

**Remarks by Dr. Joe A. Hairston
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I am excited to speak at a conference that is about “College for All.” It is hard to imagine that we should need to have a conference about this, or that the idea of preparing all children for college could be a new idea.

I am here to talk about the spirit of possibility.

Public education wasn’t originally designed to challenge all students. Some might argue that all students did not need the opportunity to go to college. The education of all children was not important to us.

In my county, Baltimore County, 40 years ago a high school diploma would be enough to qualify you for a job at Bethlehem Steel, Martin Aircraft, or some other factory. That job would pay enough so that you could buy a home and car, take vacations, and even save for retirement.

In Baltimore County, and throughout the nation, that is no longer the case. The “old” way of forging steel at Bethlehem Steel has been replaced with a high-tech process. Martin Aircraft is now Lockheed Martin.

Young people need to be well-educated to secure their futures – and ours. We are moving from a manufacturing economy into a higher skill, high-wage economy. Many jobs will require a minimum of a two-year college education or better.

Virtually all jobs will require technological skills and good communication and analytical skills. We need more thinkers, more creators, more scientists, more mathematicians, more entrepreneurs, more knowledge workers – to compete on a global scale. Whatever careers they choose, our students need higher and higher skill levels to earn a living wage and succeed in life.

Here is what we know...I want to share with you some worrisome indicators from *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* – a 2006 publication from the National Academies. These indicators show that in a very real and tangible way, our students are competing against others who may be better educated and willing to work for far less pay. Some of these are indicators that you may have seen before, but I think that when you look at them all together, the sense of urgency and enormity of the challenge is undeniable.

The U.S. trade balance in high-technology goods has shifted from a positive to a negative balance. Some of our largest employers are creating large numbers of low-wage jobs, thereby increasing competition for high-wage positions. Other nations are seeing us as a

less desirable place to live, and we are no longer the world's leading exporter of information-technology products.

Against this global and technological backdrop, our students are not faring as well as they need to. Our students are not performing as proficiently as they need to in math, and most of them are being taught by teachers not fully qualified to teach math. We are experiencing a similar challenge securing enough qualified science teachers. And it shows. Again, our students are not doing as well as other students in the world in math and science. Here's yet another fact that supports that we need to do better in preparing our students to learn math and apply it to the real world.

All of us, even those outside of education, understand the importance of improving our education system, and yet, our children still spend more time watching television than in school.

This last worrisome indicator points to the challenges in changing education in America when it is primarily governed by small school districts.

What all of these worrisome indicators confirm is that we have to do more to prepare all of our students. As President Clinton said, "In the world of the future, knowledge will matter most." At this point in time, we cannot afford to only truly educate some of our students.

Now for the first time in history, we have a federal law -- No Child Left Behind -- that mandates that we teach every child and that we show evidence that every child is learning. This law has its critics -- those who argue about the details and about funding, but it certainly has the right intent: that is to say that every child can and should learn to their highest ability. It is our job to teach them. No Child Left Behind is forcing us to be more disciplined and consistent in what we do.

Too often people also see education as a separate entity -- as if it is not affected by the world and as if

Some worrisome indicators from the PowerPoint slides that accompanied these remarks

For the cost of one chemist or one engineer in the United States, a company can hire about five chemists in China or 11 engineers in India.

The U.S. trade balance in high-technology manufactured goods shifted from *plus* \$54 billion in 1990 to *negative* \$50 billion in 2001.

During 2004, China overtook the United States to become the leading exporter of information-technology products.

Fewer than one-third of US 4th grade and 8th grade students performed proficiently in mathematics.

In 1999, 68% of US 8th grade students received instruction from a mathematics teacher who did not hold a degree or certification in mathematics.

In 2000, 93% of students in grades 5 -- 9 were taught physical science by a teacher lacking a major or certification in the physical sciences (chemistry, geology, general science, or physics).

In 1995, US 12th graders performed below the international average for 21 countries on a test of general knowledge in mathematics and science.

According to a recent survey, 86% of US voters believe that the United States must increase the number of workers with a background in science and mathematics or America's ability to compete in the global economy will be diminished.

it does not impact the world. I want to share you with my variables chart, which shows the factors that impact public education. Some of them also support public education. And public education impacts all of these factors by helping to shape and interpret culture and by producing leaders, citizens, artists, and workers.

That's the larger view, now I want to look closer at Baltimore County. Geographically, Baltimore County wraps around, but is a distinct jurisdiction from, Baltimore City, Maryland. We are a county of diversity – racially, economically, socially, and geographically – from children living in trailers to children living on estates in gated communities, from children living in families where neither parent can find work, to children living in families where one parent can afford to stay home

Like much of the rest of the nation, many of our communities are fairly segregated, leading many of our schools to be likewise either predominantly white and wealthy or African-American and middle class or mixed race but low income.

A large number of high-quality private schools in the area create substantial other educational options for area families.

In addition, we are surrounded by institutions of higher education from Johns Hopkins to community colleges. There are 20 colleges (two and four year schools) in the Baltimore metropolitan area.

Baltimore County Public Schools – the 25th largest school system in the nation, has:

- More than 107,000 students
- 168 schools, programs, and centers
- 17,000 employees, including 8,000 teachers

For the last several years, we have been experiencing a seismic shift in diversity. Our student enrollment has increased 24% since 1990. Minority enrollment in our schools is approximately 44%, including an increasing number of Hispanic students. Minority enrollment has increased 184% since 1990. ELL [English Language Learners] enrollment has increased 183% since 1990. We have seen a similar substantive increase in our students who are eligible for Free and Reduced Meals.

“Conventional wisdom,” as it is called, would predict that increased diversity would equal lower and lower performance – but that is not the case in Baltimore County. In Baltimore County Public Schools we are performing at the highest level in our history. Test scores have been steadily rising for the past five years.

We have garnered national and international attention for our use of technology and for the high quality of our arts instruction. One of our high schools was named one of the top 100 in the nation. And the 2004 Schott Foundation report on *Public Education and Black Male Students* says that Baltimore County Public Schools has “the highest graduation rate

for African American males of any large school district in the country, five points higher than that for white males in the country as a whole.”

The foundation for our achievement is our *Blueprint for Progress*. This seminal document corresponds with, yet predates, No Child Left Behind, America 2000, and the National Education and Maryland State Bridge to Excellence Goals. What I often say is that the *Blueprint* describes the kind of education every responsible parent wants for his or her child. What the *Blueprint* does for Baltimore County is create a point of focus, a common language, a common goal -- and this goal is ever-increasing academic rigor and academic achievement for all students.

As a leader I believe in clarity, brevity, and repetition. I believe in reinforcing a message until it is crystal clear. And one of those messages is “all means all.”

When we say “all” children, we have to mean “all” children. It cannot be about how rich, how black, how white, how Hispanic...It cannot be about the kind of house they live in, or how much education their parents have, or what they ate for breakfast.

All means all.

As a boy who grew into a man and an educator in a society still struggling with race, I know what it feels like when people expect less from you because of their prejudices.

My grandparents grew up in homes without running water. My sons never lived in homes without two-car garages and air-conditioning.

I am the link between those generations, and education was the key to forging that link. Education provided the opportunity for a better life.

I know how much has been sacrificed to ensure that my parents got an education, that I got an education...I know how much is sacrificed to create opportunity from one generation to the next.

As a lifelong student, I still will never forget my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Woodard, leaning down and whispering in my ear, “You can do this,” as I struggled with a tough essay. I know about the impact one person, one educator, can have on the life of a student.

With this personal commitment and with the foundation of our *Blueprint*, what I set about to do in Baltimore County was to create a culture of higher expectation and broader opportunity for all students – a spirit of possibility – by first creating a structure to support this achievement.

So, how did we accomplish this? We did this:

- By making a major investment in instructional technology and technology to support school system management
- By developing a “warehouse” to manage data and to make it immediately available to schools and teachers so that current data could be used to make day-to-day instructional decisions
- By eliminating what I call “low level” courses, courses that did not prepare students for the next level of coursework or for higher education
 - The challenge is in getting this done. It is not just a matter of saying the words. The work has to happen through people. If everyone had listened and acted in my district three years ago, our scores would be through the stratosphere.

We have also supported student achievement:

- By increasing the number and type of rigorous courses
- By monitoring students’ progress and holding all stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, and parents) accountable

AVID and College Board are integral parts of this culture – part of our spirit of possibility – by helping us to substantially increase:

- The number of students participating and succeeding in more rigorous courses
- Academic performance for all students
- The quality of instruction (through professional development)
- The degree to which students are prepared for college – and
- The number of students attending college

So who are these students? All too frequently students are getting lost or discounted in the middle years. Education has always supported the best of the best. Our top 10 to 20% attend some of the best colleges and universities in the nation. In the past ten years, we have provided additional resources to support our students with the most learning challenges. Students who need our support are those in middle -- average and underachieving students and students from low-income families, students who may be unfocused and uninspired. Students in the middle often know they are smart but need additional support to fulfill their potential.

The world continues to confirm what we know about these students. Just last week, Civic Enterprises released a new study funded by the Gates Foundation. This study found that 90% of students who drop out have passing grades. Study authors describe students who are capable but who need and want more challenge and more engagement.

Our partnership with AVID and College Board provides the framework to give these students a focus on the future, a challenge that I truly believe they are craving, and a reason to succeed.

Everyone wants to feel connected. Students in the middle, especially, excel with the close relationships developed with peer collaboration and the instructional support of teachers and tutors. They want someone to say to them, “You can do this!”

Let me talk a little more about the College Board partnership. Establishing this partnership in 2000 was one of the first acts of my administration. I had similar partnerships in other jurisdictions since 1982.

Having a partnership with College Board is an important way to increase college awareness and preparation for all students.

The Baltimore County / College Board Partnership includes:

- AP Potential
- AP teacher workshops
- AP Vertical Teaming Workshops for core subject teachers, grades 6 - 12
- SAT Online and
- SAT parent workshops

The Baltimore County / College Board Partnership also includes:

- Partnerships with local colleges (Accuplacer, AP teacher training workshops, student dual enrollment)
- CollegeEd
- Early grade 8 preparation for grade 9 PSAT
- All BCPS grade 9 and 10 students taking the PSAT
- PSAT/NMSQT – early AP identification

Advanced Placement is one of our major success stories. The steady upward rise in students participating in Advanced Placement courses reflects increased academic rigor, expectations, and student aspirations. As recently as 1992-1993, our AP participation was about 2%, now it is more than 10%.

Again, what this means is that more and more of our students are absorbing our spirit of possibility. More and more of them are hearing us say to them, “You can do this.”

Typically increased participation lowers pass rates, but not in Baltimore County. Our pass rate, which is more than 70 percent, remains above the state pass rate and above the global AP pass rate of 60%.

Now I will turn to the subject of AVID. AVID enhances the performance of students and school staff and raises the level of expectation for all students in a school. AVID provides structure, a format, a platform, that reinforces what every good school should do:

- Identify student potential and shine light on it,
- Nurture positive relationships between teachers and students,

- Enhance teachers through professional development,
- Challenge students to take on increasingly rigorous coursework, and
- Introduce all students to a world of greater opportunity and possibility.

Baltimore County Public Schools adopted AVID in 2002, supported, in part, by a \$500,000 annual minority achievement grant. It began with 59 students in six schools, starting in schools with numerous academic challenges and focusing on at-risk students. We used a two-pronged approach to enhance student performance while addressing the academic climate and routine of the entire school.

AVID today is in 15 high schools, more than half of our high schools, and has an enrollment of 768 students. We also began, last school year, implementing the AVID Path initiative in the middle schools that feed into the AVID high schools. AVID Path helps prepare students for AVID and for more rigorous coursework in general. Our first AVID class will graduate this year. We will add the program to five more high schools next school year.

AVID results

Our data technology allows us to monitor the progress of each AVID student – which is important for accountability. Our data shows that, in our schools, AVID:

- Improves attendance
- Increases student participation in highly rigorous courses (such as GT, Honors, IB, and AP)

In addition, our data shows that AVID students' pass rates in rigorous courses increase significantly by grade 12 regardless of gender or ethnicity.

Now I would like to look specifically at AP courses. Last school year was the first time that AVID students in Baltimore County participated in AP courses. Last school year the number of participating students was 36, now it is 107. Even with this dramatic increase in participation, we have achieved an even higher pass rate, moving up from 92% last year to 95% this year.

AVID also increases PSAT participation, and increases high school assessment pass rates – in algebra, biology, government, and English.

I think there are a number of reasons why AVID is so successful in Baltimore County Public Schools. It is completely aligned with the goals, performance indicators, and strategies in our *Blueprint for Progress*. It emphasizes positive relationships between teachers and students. And it requires that students make the connection between what they are learning today and their future plans. The biggest reason for our success, however, is that we have made the program a priority. We struggled against the misperceptions and attempts to undermine it, and plowed through to make it happen.

AVID also succeeds in Baltimore County schools because of: the way that we recruit students into the program and the way that we implemented the program – understanding that it is not about race. It is about increasing access for underachieving students and students from economically disadvantaged homes.

The next slides will describe our recruitment process. I want to talk for a few minutes about our recruitment and selection process and about some of the other factors that have been key to our successful implementation of AVID in Baltimore County Public Schools. Our recruitment process begins early, in December. Schools use vertical teaming meetings between the AVID high school site teams and administrators, core subject teachers, and counselor to discuss the mission and purpose of AVID. Then the AVID high school coordinator meets with the middle school team to share the recruitment plan and process, including information about the National AVID Center student selection criteria, middle school teachers' recommendations, letters of invitation to parents, the voluntary student application, and the voluntary parent and student contract.

AVID high school teams make presentations to the students recommended for the program. Often these teams bring high school AVID students to speak to the middle school students.

To be considered for the program, recommended middle school students must submit completed applications and signed parent permission sheets. Then, the AVID high school site team members select potential students based on the National AVID Center student selection criteria.

After the students are selected, a reception is held for parents and students at the AVID high school.

Our recruitment process has been very successful in bringing the middle and high school staff members together to identify students who will benefit from AVID.

Some other factors that have been key to our success include: the way that we have phased in the program, beginning with a small number of high schools (6) and adding three to five more each year. Last year, for example, we were in 11 high schools, serving 452 students. This year, with the addition of four more schools, our numbers increased to 768.

As we grew, two administrators supervised AVID program implementation and provided technical support and monthly professional development to AVID school coordinators.

I mentioned earlier that using data systems to support accountability has been essential. One of our AVID administrators created what we call the "AVID Cube" so that each school could assess various data related to students' attendance, achievement, and performances on SAT, AP, and state tests. All AVID high school administrators have several opportunities during the school year to receive training in effective use of the Cube. This Cube is unique and allows administrators to review data from different

perspectives by grade, ethnicity, school, rigorous course, etc. The data is pertinent in establishing instructional objectives, monitoring student progress and in evaluating student performances with measurable results.

Another key is that we structure opportunities for students to access rigorous instruction through honors, gifted and talented, and AP courses. All AVID students are expected to take at least one AP course by grade 12.

In addition, students are exposed to the college culture via college tours and speakers from area colleges.

Relationships are emphasized throughout AVID. This begins with the careful selection by the principal of the right individual to serve as the AVID school coordinator. This individual must be both an excellent instructor and someone who can consistently provide nurturing and positive support for the students. We are looking for educators, like my third grade teacher Mrs. Woodard, teachers who will instill in their students that spirit of possibility, that belief that they can do this, that they can do anything.

In addition, Baltimore County Public Schools has contracted with an agency to provide at least two college tutors for each AVID school. These tutors develop close instructional and mentor-type relationships with the students.

Communication extends beyond the school building. AVID teachers and site team members have frequent communication with parents regarding their children's progress. With these supports, AVID students begin to experience the support and encouragement of many adults all working together to prepare them for college and future success. These students, who could have languished in the middle, begin to feel valued and connected. I mentioned earlier that we are using the PATH program in middle schools to prepare students for success in AVID and beyond.

Also, this past fall, I appointed an AVID District Director, whose sole responsibility is supervising, monitoring, and evaluating AVID program implementation and expansion. This support service worker provides weekly technical support and monthly professional development to AVID schools, administrators, school coordinators, school site teams, and students.

Let's look at how AVID has impacted its participants:

- 54% of AVID seniors are taking at least one AP course.
- 98% of AVID seniors have applied to college. We expect to reach the 100% mark.
- Some students are earning high SAT scores – 1700 and above.
- Several students have already received scholarships. Here are just a few examples:
 - One received a \$32,000 scholarship from Washington and Jefferson College.
 - Another received \$32,000 from Wilmington College.
 - Three other students have each received \$8,000 worth of scholarships.

Now, let me tell you about a few specific students:

Marcia, a 10th grader, says that before AVID she thought maybe she would grow up and be a singer. Now she is interested in environmental preservation. She says that because of AVID she has visited colleges and now understands how to get into college, what they are looking for. She describes AVID as a structured study hall, and says that the program gives you tools to help you with your academics. Marcia considers herself a student who has always been research oriented, always wanting to know more. She says that the tools and techniques she has gained through AVID allow her to find even more meaningful information faster. In fact she says that using the PQ5R technique on a biology project is what led to her interest in the environment.

Most of all Marcia talks about “the push” she gets from AVID – from her teachers and the other students. “It’s up to you to produce. It’s your responsibility,” Marcia says. “But it makes a big difference to have people behind you – pushing, helping, working together.”

Brandon, an AVID senior, has applied to four colleges and, so far, has been accepted by three of them including his top choice, University of Maryland College Park. He plans to study engineering.

Brandon says that when he first heard about AVID he “figured it couldn’t hurt.” Now he says, “It really worked.”

Like Marcia, Brandon gives highest praise to the AVID staff. “It really made a difference,” he says, “having someone in my corner – besides my parents – pushing me to take more rigorous courses, and having more one-on-one time with teachers, not just being one of 100 kids they see each day.”

He also talks about the peer support and the difference it makes to be a part of a group of young people “all working toward the same goals, all competing with and pushing each other.” Brandon is taking AP statistics and psychology courses. Without AVID, he doubts that he would have attempted these or that he would have been involved with the Mock Trial program that he participated in last year.

The last student I want to talk about is Brittnie, a senior who scored 1760 on her SAT – 660 verbal, 540 math, and 560 writing. In middle school, Brittnie was a C student. Now, an AVID senior, she has been on the honor roll all year while taking all honors and AP courses. The staff at her high school describe her as a “great kid who has helped out the younger AVID students and tutored and really is what AVID is all about.”

With the framework provided by the AVID program, our students – these young people in the middle – are excelling beyond expectations. They are proving what they can do and showing all of us what we should do – believe in and challenge our students.

A common thread throughout the stories I just shared is the difference AVID makes by connecting young people to more adults who believe in them and have high expectations for them. AVID is real schooling – that is what education is meant to do, connect teachers and learners.

The words of my third grade teacher, Mrs. Woodard, still ring in my ear. Her confidence in me and the sensitive way that she reached out to me (with her words “You can do this”) made a lasting impression.

All of you – all of us – have the tremendous opportunity and responsibility to make similar lasting impressions. There is a popular motivational parable about footprints in the sand, about walking on the sand alone and then looking back and sometimes seeing two sets of footprints. Whatever your beliefs, this is powerful imagery that resonates with all of us in education. There are times when we are walking beside our students and times when we are walking behind them or in front of them. There are times when our children are frustrated and ready to give up, and it is up to us, as educators, to pick up their spirits, to inspire and carry them forward.

The power of education truly lies in these interactions. Each one of you – somewhere, sometime, had an educator in your life who did for you what Mrs. Woodard did for me. And each one of us needs to become a Mrs. Woodard. These interactions are too critical. We cannot just leave to chance or trust that they will occur. We must create environments and systems and structures to ensure that they occur.

In my school system, there’s only one superintendent and 17,000 employees and more than 107,000 students. Clearly, by mathematical terms, I am outnumbered. To succeed, we have to find a way to touch the hearts and minds of people so that they can understand that we are all in this together. We have to find a way to make sure that we support the people in getting the work done for our children.

AVID and the College Board are a part of that answer for our school system. They help students and teachers make the connection between school and what comes after graduation. They raise the levels of expectation, hope, and possibility.

Legendary educator Ron Edmonds said that, “We already know enough to successfully teach all children whose education is important to us.” I trust that by now that we all realize that every child’s education must become important to us – if it isn’t already. We as a nation cannot afford to write off the talents and potential contributions of even one individual.

What we must do now is simply employ those strategies, like AVID, like College Board, like increased academic rigor, that have proven successful time and time again.

I said at the beginning that I would be talking about possibilities, and that is the message I hope you have heard from me. That it is possible for all children to learn. All we have to do is challenge them, believe in them, and support them. All we have to do, as Mrs.

Woodard did for me, is offer them meaningful lessons and then whisper in their ears,
“You can do this. You can do this.”