interest in offering an SAT Prep course, but this hasn't happened as of yet because the MVLO course was not ready. Instead, BCPSS is going to utilize grant funds to offer the Princeton Review's SAT Prep online course. There was some frustration noted, in that it has taken a long time to get this or any other course off the ground. Efforts are currently underway, however, to ensure that students with identified needs are given the opportunity to enroll in courses for the summer and fall.

Part of the delay was a large fiscal problem that loomed over the BCPSS. The focus was on a \$58 million budget deficit and huge staff cuts and layoffs. As the budget and climate have stabilized, however, the focus has moved back to services for students, including the attempts to implement additional online courses.

The biggest MSOC benefit has been the interaction and relationship-building with other districts. It was noted that by meeting with other districts in an on-going fashion enabled participants to network and collaborate, as well as to garner additional strategies and tips for implementing online courses. Districts that have experienced success in enrolling students in online courses have served as great role models for districts such as Baltimore that have had a difficult time implementing the numbers of courses that they expected to have available.

Regarding lessons learned, it was noted that making a systemic instructional shift such as this can be difficult for one person. Good communication processes must be in place in order to gather feedback from all stakeholders as to the needs facing the district. Additionally, support must come from all stakeholders as feedback transformed into action. BCPSS also noted that creativity must be used when planning professional development for teachers. In the past, BCPSS provided one staff development day per month for either school-based or systemic training. That model was changed during the 2004-2005 school year, so funding had to be identified to provide stipends for teachers to come to workshops and professional development activities outside of the school day and on Saturdays.

The Baltimore City Public School System has conducted some professional development activities, although not a full training program. Four teachers have taken the mentor training course, and two are just finishing taking the Teaching Online course. It was noted that teachers who took these courses will serve as trainers as additional sections of these courses are offered locally. Last summer BCPSS also hosted some short sessions about online learning and also held a meeting in early January to discuss how to get students enrolled in courses.

Despite the fact that not as many students are taking online courses as hoped at this time, BCPSS staff is still positive and hopeful that this e-learning initiative will take hold in the district and more emphasis and support will be given to this instructional model.