

Needs Assessment

Crucial to the development of the BCPS Master Plan is the comprehensive assessment of needs in order to provide baseline data that will allow BCPS to monitor progress toward stated goals. In the last several years, BCPS has conducted several extensive needs assessments, reports that focused on key elements of the entire education system. Each of these major reports provides important data relative to some or all of the categories specified in *The Bridge to Excellence Master Plan Guidelines*. These categories include the following:

- Student achievement, disaggregated for all student groups
- Order, discipline, and school climate
- Parent, community, and business stakeholder involvement
- Student, staff, parent, and community satisfaction
- Curriculum and instruction
- Instructional improvement strategies, interventions, and accelerations
- Teacher and principal experience and qualifications
- Professional development
- Resource allocation
- Postgraduate success

These reports provided key data for the development of the *Blueprint for Progress*, our school systems' outline for the future, which will serve as the framework for the Master Plan. The *Blueprint for Progress*, which was recently revised and expanded to fully align with the requirements and recommendations of *No Child Left Behind*, *Visionary Panel for Better Schools: Achievement Matters Most*, and the *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act*, had extensive community input throughout the revision process and has made it an excellent basis for the development of the Master Plan.

In addition, BCPS has published for the last two years, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, a Results Report for the school system that measures progress toward the goals and indicators, especially those focused on student achievement, in the *Blueprint for Progress*. These "results" also serve as a needs assessment for the development of future initiatives, strategies, and resources.

The chart below summarizes recent systemic efforts to assess needs. All reports used a variety of methodologies to collect data including surveys, interviews, site visits, review of documents, and analysis of data.

Date	Title of Report	Areas Assessed
1998	Perks-Ruetter Report	Facilities Needs, including systemic renovations and technology infrastructure, and their impact on the school environment and instructional climate
July 2000	Transition Team Report	Organizational Structure, Curriculum & Instruction, Assessment, Business and Facilities Operations, Human Resources

August 2000	Assessment of BCPS Student Performance	Disaggregated Student Achievement Data; Achievement and Program Participation Gaps; Drop out and graduation rates; program participation
August. 2000	Baldrige Assessment Feedback Report	Leadership, Strategic Planning, Student, Stakeholder, and Customer Focus; Information and Analysis; Faculty and Staff Focus; Process Management; Organizational Performance Results
April 2001	MGT Report	Organization Study to determine the impact of the organizational structure on the delivery of quality services to students and the effective and efficient use of resources
Dec. 2002	Communications Audit	On-site focus groups with all segments of internal external audiences and a review of BCPS' communication materials and policies to determine the degree to which communications is helping achieve the mission of the school system
2001-2002	Education That Is Multicultural (ETM) Needs Assessment Survey	Teachers, administrators, and other staff preparedness to implement ETM bylaw
Nov. 2002	DeJong Report	Population trends, boundaries, facilities capacity to meet the student enrollment needs in the Northwest
June 2003	Magnet Schools External Assessment Report	Review of all magnet programs and schools throughout the system, including examination of curriculum, staffing, admission criteria, budget, professional development, and use of technology
Annual	Results Report	<i>All Blueprint for Progress</i> Indicators: Attendance, Parent Satisfaction, Student Performance on CTBS, IMAP, Advanced Placement, SAT, Maryland Functional Tests, University of Maryland and Career and Technology Standards; Dropout Rate
Annual	SOAR Report/Senior Follow-up Study	Progress of students who attend colleges and universities in Maryland

Annual	Educational Facilities Master Plan	Enrollment data and projections, staffing ratios, transportation and redistricting policies, facility needs analysis
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While some of the needs identified in these reports and their accompanying recommendations are already being addressed, many others continue to exist as significant areas of need, all of which are included in the Master Plan. Many of the reports observed that student achievement performance in the Baltimore County Public Schools, while satisfactory, does not reach the potential of other high-performing systems with whom we could and should be compared. Clearly, the persistent achievement gap evident in many measures of student performance dominates any needs assessment. An achievement gap is considered to be present when any of the following exist:

- A disparity among groups of students based on diversity factors
- A disparity among students' and student sub-groups' academic achievement levels in local, state, and national standards
- A disparity between any student's academic achievement and that student's potential

Student sub-groups include but are not limited to the following: males, females, students receiving special education services, students qualifying for Free And Reduced lunch Meals (FARMS), students belong to specific racial and/or ethnic groups, Limited English Proficiency Students.

In addition, two common threads unite the recommendations and findings of these reports: the need to target and coordinate all efforts and the need for a standards-based approach to student, school, and organizational performance.

The following is a summary of needs that have been identified in all or some of these reports.

⇒ Achievement Gaps between and among student subgroups in the following areas:

- SAT performance
- AP performance and participation
- CTBS performance
- Functional Tests
- University of Maryland/Career and Technology Standards
(MSA and HSA data will be added when this is available from the state.)

⇒ Access and equity issues related to student achievement and program participation among certain groups including the following:

- Students receiving special education services
- Limited English Proficiency Students
- Students qualifying for FARMS
- Schools with high percentage of students qualifying for FARMS

- Minority students, especially African-American and Hispanic

⇒The systematic collection, disaggregation, access, and meaningful use of data to improve student achievement and organizational performance in a comprehensive and centralized student achievement database

⇒Systemic processes to determine student, parent, and staff expectations and satisfaction and to facilitate engagement and communication with stakeholders

⇒ Greater use of scientific-based instructional strategies and additional standards, benchmarks, and accountability measures needed to ensure quality performance from all aspects of the education system

⇒The need to align school and systemwide improvement planning and accountability processes and better communicate validated school improvement methods

⇒Increased attention to communication, public relations, and stakeholder engagement

⇒The need to develop a comprehensive approach to technology, including increased technical support at the school level and focused professional development

⇒The improvement of curriculum to be more user-friendly, to have more depth and less breadth, to include centralized measures of individual student progress, and to provide instructional strategies which go beyond traditional teaching methodology and address multi-culturalism.

⇒Greater emphasis on highly qualified teacher recruitment and retention, including minority representation and reduction of teacher turnover.

⇒Greater focus, consistency, effectiveness, and alignment with system priorities of professional development for staff

⇒Adequate, modern facilities to support instructional programs and accommodate enrollment growth, including land for the building of new schools, and to provide an instructional program which supports high student achievement and a safe and orderly learning environment.

There are a number of complex and interrelated issues that contribute to these gaps. As part of the school improvement process, all principals analyze school-specific, disaggregated data to identify possible factors that may account for specific achievement gaps at their schools. While these causes and many others are certainly well documented, they are not insurmountable barriers. Research has shown, and school systems across the country have demonstrated, that when students have access to rigorous curriculum, highly qualified teachers, and programs that employ best practices and proven strategies for learning, all students can be successful.

Many research studies and much professional literature have been devoted to identifying possible explanatory causes for the achievement gaps that exist, and have existed, among students groups in Maryland and across the nation. Among these factors are the following:

- The quality of teacher preparation in both instructional methodology, content, and/or classroom management
- The quality of ongoing professional development in best practices and differentiated instructional strategies
- Inconsistent expectations for performance among certain subgroups of students
- Lack of readiness for beginning school
- Societal issues such as poverty, substance abuse, neglect, etc.
- Cultural biases in standardized tests and other measures used to identify students for certain programs
- Access to timely student performance data to enable classroom teachers to make informed instructional decisions.

The goal of the BCPS Master Plan must be to address in a systematic way and with clear accountability the needs identified by these assessments, and to secure the funding necessary to provide the needed resources that will ensure high achievement for all students.