

12th Annual Administrative and Supervisory Meeting

Navigating the New Normal

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Catonsville High School



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Superintendent

Good morning, and welcome to my 12th annual Administrative and Supervisory Meeting. It is hard to believe that Olivia and her classmates were just in kindergarten when my administration began. Time does fly by!

This summer, I hope you had the opportunity to “exhale” before you began preparing for the arrival of our new and returning students.

I would like to first begin with some special acknowledgements. Please stand as you are recognized: representing our PTA Council, Ms. Jayne Lee, Vice President for Leadership; Board of Education members, who are truly dedicated stewards of Baltimore County Public Schools; Joshua Parker, our 2011-2012 Teacher of the Year; and all of our past Teachers of the Year who are with us this morning. And I extend a special welcome to our 20 new principals! Our new principals will have a pivotal role in Baltimore County Public Schools’ strategic move to greater success this coming school year.

Today, I want to focus on a word that I usually do not use very often, and that word is: “normal.” What does it mean and does it really exist?

Historically, it was more or less normal that most children attended the neighborhood school with other neighborhood children whose families had similar heritage, customs, and values. It was more or less normal that classroom learning meant that everyone was taught the same way in the same setting...with the teacher standing before the blackboard, lecturing students as they sat silently at rows of desks. It was more or less normal that children would be tracked early in their school years and continue on this same track throughout their schooling. Administrators would determine the likelihood that students would either be college-bound, career- or military-bound...most often, based on gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

That “normal” no longer exists. We have diverse schools and equitable practices in place to help all children achieve their potential.

In his book, *Fertilizers, Pills, and Magnetic Strips*, author Gene Glass looks at how these rapid changes in technology are transforming our economy, culture, and the business of education. He

describes the motives behind the latest education reforms as selfishness among the middle-class who seek to transform public schools in their communities into semi-private schools... paid for with public dollars... The intention is to spend as little as possible on education for everyone else.

Where we are now, as Glass discusses in his book, and as U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan notes in his speeches... is a “New Normal.” The way Duncan sees it, “We must do better with what we have, and that means increasing efficiency at every turn and only continuing to do things if they are proven effective. If something isn’t working,” he says, “either try to fix it or move on.”

I do agree with Glass and with Secretary Duncan that our current and ongoing economic challenges have taught us that we must be efficient and do what works. We cannot continue to do things just because we always have. Everything that we do must lead to academic improvement for our students. A friend by the name of Dr. Tim Quinn observed that “When leaders do not define success, everyone will define it on their own terms; anything anyone does will be OK and everything anyone does will be subject to challenge.” We define success by the way we respond to the variables that affect our ability to educate our children. It is measured through the standards of the *Blueprint for Progress*.

This idea of doing more with less is really not “new,” and it certainly is what we already consider to be “normal” in education. The reality in education in today’s economy is that we are being asked to do much more with what we have. This is our New Normal. Now, I am sure you are asking yourselves, “How do we do this?” “How is this going to impact me?...my school?...my teachers and my students?”

I think that the first and most important thing to remember is that traditional public schools remain the best chance we have as a nation to ensure opportunity for all children. They represent the chance for all students to contribute fully to the growth of this nation. Public schools are the only way to ensure that we, as a nation, benefit from the talents and knowledge of every citizen.

In recent years, Baltimore County Public Schools has grown. More and more parents are choosing our schools over other options. That represents both the reality of the current economic situation, our New Normal, as well as their trust and faith in us – a trust that we honor.

The responsibility that parents place on us also represents a tremendous challenge. We must continue to be worthy of their trust in Baltimore County Public Schools and prove our relevance and our effectiveness in light of the New Normal.

And how do we do that? As leaders, we define success, along with a strategy for achieving it. It is our *Blueprint for Progress* that fully describes our destination, provides strategies on how to best get there, and even offers benchmarks to help us stay on track. And we have the evidence that it works. Our foundational document, the *Blueprint for Progress*, has prepared us for the New Normal.

As the late Carnegie Mellon University Professor Randy Rausch said in his now famous Last Lecture, "We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just the way we play the hand." For Baltimore County Public Schools, we play the hand that is dealt. We think ahead and move forward. We stay ahead of the curve as we have done over the past 11 years.

This summer, I took a team to Harvard University to study our challenge within the New Normal. We worked with professors from Harvard's Schools of Business and Education in looking at our *Blueprint for Progress* and strategically mapping outcomes. They looked at BCPS alumni who have gone on to earn bachelor's degrees and identified specific milestones in the *Blueprint* that made a difference for these graduates. As we focus on these critical milestones, we will ensure all of our students are on the path to college and workforce readiness.

We learned that there are some gateway courses that are key to unlocking the doors of opportunity for our students. For instance, we looked at our graduates from 2004-2006 and noted that, of the students that took early algebra and earned a C or higher, 50 percent of these students immediately enrolled in college following graduation. Not only were they better prepared for entry into the higher education arena, 42 percent of these students persisted and earned bachelor's degrees.

This is in comparison to students we graduate who do not take early algebra. We have learned that only 19 percent of these students enrolled in college and only 30 percent persisted and earned bachelor's degrees.

If you successfully complete algebra by the end of Grade 8, you have a better future. Knowing this, we must act! This is an example of why we must focus in a more purposeful way on key indicators embedded in our *Blueprint*. You'll hear more about these key indicators for student success from the assistant superintendents in the breakout sessions and throughout this upcoming school year.

These key indicators are not a new initiative. They are necessary to efficiently and effectively monitor and measure the progress of all students toward our goals outlined in our *Blueprint*. They will let us know what is working and for which students, and help us plan for the success of all Baltimore County Public Schools students. It is about doing our work in a more strategic way. This is our New Normal, and it is a way for you to lead your students and staff members to greater levels of success. This is about doing what you already do well, with more information to enable you to lead effectively with positive results. It is through your leadership that Baltimore County Public Schools takes a national role in the conversation of achievement and reform.

Let us quickly review a few highlights from the last year:

- *Education Week* ranked us fourth in the nation for graduation rates among the nation's 50 largest school districts.
- Thirteen of our high schools – more than half of our traditional and magnet high schools – have been ranked among the top 7 percent of high schools in the nation by *The Washington Post*.

- Independent reports show that college attendance rates for our graduates have increased from 2002 to 2010 across race/ethnicity and gender.
- We were once again named one of the nation's "Best Communities for Music Education" – as we were in 2004 and every year from 2006-2010.
- More of our students are taking Advanced Placement exams – 11 percent more from 2008 to 2010, and the school system's pass rate remains strong.

And that is only a partial list of our system-wide accomplishments. I could go on. I could, in fact, take up the entire morning just standing here and listing our student, staff, school, and system-wide achievements. But we must continue to push forward to adapt to more effective results with our children.

Let me share with you some examples of how this is already happening across our school district:

The New Normal is that finances are tight. Students are eager to prepare for careers and get to paid employment more quickly.

Our response to this phenomenon is the creation of our new Diploma to Degree Program, which begins its pilot with 20 students this school year and will allow them to graduate from Baltimore County Public Schools with both a high school diploma and an associate of arts degree from the Community College of Baltimore County, en route to a four-year degree from any college within the University of Maryland system.

The New Normal is that we continue to prepare students to be globally competitive. We must ensure student mastery of our new internal benchmark assessments and the Common Core Standards. By the 2012-2013 school year, we will be required by state and federal regulations to implement the Common Core Standards. In order to reach that goal, we must adhere to the following timeline for the 2011-2012 School Year:

- Continue implementation of the work that you began with the Division of Curriculum and Instruction at both the Principals Academy and the Educators Effectiveness Academy held this summer.
- Continue curriculum development to ensure all Common Core standards are infused in the expected learning outcomes for all students.
- Develop a comprehensive STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) Alliance that will allow students to focus on key areas such as homeland security, information technology, healthcare, and biomedical science.

We are already positioned to meet the challenge of global competitiveness with initiatives such as our Chinese Cultural Exchange program, our partnership with the College Board, our

relationships with the business community, and our collaborative efforts that I began this school year with the Deans of Education from local colleges and universities. From the meetings with the Deans of Education, we have already begun to strengthen our college and workforce readiness pipeline with such programs as the aforementioned Diploma to Degree Program and, we will continue to strengthen our teacher preparation programs.

The New Normal is that, as we learn more about how students learn, we continue to differentiate our teaching methods to ensure that we reach all students.

Here are just a few examples of how that is taking place in our schools. At Arbutus Middle School, English teacher Daryl Walsh takes the best of traditional teaching strategies to meet students' 21st Century needs. He ties everything to real world situations to make learning relevant.

The New Normal is to better engage our students, and again, to meet them where they are.

Bernie Hynson, at Arbutus Middle, takes his students into the stairwell to sing in order to learn about how sound travels. At Hereford High School, career and technology education teacher Cheryl Burkett works tirelessly to find just the right internships for her students and provides great support to both the interns and their mentors. Michelle Stoll, an English teacher at George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology, held a high tea that brought AP English 12 students together with culinary students to enjoy scones and tea and to discuss works by British authors.

At Orem Elementary School, art teacher Grace Hulse helped the school win a prestigious Crayola grant and launched a project that has inspired teachers throughout the school to consider bookmaking as an ongoing method of motivating and informing their students' work. And at Parkville High School, Ryan Twentey is known for being both technology-centered and expanding learning opportunities for students. He encourages students to get out into the community and around the state to take photographs and to enter competitions.

The New Normal is that our schools and classrooms are more diverse than ever.

Look around, and you will see a microcosm of our larger society in our richly diverse workforce and student body. According to the Office of World Languages, our student body represents over 113 countries with over 91 languages.

We have strengthened our resolve to high standards and increased academic rigor for all students. We have invested in schools like Chesapeake, with its Virtual Learning Environment, and we have embraced initiatives like AVID and the College Gateway Partnership to empower and inspire all students to reach their highest level of achievement...and they continue to make us proud!

Often we are criticized for measuring the success of our schools strictly by test scores. But, we also measure success by the number of hands raised in classrooms, the number of extra credit

projects turned in, the number of students involved in school activities, and by the number of parents who show up for a variety of activities.

In other words, we can also measure the success of a school by the motivation of its students.

When you stimulate the will to learn, you accelerate academic success.

We adapt to the “New Normal” by becoming even stronger leaders, even more courageous in doing what works, fixing what can be fixed, and letting go those strategies that cannot be fixed. We adapt to the “New Normal” by embracing key indicators to ensure equity for the future of all Baltimore County Public Schools students, and being even more committed to the *Blueprint for Progress*.

To paraphrase the words of Dr. Martin Luther King... as a leader, there are times when we have to take a position that is not popular, political, or safe. You take a position because it is the right thing to do.

Our teachers are our frontline leaders in their classrooms. They enthusiastically build relationships while at the same time delivering high-quality instruction that is both rigorous and relevant for the 21st Century.

I have said many times that Baltimore County Public Schools is not a system of schools, but a school system. I would like to add this morning that this school system is also a community of thinkers. With the collective power of 17,000 employees in our organization taking responsibility and working toward the same goal, our potential is limitless.

We must continue to model how a successful and winning team performs. I want to be clear on this statement as it relates to the team: during this school year, whatever we decide to do, discussions stay in the room, and decisions leave the room. This is about working together on one accord...making decisions and taking action. This is the model of a team and how frontrunners stay frontrunners, and that is who we are.

Earlier this summer, we selected and agreed upon the System Priorities for school year 2011-2012. We will...

- Provide Professional Development to all teachers on the Common Core Standards.
- Maintain ISO 9001:2008 registration.
- Develop goals for all leadership to ensure quality performance.
- Establish uniformity and consistency for all written and electronic communication. (Very shortly, you will receive the Correspondence Manual for guidance.)

Continuing with our priorities for 2011-2012, we will...

- Identify outreach opportunities to support student achievement, and
- Use all communications vehicles to effectively inform internal and external audiences.

Now that's transparency at its finest!

As I enthusiastically look around this auditorium, filled with a solid team of talented educators with outstanding achievement records, I am confident that we will continue to ensure that our greatest asset – our students – are among the best prepared for college, career, and the 21st Century workforce.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we navigate the New Normal, we will always stay the course and stay focused on our promise to all parents whose dreams are wanting the best for their children. And that promise is our commitment and mission to prepare their children... our students... with the best educational experience.

Thank you, and have an outstanding school year.
