

# **PDK-CMSI CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT AUDIT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

This Executive Summary features an overview of the methodology, key findings, and recommendations of the Phi Delta Kappa Curriculum Management Services Incorporated (PDK-CMSi) curriculum management assessment of Baltimore County Public Schools. In September 2006, at the direction of Superintendent Dr. Joe A. Hairston, Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) contracted PDK-CMSi to conduct a curriculum management audit. The level of scrutiny and accountability that public schools face today is unprecedented. Dr. Hairston chose to undertake this initiative to objectively examine and continue to advance the quality of education delivered to *all* students. This action reinforces the Superintendent's stated belief that it is important and essential that BCPS undertakes its *own* initiatives to assess strengths, challenges, and effectiveness in order to design an instructional program for the future.

This audit provides an intensive examination of how well BCPS has been able to establish valid directions for student achievement and well being, concentrate its resources to accomplish those directions, as well as improve its organizational performance over time. During the audit process, PDK-CMSi performed an independent examination employing multiple data sources in BCPS, including documents, interviews, curricular and other artifacts, as well as site visits to schools. Data from school and classroom observations, research of relevant documentation, and interviews with staff and community have been assessed and triangulated by PDK-CMSi in a manner that has produced a series of findings with a level of detail and specificity resulting in targeted recommendations for the Superintendent and the Board of Education.

### **AUDIT PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY**

The audit process is strategically and effectively designed to examine the written, taught, and assessed aspects of the curriculum including the leadership, process, and controls that are in place to successfully manage the primary objective of improving student performance and academic achievement. To that end, Phi Delta Kappa auditors compiled data from 157 school visitations during the week of December 3-8, 2006 with over 3000 classroom observations. In addition, auditors interviewed the Superintendent of Schools; all members of the Board of Education of Baltimore County; approximately 125 central office level administrators, coordinators, and resource teachers; the president of the Teachers Association of Baltimore County; approximately 85 BCPS elementary, middle and high school principals; many members of school district community stakeholder advisory groups; and approximately 30 parents and interested community members who accepted the Superintendent's invitation to meet with auditors during the site visit. The audit also included an extensive review of school system documentation, which was both directly and indirectly related to curriculum and its delivery.

Comparing data and information obtained from the above diverse sources provided data triangulation to reinforce the validity of the findings and assist in the development of meaningful recommendations.

## **STANDARDS AND FINDINGS**

The PDK-CMSi Curriculum Management Audit used the data sources described above in the evaluation of the five general management standards. These standards describe organizational characteristics that represent an ideal, yet attainable, management system. The five standards concern Governance and Control, Direction and Clientele Expectations, Connectivity and Consistency, Assessment and Feedback, and Productivity and Efficiency. Related findings are grouped under each of these standards, which form the benchmark against which Baltimore County Public Schools' existing curricular practices were reviewed. Basically the findings detail the status of the school system in fulfilling its expectations, goals, and objectives.

### **Standard 1: Governance and Control**

*A school system is able to demonstrate its control of resources, programs, and personnel.*

- Planning in the district meets audit criteria given that it is comprehensive, extends over a multi-year period, is incorporated into system-wide planning and includes an annual report on results. (Finding 1.1)
- While many administrators are fulfilling curricular/instructional functions at the county level, no one is “in control” of the total curriculum; no one is managing the system-wide change process on a day-to-day basis and the necessary interrelationships between curriculum development, professional development, and assessment are not sufficiently focused and coordinated to provide a manageable process for teachers and principals within *The Blueprint for Progress*. (Finding 1.2)
- Board policies are obsolete, outdated, and inadequate to promote effective quality control, but many system procedures are in place via *The Blueprint for Progress*. (Finding 1.3)
- The professional development program is inadequate to identify professional development needs or to provide individual staff members the necessary knowledge and skills in a systemic and coordinated manner focused upon the improvement of student achievement. (Finding 1.4)
- Programs are not systematically designed, implemented, or evaluated effectively for the improvement of student achievement, and programs are not congruent with policy requirements. (Finding 1.5)
- The evaluation process for first-year probationary teachers is well-defined. However, the implementation of the process neither aligns with district expectations nor provides teachers with the feedback necessary for professional growth. (Finding 1.6)
- Most job descriptions for positions found in the organizational structure chart provided by the school district met standards for adequacy. (Finding 1.7)
- The Technology Plan 2005-2008 was adequate in design, but instructional use is generally limited to computer labs, and technology integration is optional according to curriculum guides. (Finding 1.8)

- Observed classroom activities do not reflect teaching and learning expectations defined by the Baltimore County School District and the Maryland Department of Education, and Principals' monitoring of instruction is inconsistent across the system. (Finding 1.9)

### **Standard 2: Direction and Clientele Expectations**

*A school system has established clear and valid objectives for students.*

- The system's comprehensive curriculum management plan is seriously inadequate to provide direction for the design, delivery, and evaluation of the curriculum. (Finding 2.1)
- The scope of the written curriculum is adequate in English and reading, mathematics, science, and social studies for all grade levels, but the scope of the written curriculum is inadequate in non-core content areas in the Baltimore County School District. (Finding 2.2)
- The quality of most of the BCPS curriculum guides is inadequate to direct teaching and to promote alignment with local, state, and national standards. (Finding 2.3)
- An internal consistency analysis of the BCPS mathematics curriculum shows strong connections to the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards through grade 8 in the content strands but less with the process strands; however, the high school mathematics curriculum has incorporated and moved beyond the state's core learning goals. (Finding 2.4)
- An internal consistency analysis of the BCPS English and language arts curriculum guides shows that they are adequately spiraled and aligned with national standards, but the writing portion of the curriculum is weak. (Finding 2.5)
- There is internal consistency among learner objectives, district assessment items, and suggested instructional strategies in English, language arts, and reading curriculum guides, with an exception noted in the writing curriculum. (Finding 2.6)
- Science curriculum guides reflect many sound elements in design, but approaches to learning are inadequate for delivery of a cognitively rigorous program. (Finding 2.7)
- Social Studies curriculum documents are aligned with state and national standards, recommended teaching strategies and textbook references are congruent with student objectives, but student artifact rigor does not reflect either student objectives or system expectations. (Finding 2.8)

### **Standard 3: Connectivity and Consistency**

*A school system demonstrates internal connectivity and rational equity in its program development and implementation.*

- Efforts initiated to allocate resources in accordance with district goals and student needs for the purpose of eliminating unequal student access to comparable programs, services, and opportunities have not been adequately successful system-wide. (Finding 3.1)

#### **Standard 4: Assessment and Feedback**

*A school system uses the results from system-designed and/or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs.*

- The scope of assessment is not adequate to assess student progress across the system's curriculum, and assessment planning is inadequate for quality control. (Finding 4.1)
- Student assessment results are mixed, ranging from exceeding state averages in proficiency in reading to a declining level of achievement growth in other areas, and assessment results indicate that closing the achievement gap may take up to 50 years at the current rate of progress. (Finding 4.2)
- Highly sophisticated levels of assessment data are published, but information to guide instructional decision making is inadequate system-wide and student mastery is not monitored effectively. (Finding 4.3)
- Program assessment is inadequate to determine program effectiveness, is inconsistent in evaluating new and continuing programs, and in some cases is not used in planning for program implementation. (Finding 4.4)
- The process to ensure data accuracy and security is flawed and the data maintenance process jeopardizes data integrity and access by potential users. (Finding 4.5)

#### **Standard 5: Productivity and Efficiency**

*A school system has improved productivity.*

- Budget development and decision making are not fully driven by curriculum goals and strategic priorities, and cost-benefit analysis is unattainable given the inadequate connection to assessment of productivity and effectiveness. (Finding 5.1)
- Facilities are inadequate and are characterized by substandard classroom environmental conditions which undermine effective teaching and learning in many schools, perceptions of slow and ineffective maintenance of facilities, and a growing backlog of unfinished and deferred repairs and renovations. (Finding 5.2)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the overarching recommendations derived from the analysis of the findings. It is important to note that, in structuring these recommendations, PDK-CMSi explicitly distinguishes the administrative role and responsibilities of the superintendent from the policy making and monitoring functions of the board of education. Also of importance, the recommendations are in a prioritized order according to their "criticality" as related to systemic improvement. From these recommendations, the Superintendent will develop an action plan and take necessary steps to improve the structure, content and delivery of the BCPS curriculum.

**Recommendation 1:** Bring district curriculum and program development and the change process under system control; conduct a national search and hire a chief academic officer (CAO) who reports directly to the superintendent; bring curriculum development, professional

development and assessment into alignment. Develop a systemwide curriculum management plan.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop and implement comprehensive professional development policies, rules, and plans, which provide (1) central control and coordination of all professional development, (2) identification of individualized staff professional development needs, (3) systemic and coordinated delivery of needed knowledge and skills focused on improvement of student achievement, and (4) evaluation of professional development effectiveness in terms of improvement of learner achievement.

**Recommendation 3:** Develop and execute a curriculum management plan that produces high quality curriculum guides to promote alignment and content rigor, provides a consistent format for guides to focus and normalize systemwide use, and establishes curriculum guides for non-core areas for system quality control.

**Recommendation 4:** Review, revise, adopt and implement current board policies for meeting the characteristics of sound curriculum management with a special emphasis on codifying, in board policy, the current planning functions of the district.

**Recommendation 5:** Develop and implement a comprehensive assessment plan and system that fosters sound instructional decision making based upon adequate and comprehensive feedback and provides (1) information for administrators and teachers on individual student progress, (2) a plan for clear and needed improvements to benchmark and short-cycle assessments, and (3) information for use in design and delivery of curriculum, support services, and professional development.

**Sub-recommendation 5.1.1:** Work with the State of Maryland to obtain more specific data on student performance.

**Recommendation 6:** Require the systematic evaluation of district programs and master plan actions by external or internal program review linked to student achievement data.

**Recommendation 7:** Design and implement a data management plan in order to maintain accurate, useful, and easily accessible data to guide staff in instructional decision making, include automatic error checking and data sampling, and maintain a single centralized database to ensure consistent and accessible reports.

**Recommendation 8:** Develop and implement a 5-year plan that fully aligns district resources to curricular goals and strategic priorities and which includes systematic cost-benefit analyses to assure that expenditures are producing desired results systemwide.

**Recommendation 9:** Develop and implement system planning focused on goals to ensure equal access for students to all comparable programs, services and opportunities for student success; take steps to eliminate the achievement gap among student groups; and act to allocate resources on the basis of need.

**Recommendation 10:** Immediately act to eliminate substandard educational environments by eliminating safety hazards and instructional barriers, by establishing a responsive and effective system of maintenance executed on the basis of need, and take steps to eliminate the detrimental backlog of uncompleted maintenance operations and needs.

**Recommendation 11:** Initiate and implement needed policy updates and necessary improvements for special programs.

## CONCLUSION

The PDK-CSMi audit focuses on evaluating the current management structure and operations in order to improve the design, delivery, and management of curriculum and instruction. In its findings, the audit identifies several issues that must be resolved by the school system in order to progress in the specified areas. Chief among these issues is the “lack of leadership in the area of curriculum which would bring the management of change under more focused control....” The audit also expresses intense criticism of the state of professional development in BCPS. Moreover, the audit essentially reveals an ongoing disconnect between the various iterations of the curriculum, that is, the curriculum that is written versus that which is taught versus that which is assessed.

The auditors provide sweeping recommendations ranging from the “overhaul” of curriculum guides to better employment of rich data resources to address such issues as equal access and elimination of academic gaps among groups of students as well as the achievement of all students. Timely implementation of the audit recommendations should result in improved performance in the areas of curricular design and delivery, as well as alignment of professional development and assessment. The Superintendent will develop a comprehensive action plan that responds directly to the findings and recommendations contained in the audit.

Finally, the PDK-CSMi audit particularly commends the Superintendent’s *Blueprint for Progress*, which provides a unique framework for focusing the energy and commitment within the school system. As a result, and despite confronting several major issues, BCPS is positioned to move to the next level of excellence for its students, staff, parents, and the broader community.