

House Bill 853
Evaluation of Improvements in the
Baltimore City Public School System
School Years 2001-2002 to 2006-2007

Final Report
Executive Summary

Prepared for the
Baltimore City Public School System
Board of School Commissioners
and the
Maryland State Board of Education

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Evaluation of Improvements in the Baltimore Public School System School Years 2001-2002 to 2006-2007

Executive Summary

The Baltimore City Public School System Board of School Commissioners and the Maryland State Board of Education are required to conduct a review and evaluation of the improvements in the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) every five years since the 1997 reform initiative. This initiative moved the BCPSS from a department of the City of Baltimore to an independent agency with commissioners jointly appointed by the mayor and governor, established a partnership between Baltimore City and the State of Maryland to improve the system, and provided increased state funding. Westat conducted the first review in 2001. Subsequent federal regulations and guidance under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* had significant effect on educational planning, and *Senate Bill 856 Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002* required Maryland local school boards to develop, implement and monitor master plans. The *Annotated Code of Maryland Education Article § 5-401 Comprehensive Master Plans* further defined the contents of these master plans.

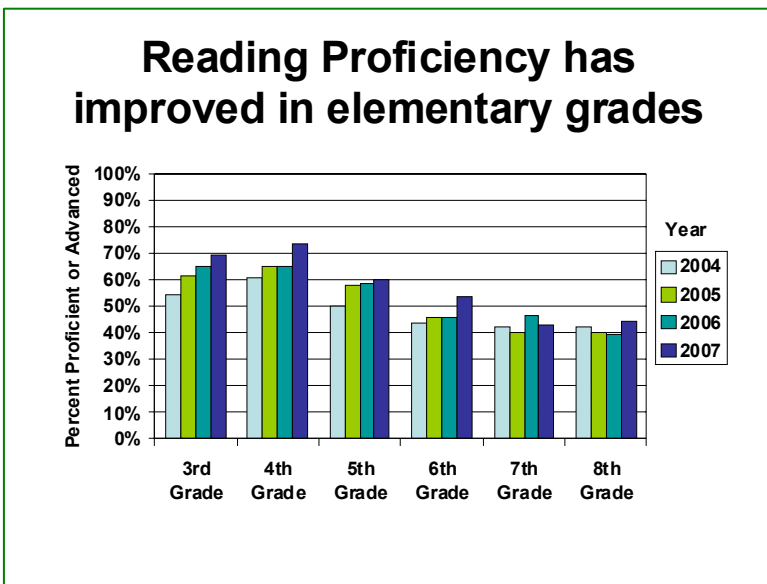
This evaluation is the second review since the 1997 reform initiative, and is required by *House Bill 853 of 2002 Baltimore City-State Partnership* that reauthorized the original initiative. The evaluation covers school years 2001-2002 through 2006-2007, but is not intended to be a comprehensive history of all the regulatory and responding changes that occurred during the period. Rather it focuses on three areas: student achievement during 2004-2007, key initiatives in the master plan for school year 2006-2007, and improvement in seven areas of system management.

Student Achievement

This report analyzes student achievement between school year 2003-2004 and school year 2006-2007 when the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) began for grades 3-8. Assessments in school year 2001-2002 and school year 2002-2003 are not comparable. Student achievement has improved in the BCPSS since 2004 in both reading and mathematics, although this improvement may not have been enough to make adequate yearly progress toward the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) requirement of 100% proficiency among all student subgroups by 2014.

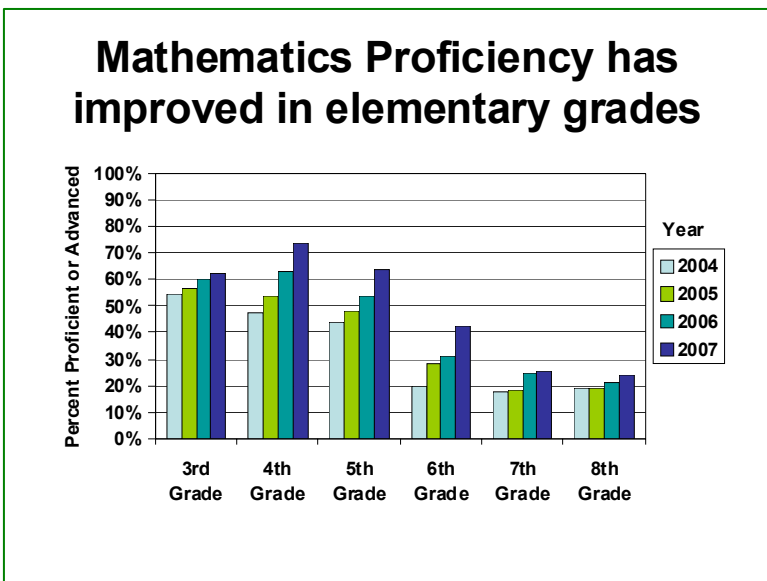
Elementary Grades

The reading proficiency of BCPSS students in the elementary grades improved between 2004 and 2007, and could reach the NCLB goal in 2014 for grades three and four if the pace of improvement continues. This began in grades one and two where students came closer to reaching the national norms for students taking the Stanford Achievement Test during the four years. On the Maryland School Assessment, the percent



of students assessed as proficient or advanced increased from 55% to 69% among third graders, from 61% to 73% among fourth graders, and from 50% to 60% among fifth graders. (See **Reading Proficiency Chart**.) The improvement in grades 3-5 was greater than in Maryland as a whole, and closed one-third of the gap between the 2004 proficiency level and the 2014 NCLB target. Education is cumulative, and analysis suggests that proficiency improvements in these elementary years will lead to improvements in subsequent grades as these students move through the school system.

The mathematics proficiency of BCPSS students in the elementary grades improved between 2004 and 2007, and could reach the NCLB goal in 2014 for grades four and five if this pace of improvement continues. This began in grades one and two, and BCPSS first grade students in 2006 and 2007 scored above the national norms for students taking the Stanford Achievement Test. On the Maryland School Assessment, the greatest improvement came in the fourth



grade, from 48% of the students assessed as proficient or advanced in 2004 to 73% proficient or advanced in 2007. The percent increased from 54% to 62% among third graders, and from 44% to 64% among fifth graders. (See **Mathematics Proficiency Chart**.) Education is cumulative, and analysis suggests that proficiency improvements

in these elementary years will lead to improvements in subsequent grades as these students move through the school system. The mathematics improvement in grades 3-5 was greater than in Maryland as a whole, and closed one-third of the gap between the 2004 proficiency level and the 2014 NCLB target.

Middle Grades

Academic achievement in reading changed little between 2004 and 2007 in the middle grades, and the BCPSS is not on track to reach the NCLB goal by 2014 for the middle grades. The percent of sixth grade students assessed as proficient or advanced in reading improved from 44% in 2004 to 54% in 2007, but almost all of that increase came in 2007. Practically no improvement came in the seventh and eighth grade. Improvement in these middle grades fell below the improvement in Maryland as a whole, and closed only 8% of the gap to the NCLB goal. However, education is cumulative, and the proficiency improvements in the elementary grades, together with the 2007 improvement in sixth grade reading proficiency, suggests that more improvement will begin to be seen in the middle school years as students move through their educational process.

Middle grade students improved slightly more in mathematics than in reading between 2004 and 2007. Sixth grade students showed the greatest improvement, increasing from 20% proficient or advanced in mathematics in 2004 to 42% in 2007. Seventh grade students increased from 18% to 26%, and eighth grade students increased from 19% to 24% proficient or advanced in mathematics. This level of improvement only closed 15% of the gap between middle grade achievement in 2004 and the NCLB goal for 2014.

High School

Academic achievement improved among Baltimore City high school students, but improved too little to close the difference between them and Maryland high school students as a whole, or to be on pace to achieve the NCLB goal by 2014. Improvement on the English II High School Assessment increased from 35% in 2005 to 48% in 2007, but part of this increase may have come from students taking the assessment in 2007 knowing they must pass it if they are to graduate in 2009. The 13% percentage point increase in English proficiency between 2005 and 2007 among BCPSS high school students was the same as in Maryland as a whole, but 71% of all Maryland high school students taking the English High School Assessment in 2007 achieved proficiency.

The BCPSS graduation rate improved from 54.3% in school year 2003-2004 to 60.1% in school year 2006-2007, the third greatest improvement among the local school systems in the state. However, this still left its graduation rate substantially lower than the 85% graduation rate for Maryland as a whole, and lower than every other local school system in Maryland.

Variation in Improvement

Schools improved throughout the BCPSS, but not necessarily at the same rate. Reading and mathematics proficiency for students in grades 3-5 improved about as much in schools that failed to meet their Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in school year 2003-2004 as for schools that met their AMOs at the beginning of the period. Proficiency increased enough in some poorer performing elementary schools so that they met their AMOs in school year 2006-2007. Unfortunately, more schools that originally met their AMOs had insufficient improvement in proficiency to continue to meet it. A similar pattern occurred among middle grades in mathematics, although the amount of improvement was less than the earlier grades. In reading, however, improvement among middle grade students occurred in about one-third of the schools that had met their AMOs in school year 2003-2004, and declined in the other two-thirds. No school with middle grades moved from not meeting its AMO in school year 2003-2004 to meeting its AMO in reading during school year 2006-2007.

Student MSA proficiency improved among all student subgroups, but improved most among the small number of Hispanic students and students with limited English proficiency. BCPSS students in special education improved in reading proficiency at a higher rate than did all BCPSS students, but improved less in mathematics. While the BCPSS continues to face challenges in helping many student groups achieve proficiency, particularly in the middle grades, the size of the improvements in other areas shows that the BCPSS is making progress in addressing the needs of its students.

Key Master Plan Initiatives

House Bill 853 set forth 19 focus areas to be addressed in the BCPSS Master Plan that are shown in the **Legislative Focus Area** table in an abbreviated version. This portion of the evaluation summarizes the extent to which each of these focus areas were addressed in *The Baltimore City Public School System Master Plan School Years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008* (hereafter referred to as “Master Plan”). The evaluation does not assess how the Master Plan complies with subsequent legislation and regulation. That assessment was conducted by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) prior to its approval of the Master Plan on December 12, 2006.

Table. Legislative Focus Areas	
1	Incorporate the key recommendations of the Westat Report
2	Integrate special and general education, and measure impact on student performance
3	Provide a balanced and efficient allocation of qualified educational and managerial staff
4	Provide effective curriculum and instructional programs: i) Citywide curriculum framework with a developmental sequence ii) Professional development that involves school-based practitioners in the design and implementation iii) Educational program to meet the needs of students at risk of educational failure
5	Review student performance-based evaluation system with teacher/principal investment
6	Provide systems to track student enrollment, attendance, academics, discipline, and compliance with IDEA
7	Provide financial management and budgeting system to maximize resource use
8	Provide effective hiring and assignment of teachers and staff
9	Develop an effective system of providing instructional materials and support services
10	Develop and evaluate model school reform initiatives
11	Develop a timely process to distribute, validate, and analyze student test data
12	Provide appropriate methods for student assessment and remediation
13	Develop and implement a student code of discipline
14	Incorporate the facilities' master plan and update annually
15	Train principals and assistant principals in increasing parental involvement
16	Implement and evaluate reforms included in the master plan
17	Improve the status of schools that are subject to a state reconstitution notice
18	Develop a system of teacher input on reforms, initiatives, curriculum, instruction, and professional development
19	Institute a formal procedure for semiannual reports on the mentoring programs

This portion of the evaluation was designed to answer three questions:

1. To what extent does the Master Plan include programs, policies, procedures, or initiatives that address each House Bill 853 focus area?
2. To what extent is each focus area fully (comprehensively) addressed in the Master Plan?
3. To what extent have Master Plan strategies for each focus area been implemented during school year 2006-2007?

This analysis first summarized the background, context, and meaning of each of the nineteen focus areas. To accomplish this, the team reviewed Westat (2001), House Bill 853, BCPSS policies, MSDE policies, and other documents to which the focus area referred. Next, key

components of each focus area were identified in order to ensure that the entire focus area would be addressed by the analysis. For example, Focus Area 3 states: Provide a balanced and efficient allocation of qualified educational and managerial staff. Four key components were identified for the analysis of this focus area: (1) provide a balanced allocation of qualified educational staff; (2) provide a balanced allocation of qualified managerial staff; (3) provide an efficient allocation of qualified educational staff; and (4) provide an efficient allocation of qualified managerial staff.

Question 1: To what extent does the Master Plan include programs, policies, procedures, or initiatives that address each focus area?

Using the language of the key components, a list of key words and phrases was developed to help guide the search through the strategies of the Master Plan. This search process was also supported by the use of DTSearch text retrieval software. After linking strategies with key components, we then examined the selected strategies in order to document the specific curriculum, programs, procedures, policies, and initiatives related to each key component within each focus area. Where applicable, we also supplemented the findings about Master Plan strategies with preliminary findings from the evaluation currently being conducted by Bonham and Gorham (2008) of the Master Plan implementation during the current (2007-2008) school year.

It was found that the number of strategies associated with each legislative focus area ranged from zero to 227 strategies, an average of almost 30 strategies per focus area. The two focus areas with the greatest number of strategies were those related to curriculum (227 strategies) and instructional materials and support services (124 strategies).

Question 2: To what extent is each focus area fully (comprehensively) addressed in the Master Plan?

In addition to determining the number of strategies that addressed each key component, the analysis also involved determining how comprehensively each focus area is addressed in the Master Plan as defined by the following criteria:

- *Fully Addressed* – There are Master Plan strategies linked with all key components of the focus area.
- *Partially Addressed* – There are Master Plan strategies linked with some key components of the focus area.
- *Not Addressed* – There are no Master Plan strategies linked with any key components of the focus area.

It was found that the following focus areas (and all of their key components) were fully addressed in the Master Plan:

Legislative Focus Areas Fully Addressed in the Master Plan	
Focus Area	Key Component(s)
Increase access to high quality information technology (IT)	Integrate IT plans district-wide; expand and enhance IT related to instruction and operations
Build staff capacity	Provide leadership to principals
Student tracking system	Effective management information systems (MIS) that include the capacity to track student enrollment, attendance, academic records, discipline records, compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; continue development of compatibility between SETS and SASI
Financial management system	Provide effective financial management and budgeting system to ensure maximization and appropriate utilization of resources
Instructional materials and support	Develop effective system for providing and distributing instructional materials; develop effective system of providing support services
School reform	Develop and evaluate model school reform initiatives; expand reform efforts at middle and high schools
Distributing student test data	Process for distributing student test data to area officers and principals; process for distributing central office resources to validate and analyze student test data; timelines for distribution of test data to area officers and principals
Student assessment and remediation	Appropriate methods for student assessment and remediation
Student code of discipline	Develop and implement a student code of discipline
Implementation and evaluation of reforms	Measureable outcomes for implementation of Master Plan (MP); evaluation of MP reforms; timelines for implementation of MP and evaluation of MP reforms; reporting MP reform outcomes to Governor, Mayor, General Assembly; continue collaborative relationship between the BCPSS and MSDE
School restructuring	Improve the status of schools that are subject to restructuring

The following focus areas were partially addressed in the Master Plan: (Only the key components listed in the table below were addressed in the Master Plan; the remaining key components are discussed later in this executive summary):

Legislative Focus Areas Partially Address in the Master Plan	
Focus Area	Key Component(s)
Upgrade communications between administrative levels and the schools	Improve process of providing financial data to schools and general public
Extra supports for young and at-risk learners	Provide additional funds to ready-to-learn initiatives that are successful
Integrate special and general education	Address compliance and system efforts to achieve organization and instructional integration of special and general education
Allocation of staff	Provide a balanced and efficient allocation of qualified staff to support managerial and educational functions of school system; develop and monitor class-size reduction plan for all elementary grade levels
Curriculum and instruction	Development and dissemination of citywide curriculum reflecting MSA and VSC standards and an appropriate developmental sequence for students; school-based practitioner involvement in design and implementation of high quality PD; differentiated PD activities; PD derived from analysis of student performance and needs; PD meeting NSDC standards; effective educational program for students at risk of educational failure; conduct audit of curricula; evaluate ready-to-learn initiatives
Teacher hiring and assignment	Provide effective hiring of teachers and staff; increase proportion of certified and tenured teachers serving middle and high schools
Facilities Master Plan	Incorporate facilities master plan into the Master Plan; facilities master plan should include information about projects currently underway
Parental involvement	Develop a program to train principals and assistant principals in methods of increasing parental involvement at the school level

The following focus areas were not addressed in the Master Plan

Legislative Focus Areas Not Addressed in the Master Plan	
Focus Area	Key Component(s)
Master Plan as a comprehensive blueprint	Improve level of coordination and alignment of budgeting process with Master Plan; align programs and resources and coordinate schedules for development and public presentation
Teacher input	Formal procedure by which the directors of each of the school system's mentoring programs will provide semiannual reports to the Board and to the senior management concerning mentoring program perspectives

A closer look at focus areas that were partially or not addressed in the Master Plan was undertaken in order to determine which key components were not addressed in the Master Plan. These focus areas may be addressed in other ways, or in other documents like those reviewed in the third component of this evaluation. If they are not addressed, they may require more

intensive systemic attention. This analysis resulted in the following list of partially addressed or unaddressed key components:

Sharing and reporting of data from the central office level to area and school level staff and/or external stakeholders.

The Westat recommendations that concern reporting financial data to schools and ensuring timely data delivery are both unaddressed in the Master Plan. Similarly, the Master Plan does not provide a detailed process or timeline for distributing student test data to principals or area officers. The legislative reporting requirements that specifically mention the Governor, Mayor, and General Assembly are likewise not specifically addressed in the Master Plan. Finally, the Master Plan does not address the legislative requirement that teacher mentoring programs present reports to the board and senior management.

Measuring and evaluating the outcomes of reforms.

The Westat recommendation that the system evaluate interventions related to its new promotion and retention policy is not addressed in the Master Plan. Likewise, the Master Plan does not make provision for capturing program quality information to evaluate the integration of special and general education or for measuring the systemwide impact of this integration on student performance. Another area of measurement and evaluation not addressed in the Master Plan is training school leaders to measure the level of parental involvement in their schools.

Facilities efficiency and tracking.

The Facilities component of the Master Plan Status Report does not discuss innovative approaches for reducing costs associated with existing facilities or mechanisms for tracking completion of repair and maintenance services. The BCPSS prepares a separate *Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan* that was part of the review discussed in the following section.

Staff assignment and fiscal/qualitative analysis of staffing.

The legislative mandates that concerned effective assignment of teachers and staff were not addressed in the Master Plan. Likewise, key components that call for a qualitative and fiscal analysis of central and area staffing were not addressed. Other documents discuss allocation of positions, but a separate evaluation shows that not all allocated positions were filled. A more general discussion of the human resources system is found in the following section.

Training principals and assistant principals in specific parental involvement strategies.

Two key components related to professional development are not addressed in the Master Plan: there are no strategies to train principals and assistant principals in strategies for connecting parents to the instructional program of the school or to involve teacher organization representatives in the design and implementation of professional development.

Alignment of budget process with Master Plan.

Two budgeting mandates of HB 853 are not met in the Master Plan. There are no specific strategies to coordinate and align the system's budgeting process with the Master Plan or to coordinate schedules for the development and public presentation of budgets. The time frame for developing the budget and the Master Plan make alignment difficult. The FY2007 budget was based on the 2005 master plan, and the Master Plan for the 2006-2007 school year only showed how increases in that budget over the previous year related to some specific Master Plan strategies. However, a separate investigation found budget support for additional expenditures required by strategies in the Master Plan (Bonham and Gorham, 2008).

Alignment of assessments with standards.

The only instructional mandate not addressed in the Master Plan is the alignment of assessments with state standards.

Teacher input.

The legislative requirement that the BCPSS institute an effective system of teacher input is not addressed in the Master Plan.

Question 3: To what extent have Master Plan strategies for each focus area been implemented as of SCHOOL YEAR 2006-2007?

Finally, to determine the extent to which the strategies associated with each key component were implemented as of July 2007, we reviewed the information provided about each strategy in the "Strategies," "Evaluation/Monitoring/Evidence," and "Status Report" columns of the *October 2007 Master Plan Implementation Status Report*. Using this information, the implementation status of each strategy was categorized in one of the following ways:

- *Fully Implemented* – All of the evidence associated with the implementation of the strategy was documented.
- *Partially Implemented* – Some of the evidence associated with the implementation of the strategy was documented.
- *Not Implemented* – None of the evidence associated with the implementation of the strategy was documented.
- *Unclear* – Strategy implementation documentation was unclear or confusing; therefore, a decision about strategy implementation status was not made.

On average across the focus areas, 36% of strategies linked to focus areas were fully implemented, 34% were partially implemented, 11% were not implemented, and 8% were unclear (i.e., a determination could not be made about the implementation status of the strategy due to problematic, missing, or confusing information provided about the strategy in the *Master Plan Status Report*).

Focus areas with more than one strategy that had the three highest percentages of “fully implemented” strategies were:

- Evaluate extra supports for young learners and learners at risk (66%);
- Improve the status of schools that are subject to restructuring (64%);
- Provide financial management and budgeting system to maximize resource use (60%).

Focus areas with more than one strategy that had the three highest percentages of “not implemented” strategies were:

- Train principals and assistant principals in increasing parental involvement (50%);
- Incorporate the facilities master plan and update annually (50%);
- Provide effective hiring and assignment of teachers and staff (30%).

The last two of these focus areas with high percentages of “not implemented” in the Master Plan are discussed further in the following review of system management that involved a wider range of documents.

Improvement of System Management

The Westat (2001) report included twelve major recommendations. Half of them related to improvement of system management:

- Improve facilities management.
- Increase access to high quality IT.
- Upgrade communications between the administrative levels and the schools;
- Continue emphasis on building staff capacity.
- Continue to use and develop the master plan as a comprehensive blueprint for system functioning.
- Continue efforts to involve parents and support the work of the Parent and Community Advisory Committee.

This evaluation reviewed 112 audits, reports, studies, and other documents relating to the improvement in seven functions of system management over school years 2001-2002 through 2006-2007.

Financial Management, Including Budgeting, Grant Management and Reporting

The Westat report recommended improvement in the level of coordination and alignment of the budget process. The BCPSS faced two major challenges to meet the Westat recommendation. The first challenge was in implementing the new Oracle financial application software. General financial and grant management audits, reports, and studies over the years documented the challenge. Some of the weaknesses identified in the various reports, stemmed from the system’s failure to conduct a post-implementation evaluation soon after the installation was complete. The BCPSS

appears to have addressed these challenges and the Oracle financial application seems to be working with adequate controls in place to insure proper budgeting, general financial management, and grant management. The system should continue its monitoring of the financial application and continue the training received from Oracle. This will insure staff will be able to respond quickly to any subsequent financial application challenges, should any arise.

The second major challenge was overcoming a reported \$58 M deficit reported at the end of FY 2004, according to the report of the Maryland State Department of Education panel on BCPSS finances. The immediate consequence of the disclosure of the deficit was increased reporting requirements to the local school board, city, and state. This increased level of scrutiny appeared to help focus the system strategically to deal with the problem. The system responded aggressively and eliminated the deficit by the end of FY 2006 according to the June 2006 Biannual Financial Status Report of State Superintendent and subsequent reports. An outcome of the increased number of reporting requirement was that the system improved its financial reporting. In addition, the BCPSS improved its management processes and linked the budget to the Master Plan. As the system continues to monitor and make improvements to the new reporting and management processes, it increases the likelihood that major financial problems will be detected in a timely fashion. The changes put in place have improved the performance and efficiency of the financial management function.

Management Information Systems and Accountability

The Westat report noted that the Information Technology department and IT functions were improving, but recommended that it work in greater partnership with school staff to integrate IT plans district-wide. The IT department and IT functions have made major strides to provide support for software and hardware application throughout the BCPSS. The IT function worked with the finance department to conduct the post-implementation review of the Oracle financial application according to the 2006 Financial Audit Report's Response to Findings. This function's leadership seems to be very focused on meeting the system's technology needs. The IT function's ability to quickly respond to the system's needs has aided in improvements in other functions. According to the Office of Legislative Audits - Financial Management Practices Performance Audit Report in January 2006, which included a review of the Information Technology function, the BCPSS IT function provides support for a number of financial and academic applications. In addition, the BCPSS' IT department was cited for having a number of industry-accepted IT application development best practices in place. Responding to the Master Plan and other reports and studies, this function has made adjustments to meet the needs of the systems for improved technology support. For these reasons and others more fully explained in this review, Management Information and Accountability function has made improvements in performance and efficiency.

Facilities and Maintenance

Westat (2001) identified major needs throughout the BCPSS in the Facilities and Maintenance function. Its major recommendation was to develop a plan that addressed building closures, building construction, and facility maintenance. Since then, major changes have occurred in the leadership of the Facilities and Maintenance functions and the responsiveness of this leadership. This function also had increased oversight at the local and state level that contributed to management and reporting improvements. The leadership over the Facilities and Maintenance function increased the number of capital projects completed and increased school closures as required by the FY 2007 Capital Improvement Program. In addition, improvements in responsiveness to repair and maintenance requests have, at least anecdotally, resulted in improvements in the level of customer satisfaction. This was documented in the correspondence sent to the superintendent on July 26, 2007 from the State of Maryland, Public School Construction Program – Interagency Committee on School Construction. Plans have been put in place and adhered to with goals for facility closures, construction, renovation, and maintenance. However, this function will benefit greatly with stability and leadership to continue to make progress over time. More work needs to be done to insure the improvements are sustainable. While there are still areas for improvements that need to be addressed, such as feedback from customers of progress in this function, there have been significant improvements made in the performance and efficiency in the Facilities and Maintenance function.

Procurement

Westat (2001) noted that procurement for the BCPSS had shifted from the City of Baltimore to the BCPSS, and found widespread appreciation of the new process. Findings and recommendations from the subsequent annual financial audits and other reports and studies indicated that weak procurement internal controls caused items to be expended in excess of the budget and contributed to deficits in school year 2002-2003 and school year 2003-2004. The BCPSS has responded to these findings and recommendations and has strengthened controls over the procurement process. This is documented by review of follow-up to each audit finding in the audit report of the subsequent year. The BCPSS improved the budgeting and encumbrance controls in the Oracle Financial application and moved from a paper process to an electronic process. It piloted a web-based e-commerce procurement application in school year 2006-2007 that integrates with the system's financial application. In an interview with the Director of Materials, full implementation occurred shortly after the time period covered in this evaluation. Processes have also been put in place to review and establish all contracts in the districts. This has made the contract negotiation process more efficient and has increased the speed of the purchasing process.

Review of the progress made in this function indicates that the district has a strong commitment to improve the controls over the procurement process and a commitment to improve the ease of use of the process for the end user. For these reason, we believe

the BCPSS has made improvements in performance and efficiency in the Procurement function.

Performance (Human Resource) Management

The Performance (Human Resources) Management function demonstrated improvement in efficiency and performance as a function of the expanded use of technology, the ability to reorganize its personnel structure to align with the system's priorities, and the use of innovative recruitment and retention strategies. The 2003 implementation of the Human Resources Management System (HRMS) allowed for enhanced operational efficiency by integrating the major human resource functions such as payroll, position control, and budget into one coordinated system. HRMS facilitated the generation of audits and reports that increased access to data and increased propriety of transactions. Another measure that contributed to greater efficiency was the collaboration with MSDE to pilot a scanning process to manage teacher certification credentials for compliance with the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Scanning was also used to convert general personnel records from the past ten years from paper to electronic form, eliminating those paper records. The teacher application and selection efforts were made more efficient with the use of *Teacher Track* software, which streamlines the application process. Lastly, the Human Resources Department experienced two major reorganizations to meet the system's most pressing priorities. The first, which related to teacher certification credentials, consisted of restructuring and expanding the Certification Office. The second involved the Department of Personnel transitioning to a dedicated staffing model to improve relationships between human resource staff and school principals with the goal of enhancing the teacher recruitment process.

In terms of performance in building staffing capacity, the Performance (Human Resources) Management function realized improvement in the areas of organization and staffing, and in teacher recruitment and retention. Collaboration with the Baltimore Model Schools Initiative to train principals in best practices for selecting effective teacher candidates began at the start of the 2005-2006 school year. Every special education teacher position filled at least by the start of the school year 2006-2007. In terms of recruitment, the BCPSS has managed to offer a more competitive package of incentives for new teachers, with benefits ranging from eligibility for an early signing bonus to opportunities for transitional co-teaching. Several initiatives are in place to attract and develop teachers, including international recruitment efforts targeting the Philippines, Alternative Certification Routes, and the Parato-Teacher model. Retention practices improved to assist teachers in attaining highly qualified eligibility. Specifically, the reimbursement policy was revised to lower teachers' out-of-pocket expenses associated with Praxis fees and coursework needed for certification. Significantly, the expanded recruitment and retention practices contributed to an 18.7 percentage point increase in the number of classes taught by highly qualified teachers between school years 2003-2004 and 2006-2007.

Communication and Engagement

The Communication Management System was designed and strategies implemented that have strong potential to improve communication and public relation functions, and to increase parental and community engagement. Efforts continue to focus on establishing a brand for the BCPSS, telling the story of the district and fostering meaningful involvement and collaboration with families, the community, and business partners. The successful re-launch of Educational Channel 77 allows the system to reach a broad audience via cable television, with a full complement of BCPSS inspired programming that involves students, staff, and administrators. Two new publications, the *Baltimore City Educator* and the *Schools Monthly* e-news letter have been published and disseminated with the goals of sharing information and publicizing the BCPSS' successes and accolades. The use of the Teacher Support System (TSS), an electronic portal facilitating teacher and student access to instructional resources, increased over the period. For the first time, a course catalog of the system's classes was published.

The BCPSS developed several initiatives in the area of Family and Community Engagement to help overcome historical barriers to family and community involvement, and assist schools in meeting state and federal parental involvement mandates. The Board approved the Family Community Engagement policy in May 2004 that outlined the requirement to have a family and community engagement team at each school. Workshops and informational sessions were offered to provide parents with the opportunity to learn about ways to get involved in their children's education and to talk with school and Board administrators. In order to decrease the potential of language serving as a barrier to involvement, translators were provided at all meetings sponsored by the Office of Parent and Community Involvement, and a 12-week Family Literacy class was offered for speakers of other languages. The BCPSS began offering breakfast every school day to students through the *Breakfast Club* in order to assist parents in ensuring that students receive a healthy breakfast. One measure of success in parental and community engagement is the 25 percent increase in school representation at the 2007 Parent and Community Leadership Development Resource session compared with the previous year.

In terms of partnerships, the BCPSS has developed meaningful collaborations with higher education institutions, community groups, businesses, and non-profits. The Human Resources Department, the Teacher/Principal Quality Office, Towson University, and the Cherry Hill community joined together to form the Cherry Hill Learning Zone which serves as a community resource for teachers working toward certification, and as a place where parents and students receive information and services. The partnerships with the Stupski Foundation helped in conducting organizational audits, assisting in developing a communication plan, and enhancing research and evaluation capability. Partnerships allow BCPSS to increase other capacities by leveraging additional resources and opportunities.

System-wide Organization and Management

The demand for, and use of, data to make informed decisions regarding system organization and management increased significantly during the period under review. The infrastructure to collect, assess, and disseminate data on key indicators of student performance and system management improved despite the challenges to stability from a high turnover rate in top leadership positions and a series of restructuring events that created, eliminated, and revamped positions. Four changes in the Chief Executive Office (CEO) position occurred between 2002 and 2007, along with key positions reporting directly to the CEO. These changes often resulted in a climate of instability, making it difficult to maintain morale and commitment to initiatives. During the period, the system endured vacillating cycles of centralization and decentralization, which were exemplified by phases of expansion and phases of layoffs at the central office.

The Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability (DREAA) was developed as a result of a mandate of the city-state partnership legislation. It exists to provide accurate, timely, and relevant data to inform decision making and to support evaluation of the master plan Implementation. DREAA contributed to system improvements in several ways: administering benchmarks to monitor student progress and to inform instructional planning, providing internally generated enrollment projections, publishing detailed and aggregated student data, and administering school climate surveys. Additionally, DREAA worked with school staff to produce custom datasets and train them on accessing and using data.

SchoolStat serves as one of the BCPSS data-driven accountability systems. It began in 2001 and expanded each year thereafter. SchoolStat's central aim is to raise the level of accountability by assessing performance against a standard set of management principles and by providing a structured and collaborative process by which staff work together to assess and address challenges. SchoolStat achieved a number of measurable accomplishments that indicate enhanced management efficiency and performance for the system. For example, in school year 2005-2006, school leadership teams identified and executed best practice strategies that resulted in improved school attendance across grades. Thus, despite changes in the top position, the system achieved improvements in infrastructure to collect, assess, and disseminate data on key indicators of student performance and system management, and increased commitment to use data to inform decision-making.

Public Comments

Public hearings on the draft report generated public comment on the scope of the evaluation, not the findings of the evaluation as presented. The comments included three observations: 1) the evaluation did not collect new information from parents, students, teachers and other stakeholders, 2) the evaluation did not address whether the Master Plan included all the objectives it should and whether it drove the budget or the budget drove it, and 3) and the evaluation did not address whether the improvements were as great as they should have been. The public comments did not view the evaluation as providing guidance for future improvements.

Discussion Summary

This evaluation had a limited scope, both in the questions it was designed to answer and in the information it used to address the questions. It addressed improvements in student achievement primarily through proficiency improvements on the Maryland School Assessments in grades three through eight over four years, not whether students were developing and achieving in other areas. It evaluated how the Master Plan for school year 2006-2007 addressed the areas included in the legislation that re-authorized the City-State Partnership, not whether the Master Plan included what it should nor met current guidelines. It address whether improvements had been made in seven administrative systems, not whether this systems were currently functioning at the level they should be. Within the narrow scope of the evaluation, it found the following:

- **Student achievement** improved greatly in elementary grades, with some grades on track to reach the No Child Left Behind goals if the recent pace of improvements can be maintained for another seven years. Achievement improved a small amount in the middle and high school grades, but not enough to catch up with the rest of Maryland, nor to reach the No Child Left Behind goals without substantially greater amounts of improvement in the future.
- **The 2006-2007 Master Plan** addressed most of the areas included in HB 853, and most of the strategies associated with the legislative focus areas had been fully or partially implemented by the end of the school year. Changes in federal and state legislation and policy since the passage of HB 853 may account for some focus areas not being addressed in the state-approved Master Plan.
- **System Management** has improved since 2001 in efficiency and performance in all seven areas we reviewed. These improvement appear to provide a solid foundation for continuing improvement.



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