

## **2009 City of Bowie Education Priorities Report City Council Worksession, October 26, 2009**

### **Executive Summary**

There is good news to report regarding education, locally and statewide. This past year, Maryland schools were recognized as being some of the best among the states, in several respected education reviews. *Education Week: 2009 Quality Counts*, the College Board and *Newsweek* magazine all ranked Maryland schools #1 in the nation for various successes in education.

Bowie High School was among five high schools in the Prince George's County Public School System listed in *Newsweek* as one of "America's Top Public High Schools" (June 8, 2009) based on the percentage of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) tests taken by seniors. Many schools in Maryland, and in Prince George's County, including those in Bowie, have reached or are coming closer to reaching Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Maryland State Assessments (MSAs). Three Bowie schools excelled, with one hundred per cent or at least one grade level reaching proficiency on one or more categories.

With the implementation of a "Voluntary State Curriculum" and support for Early Childhood Programs, the Maryland State Department of Education has taken on the "responsibility to ensure that all children are ready for school." The number of children who are "Fully Ready for Kindergarten," has increased which may ensure that they will continue their education at, or above grade level.

It is important to celebrate the successes, as in these trying economic times, the Prince George's County Public School System and education in general, face many challenges, due to serious budget cuts at both the State and County levels. Federal Stimulus funds, which were planned to offer innovative programs, improve quality and teacher effectiveness, instead are filling in for funding lost due to the economy and have saved many jobs and programs, temporarily. Special Education and Title I programs are benefiting from an unprecedented infusion of federal funds. Yet, in the long run, whether this will provide enough impetus to continue the academic progress of recent years, without a quick economic recovery, remains to be seen.

The poor economy has had an impact on education in Prince George's County. Budget cuts were implemented, including reductions in staffing and changes in programs and administration, resulting in the loss of jobs for some educators, pay cuts for others and a reduction in office hours. Schools and administrative offices closed on Fridays this past summer to cut the cost of building operations.

Among the economic considerations, the Phase 2 Boundary process will review over - crowded schools and those that are under-enrolled, to determine if money might be saved by shifting student populations. At the same time, programs are being reviewed for needed changes, and it is hoped that the "temporary" buildings, which have been in use outside of some schools for years, will be eliminated.

In spite of the poor economy and budget reductions, PGCPs managed to provide many summer programs to assist students in moving forward in their education, yet the State of Maryland has made cuts in the FY '10 budget for other successful summer programs.

The projected number of high school students that may not have graduated if they did not pass the High School Assessments was alarming, when passing these HSA exams became a requirement for graduation this past year. With a huge push from the School System in the last half of the year, and the use of alternative routes to graduation approved by the State, the number of high school students who did not graduate because of these requirements, was significantly reduced.

Although the No Child Left Behind Act requires testing of students to show whether they meet the state standards, commonalities among standards across states has not been addressed until recently. Expectations of students who move from one state to another cannot be clearly compared. Finally, there is an attempt by 46 states, including Maryland, to develop "Common Core Standards."

Graduation and drop out rates are not looking good in Prince George's County. In the past, reporting has been an issue as measurements differed, although it has been clear that the numbers are not as high as they should be if we expect students to be successful when seeking employment. In addition, SAT scores are significantly lower in this County than the State average, and questions are being asked as to whether PGCPs students are really ready for college. If not, why not? When entering college, increasing numbers of students are being required to take remedial classes in reading and math prior to continuing with college level courses.

Communication continues to be a challenge for PGCPs. This concern is not limited to family and community members. As shown in the failure to prepare class schedules for many students, information is not shared as many would expect, even with the Superintendent, in spite of the well intended attempts.

Back to school: August, 2009:

- Many students were missing schedules and/or sitting in on classes, temporarily;
- Zones were reconfigured into Areas; and
- School boundaries were being evaluated based on numbers of students, overcrowding in some schools, numbers of students below capacity at others, and still many temporaries outside of school buildings in Bowie as well as throughout the County.

A New Bowie High School is no longer in the School System's plans for the near future. No funding was shown for planning this school in the recently released 2011-2016 CIP. Phase 3 of the Boundaries considerations will review high school populations once Phase 2 is completed. Proposals will have to be reviewed in order to find out what the future holds for a New Bowie High School.

"Charter Schools," according to the Public School Review, (<http://www.publicschoolreview.com/articles/3>), "fit in a niche between private and public schools." Programs are "funded with public money," and offer "an alternative to regular public schools systems." Charter schools have been around for a while, but are gradually growing in numbers in Maryland. They continue to raise troubling questions regarding their measures of academic success.

H1N1 (Swine Flu) is both a nationwide and worldwide concern. Illnesses seem to spread rapidly in schools, therefore, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) made recommendations available on their web site in August, 2009. Later the same month, PGCPs set up a page on their web site with information for families and the community regarding their policy and efforts related to preventative measures. Plans are in place for vaccinations to be given to students in public schools, as they become available.

The Education Committee will continue to monitor the School System's many programs and budgetary constraints during the current challenging economic downturn. The Committee will keep the Bowie City Council updated on the School System's progress and/or lack of progress. Education has endured many recent changes, at all levels, and it looks as if this may be just the beginning!

## **2009 City of Bowie Education Priorities Report City Council Worksession, October 26, 2009**

### **Introduction**

The City of Bowie Education Committee's annual Education Priorities Report presents challenges each year, in researching information and facts on a number of topics related to educational successes and concerns. This year has been especially difficult. With the economic downturn, budget cuts related to school programs and educators, many of the topics included have been in constant flux. Most issues and concerns continue to be observed or monitored to see what will happen next. Will student successes continue and/or increase, in spite of and/or because of necessary changes? The City should be both positive and hopeful, in spite of the numerous issues and concerns facing the school system.

### **Testing & More: Striving for Student Academic Success\***

#### **Maryland Schools Rank on Top, Among the States**

Maryland schools have recently been ranked at the top in several education reviews. *Education Week: 2009 Quality Counts* (MSDE, *Maryland Ranks #1 in the Nation on Advanced Placement Exams for Participation and Performance, February 2009*) rated Maryland among the top 10 states in kindergarten enrollment, top 25% for preschool enrollment, and obtained the highest rank for Advanced Placement (AP) improvement, as well as recognizing the state in other areas. The College Board found that Maryland students had the highest percentage of students taking Advanced Placement courses and scoring at the college level. ("AP Report to the Nation," February 4, 2009) Maryland had the largest percentage of students in the nation scoring at least a 3 on one or more AP exams taken during high school. (MSDE, *Maryland Ranks #1 in the Nation on Advanced Placement Exams for Participation and Performance, February 2009*) *Newsweek* magazine, in their annual "America's Top High Schools" issue in June, credited Maryland, in their "Mid Atlantic Excellence" article, as first in the nation (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/202022>). Maryland has the highest percentage of "rigorous high schools," based on their "Challenge Index" which looks at Advanced Placement classes, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge courses and student test results. These have been shown to be good indicators of student preparation for higher education.

#### **Early Learning**

Academic progress has been seen since the implementation of early learning opportunities, (under the administration of Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) since 2005) as shown in the increased numbers of children who are "Fully Ready for Kindergarten." Fewer than half of students showed readiness in 2001-2002 testing, whereas this number rose to 60% in 2006, and 68% in 2008.

The "2008-2009 School Readiness Report: children entering school ready to learn" includes the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR)(MSDE, [http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/BCFF0F0E-33E5-48DA-8F11-28CF333816C2/19574/MMSR\\_ReadytoLearn\\_200809.pdf](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/BCFF0F0E-33E5-48DA-8F11-28CF333816C2/19574/MMSR_ReadytoLearn_200809.pdf)), includes the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR). This model has components which define

standards for curriculum and instruction, assessment of young children's learning, effective communication between early childhood programs and families, and ways to successfully help children make the transition" from early childhood to elementary school. Results of the MMSR help families and early childhood providers to "work together to help prepare a child to successfully move on from kindergarten."

In addition, according to a Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) press release on January 23, 2008, "The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Early Childhood Development made available a state-recommended list of curriculum for infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) to provide guidance to child care centers, Head Start programs, and nursery schools in selecting curriculum that aligns with *Guidelines for the Healthy Development and Care of Young Children*. These guidelines serve as a "framework for the learning and development for infants and toddlers." The release included the following statement of Dr. Rolf Grafwallner, Assistant State Superintendent for the Division of Early Childhood Development, "We are very excited to provide programmatic support to early childhood providers who serve infants and toddlers. More than 150,000 infants and toddlers are cared for in Maryland. The use of the infant/toddler curricula will inevitably improve the quality of care and enhance young children's development and learning." This press release also explained that "the Early Childhood Curriculum Project is meant to offer resources for the classroom that align with the State's prekindergarten and kindergarten curricular frameworks, also known as the Voluntary State Curriculum." In addition, State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick stated that "We have a responsibility to ensure that all children are ready for school."

### **Maryland School Assessments (MSAs)**

MSA scores from this past school year are now available. Many schools across the state showed gains, such as the rise in proficiency in middle school math up from 69 % to 71.2%, and reading up from 78.7% to 81.8% (*Washington Post*, "Maryland Gains Continue on Reading, Math Tests," July 22, 2009). However, MSA scores of students attending Prince George's County Schools remain at the bottom of the 24 school systems in the state, only higher than Baltimore City. In fact, these schools show overall scores that are lower than the state average.

However, the good news is that many of the schools located in Bowie have reached proficiency or advanced, in most or all categories of MSA. (Maryland Report Card: <http://www.mdreportcard.org/rschool.aspx?K=16AAAA&WDATA=school>)

According to the *Bowie Star* (*Bowie Schools See Mixed MSA Results, July 23, 2009*) Bowie schools that scored proficiency or advanced on MSA last year, continued to be successful this year. Tulip Grove third- and fourth-graders scored 100 percent proficiency in both math and reading. Third- and sixth-graders at Heather Hills Elementary School scored 100 percent proficiency in reading. Whitehall Elementary School fifth grade students scored 100 percent proficiency in reading, and fourth grade students scored 100 percent proficiency in math. Heather Hills and Tulip Grove Elementary Schools scored 100 percent proficiency on portions of the test last year as well. Other schools located in Bowie reached their adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals, scoring above the County average in several areas. Northview, Pointer Ridge, Rockledge and Yorktown each scored above 90% in one or more areas. (Maryland Report Card)

A few schools in Bowie, however, after two years of continued improvement, did not post gains in all areas. They were High Bridge and Yorktown Elementary Schools and both Benjamin Tasker and Samuel Ogle Middle Schools.

Principal Cheryl Hughes indicated that while Yorktown Elementary made significant gains, they did not make AYP because not enough special education students cleared this year's benchmark in math proficiency. If any subgroup in the school falls short of the benchmark, even by one student, the school does not make AYP. All students must achieve at high levels. The good news is that the Hispanic population at this school jumped from 70.6% proficiency last year to 100% proficiency or better this year. In addition, one third of High Bridge Elementary School students have special needs, resulting in the school not meeting AYP.

### **School system summer programs planned to prevent loss of school year gains and improve skills.**

The "Extended Learning Programs Abound...2009 Summer School Program Brochure," is a listing (available on the PGCPSS web site), of programs in which students were able to enroll this summer. Classes were available for students in preschool, to provide "support and enrichment by focusing on language and literacy skills and math skills that will include hands on learning and parent involvement." In addition, "An individualized extension of specific services beyond the regular school year," was "designed to meet specific goals included" in student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

A program for English Speakers of Other Languages provided "supplemental support focused on maintaining and improving language acquisition (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and math skills for ESOL students." "The goal of the Elementary School program was to tie instructional strategies to the needs and interest of students while reinforcing skills in Mathematics and Reading. The program is offered to students enrolled in grades 1, 2, & 3." For middle school students, there was "instruction in reading and mathematics for students in need of additional support in either of these content areas."

"Jumpstart to Graduation" was a Summer Bridge program developed to assist students in making "a smooth transition from middle school to high school both academically and socially, and to set their sights on graduation in 2013." In addition, the following subjects were offered for high school students:

- Preparation for taking SATs;
- Day and evening classes, "for original credit (enrolled in course for the first time); repeat credit (course repeated); and non-credit (for review or enrichment)," for which graduation at the end of the program" was available for "eligible students;"
- HSA Preparation: "The HSA Academic Validation Program is an MSDE initiative for students who have not passed one or more HSA and meet the PGCPSS Bridge Plan criteria. The program provides an alternative way for students to demonstrate their understanding of the core concepts from the HSA courses."
- AP Bridge Academy provided "support for the non-traditional student" "transitioning into the Advanced Placement (AP) program."

Other programs were available for students entering International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, as well as those who were enrolled in specialized "Diploma Programmes."

The Title I Intensive Intervention Summer School (IISS) was available “to improve the literacy and mathematical skills of students in the Title I elementary and middle schools.”

A *Washington Post* article, “Active Summer, Active Minds,” (June 15, 2009) quoted experts expressing concerns about the losses of students’ abilities in math and other subjects over the summer. “If we can eliminate the summer gap, we can close the longstanding achievement gap between richer and poorer kids,” said Dr. Richard L. Allington, a Professor of Education at the University of Tennessee and past president of the International Reading Association. “Basically, even poor kids grow reading skills at about the same rate as middle-class kids when they are in school. Two-thirds of the achievement gap occurs during the summers, not during the school year.” The number of available summer programs in this County has increased to provide additional assistance for students in many subject areas, which, we can hope, will increase the academic progress of many students.

### **High School Assessments (HSAs)**

The following information about the HSAs is taken from Maryland State Department of Education’s (MSDE) web site ([http://www.hsaexam.org/your\\_child.html](http://www.hsaexam.org/your_child.html)):

- “The High School Assessments, or HSAs, are four multiple-choice tests—one each in Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, Government, and English.” Students take each test as they complete the related course. Tests are based on the “Core Learning Goals, a part of Maryland’s curriculum that outlines high school course content and learning objectives.”
- Students entering 9th grade in 2005 or beyond, must meet the state’s high school testing requirement to graduate. They may do this by passing all four HSAs. (Scores on an HSA taken more than once are not averaged. The student’s highest score counts.)
- Certain Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams may be substituted for passing scores on the HSAs. (School counsellors have a list of approved exams and acceptable scores.)
- A combined-score option allows students who obtain a lower score on one test to meet the testing requirement with a total score of 1602 or better on all four HSAs.

There has been much concern about whether or not large numbers of students would be successful on the HSAs, thereby increasing the number of students who would not graduate, as the 2009 graduating class was the first class required to pass all four HSAs or achieve a minimum total score or complete an independent “bridge plan.” A 2006 *Bowie Star* article (“Only 15 percent of seniors passed HSAs,” August 3, 2006) stated that only 15% of seniors taking all four tests would have graduated if passing the HSAs was a requirement at that time.” When two thousand seven hundred and fifty four students across the County had not met this requirement in December 2008, many feared the worst. By June there were only 500 (*Bowie Star*, “Nearly 500 county seniors still need to pass state tests,” June 4, 2009). According to the Baltimore Examiner, (“Pr. George’s County drastically reduces number of students who fail HSA.” (June 27, 2009) Dr. Hite’s review of students across the county who did not graduate because of their failure to pass these tests found that the number had been drastically reduced, and only 35 students fit in this category. These students were given an opportunity to work toward meeting these requirements this past summer. It was noted that students who did not graduate for reasons other than the HSAs were not included in this number.

### **Core standards**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) does not require states to adopt common education standards. There has been a push over the last year by the nation's governors and chief state school officers, joined recently by the U.S. Department of Education, to begin developing a set of internationally benchmarked common core standards in English and math within three years and to encourage all states to adopt them. According to an *Education Week* article (June 1, 2009), 46 states have signed a "memorandum of agreement committing to the process and development of voluntary, common standards."

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, have adopted a Memorandum of Agreement for Common Core Standards. Their hope is to establish a "common core of standards that raises the bar for all students." Their timeline includes the development of "End-of-High-School Expectations" in July 2009, and the development of "K-12 Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics," in December 2009. The goal is to adopt a "true common core of state standards that are internationally benchmarked," in a time frame "not to exceed three (3) years."

Maryland is one of the 46 states that have signed the memorandum. Governor O'Malley has called for a longitudinal tracking system, which will follow students throughout elementary, middle, and high school and into college and beyond. MSDE last year began providing each student with an identifying number that will be used for a robust database of education information. (MSDE press release, "MD Joins 49 States and Territories in Common Core State Standards Initiative," June 1, 2009)

### **Graduation & Dropout Rates**

According to the PGCPs Bridge to Excellence Master Plan, (Table 5.6, p. 568), graduation rates in the County have actually gone down since the 2002-2003 school year, at which time 89.54%\*graduated (the percentage of students receiving a diploma during the school year). The most recent year reported was 2007-2008, during which 83.09% graduated.

Dropout rates, at 2.34% in school year 2002-2003, rose to 3.96% in 2005-2006 and were down to 2.32% in 2007-2008.\*\*

\*"*This is an estimated cohort rate.* It is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates by the sum of the dropouts for grades 9-12, respectively, in consecutive years, plus the number of high school graduates."

\*\*"The number and percentage who leave school for any reason, except death, before graduation or completion of a Maryland approved educational program and who are not known to enroll in another school or state-approved program during the current school year. The dropout rate is computed by dividing the number of dropouts by the total number of students in grades 9-12."

According to the State of Education Report (MSDE, June 2009) graduation rates across the state have improved, increasing from 83.83% in 2002 to 85.24% in 2007, which places this county below the state average. With Maryland now instituting a unique identifying number for each student, the expectation is that the state will have a much better read on what percentage of students are actually graduating and by what date.

### **Are State and County Students Prepared for College?**

There are many possibilities to consider as to why students may not be prepared for college. The Abell Foundation's recent report (April 2009) on math standards for the state of Maryland, "Doing the Math: Are Maryland's High School Math Students Adding Up to College Success?" criticized the State's math curriculum, saying that it is "inadequate to prepare a student for success in mathematics at the college level. (*Baltimore Sun*, "State: MD's math curriculum prepares students," 7/29/2009). This claim is refuted by State Superintendent, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, who indicates that the state has developed national Algebra II course standards and testing which is a portion of the state's "high quality college preparation program." Yet, the numbers of students required to take remedial classes in college continues to rise. Another *Baltimore Sun* article, "A failing grade for Md. Math, July 12, 2009," in covering the Abell Foundation's report, states that the number of Maryland graduates "who had taken a college preparatory curriculum and went on to one of the state's two- or four -year colleges, rose from 23 percent in 1997 to 32 percent in 2007." These classes are non credit classes, but still have a tuition cost, and are required before moving on to the college level classes, according to the report, "Doing the Math." This report also refers to the Algebra I Standards as being "watered down," so that teachers may prepare students for the HSAs. These tests are suppose to assure that students have the minimum skills needed to obtain a high school diploma, but are seen as more of a floor than a ceiling to reach toward.

An Education Week article, reporting on the annual study "Diplomas Count 2009," "Building a Culture Aimed at College," June 11, 2009, explained the value of a "college-going culture," at high schools. Once students enter high school they are "talking college," the idea of going to college always on their minds, counselors checking to be sure they take the SATs, college planning process a part of their classes, and the CollegeBound Foundation (and/or others) providing information about colleges.

Prince George's County Public School System held Stakeholder's Meetings in May and June 2009, to seek input from parents and the community regarding what "college and workforce readiness means," which was also billed as "Secondary School Reform." A handout provided to participants (Prince George's County Public Schools Bridge to Excellence Master Plan Stakeholder Meeting, June 18, 2009), included a graph (p.10) showing the county at the bottom of 6 counties in cumulative "Grade Point Average After the First Year of College," at 2.27, while Anne Arundel, Montgomery and Howard County students are at about 2.7 and Baltimore City and Charles Counties are at about 2.5, still above Prince George's. In this same handout (p.8), another graph showed this county as the highest among six counties in the number of students needing math and English remediation in college, in 2006-2007, with 42% needing math and 15% needing English assistance.

SAT scores across the State of Maryland may be another indicator of why County students may not be as well prepared for college or doing as well in college. The following information was provided by PGCPSS at the above referenced Stakeholder meeting:

	Number of students	Critical reading Mean	Math Mean	Writing Mean	Combined Mean
PGCPS	4,774	432	420	431	1283
State of Maryland	36,368	490	498	490	1478

**Local Public Education**  
**County School System and Schools in Bowie\***

**Back to School, 2009**

The opening of school on August 24<sup>th</sup> did not go as smoothly as expected. Schedules and even homeroom assignments were not available for thousands of middle and high school students. The *Washington Post* reported that high school students had an extended vacation, since students sat in cafeterias, gymnasiums, libraries and classes they “did not want or need,” (“Students’ Scheduling Errors May Last Days,” August 27, 2009) with many not attending regular classes for several days. Parents were asking what the school system was doing all summer, to which the response was that they did not realize until the last minute that the trouble was “exacerbated by difficulties with SchoolMax, a \$4.1 million computer system purchased last year.” Additional schedulers were sent into the high schools to work on the problem. SchoolMax was the same program that crashed several times last year and apparently caused many problems with student report cards.

The problem extended further into the week, with many students placed into other classes and provided with what some called “mock schedules.” Among the schedules students received, there were apparently many errors. Superintendent Dr. Hite stated that, while there were “double the number” of scheduling issues this year, “it usually takes about two weeks to sort out scheduling issues during a normal school year.” Dr. Hite later said that he did not understand “the full magnitude of the problem until the first day of school.” (*Washington Post*, “Schools’ Computer Bugs Not Isolated,” September 16, 2009). Unfortunately, students and parents felt that students wasted several days of school. By Monday, August 31<sup>st</sup> all students were in classes, although it was not clear whether they were all in the classes they were supposed to be taking this semester.

According to the *Washington Post* (Schools’ Computer Bugs Not Isolated, September 16, 2009), the problems with SchoolMax were not unique to Prince George’s County. Many issues have confronted others using this same product, including Albuquerque, Los Angeles and Bartow County, Georgia. Concerns with this product include tracking student attendance, discipline and scheduling. In addition, the *Bowie Blade-News* reported that the problem continued more than a week after the start of school, with students still attending classes temporarily while awaiting the completion of “real” schedules (“75 BHS students still without class schedules,” September 3, 2009).

**New School Areas**

The budget shortfall, according to Dr. Hite’s Memo to principals, “Reconfiguration of Zones to Area Offices,” dated June 2, 2009, was the reason for this change. This communication lists the core functions of the area offices for SY 2010. Overall the Area

Offices will support the principals and staff at elementary and middle schools, based on their individual needs.

The four areas are geographically based, to include 40 to 46 schools, radiating from the Washington DC line east, with elementary to middle school feeder patterns contained in a single area. Schools located in Bowie are divided between two "Areas." Mrs. Kathleen Kurtz is the Executive Director of the schools in Zone 3, located south of Route 450 and Mr. Andrew Zuckerman holds that same position for Area 2, north of Route 450. (Area 2 web site: <http://www1.pgcps.org/area2/>, Area 3 web site: <http://www1.pgcps.org/area3/>)

High schools operate under the High School Consortium (see below), under the direction of Ms. Monica Goldson. The Autonomy and Opportunity Zones still exist, but are attached to individual schools rather than areas. Each will work with others in their Zones to network around "topics and issues unique to their circumstances."

### **High School Consortium**

The High School Consortium (HSC), the oversight body for high schools in the PGCPs, is still in existence, even with the current changes and restructuring. According to the web site, (<http://www1.pgcps.org/highschoolconsortium/>), the HSC oversees programs in the high schools such as, "Jumpstart to Graduation," a Summer Bridge program to help students make a smooth transition from middle school to high school, both academically and socially, and to set their sights on graduation in 2013. This spirited and high energy academic acceleration and enrichment program will "jumpstart" rising 9<sup>th</sup> graders' high school experience by helping them prepare for the rigors of high school. Along with improving academic skills, students will develop friendships with peers and build relationships with teachers that will aid them in their freshman year and beyond.

### **Boundaries**

"Phase Two-Comprehensive Boundary Review," according to the school system web site, has a timeline as follows:

- **Summer 2009** - Initial boundary proposal plan review
- **Fall 2009** - Community Meetings to receive input on proposed boundary review
- **Winter 2009** – Board Review and vote on boundary review

The school system began to review school boundaries this past school year, with Phase 1. This was done as the School Board began to review populations in the schools and saw a need to better fill schools that are under-enrolled, while reducing the populations in those that continue to be overcrowded, and the utilization of temporary classrooms. Another strong consideration, in this poor economy, was the closure of some of the older schools, based on the expense of their upkeep where there was a reduction in the need for seats. The results of Phase 1 included the closing of eight schools, for which the PGCPs held repurposing meetings in September. The School Board meeting on August 27<sup>th</sup> included a discussion of [Phase 2 of Boundaries](#). High schools will not be included in Phase 2, but will be considered separately as part of Phase 3. The Timeline includes "Initial Public Review & Recommendation for Adjustments from the Community" which were taking place between September 28<sup>th</sup> and October 26<sup>th</sup>. From the end of October until November 20<sup>th</sup> there will be a "Release of Superintendent's Initial Plan for Formal Public Review," with the "Final Superintendent's Recommendation & Board Vote(s)," from November 30 to December 18, 2009. (PowerPoint Presentation at Board meeting August 27, 2009). We will continue to watch for the proposal to become available for review, as shifts of students to different schools will be important to parents, school communities and the City of Bowie.

At the time of this presentation, a “Community Forum” will have taken place at Bowie High School, on October 20<sup>th</sup>. Four of these Forums will be completed by October 27<sup>th</sup>. The PGCPs web site, (<http://www1.pgcps.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=93936>), indicates that the Superintendent’s “Initial Plan for Formal Public Review will take place between October 26<sup>th</sup> and November 20, 2009. This plan will “reflect the combined feedback from the internal review” and the “informal forums.” This will be “initiated with a first reader for the Board,” followed by “regional public hearings.” The final “Superintendent’s Recommendation & Board Vote(s),” will take place between November 30<sup>th</sup> and December 18<sup>th</sup>. The review period will be extended if “material adjustment” is undertaken, with a postponement of the Board vote until January 28, 2010.

### **Pre K & K-8 Schools**

Researched by the School Board and proposed for implementation in recent years, the school system has been reorganizing schools to fit the Pre K -8 and K-8 School model. When the Phase 2 Boundary proposal is made available, there may be evidence of the implementation of school restructuring to fit this model, where budgetary impact will be limited.

### **New Bowie High School**

Funds originally included in the CIP to begin plans for a small specialized high school in this area have been removed. In the current economy it is impossible to predict when this might again be considered. Although Bowie residents are aware of the overcrowding at Bowie High School, which has been a problem for many years, the City can only hope that the ninth graders will remain at the Belair Annex. The Annex currently provides some relief, until the economy changes and the subject of a new high school in Bowie can be reconsidered.

### **Communication**

We have reported on difficulties of the Prince George’s County School System with communication, with Parents and between the School System and the community, for a number of years. Last year PGCPs made an attempt to improve this by providing a list of contact information for use in obtaining answers to questions, “How To Address Questions and Concerns,” which was printed in English and Spanish. This has been updated and appeared in the *Gazette* newspapers in their annual “Guide to Education in Prince George’s County,” on August 6, 2009, making it available across the County. In addition it is available on the School System’s web site, <http://www1.pgcps.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=96538>, as well as on each of the School Areas web pages.

A web based system, through which parents could obtain information about their students’ progress, the *School MAX Family Portal*, was implemented during the last school year although difficulties with the system initially caused its use to be postponed. Currently, this online web-based system provides parents direct access to their child’s academic progress. Parents can login and check their child’s grades and communicate via email with the teachers or administrators from anywhere and at any time. If something happens during the day, and the school needs to contact the parent about their child, they can do so easily through the phone number or email listed by the parent. This system has been adopted by the school system, at all levels (elementary, middle and high school), in an effort to keep parents abreast of their children’s academic progress. Unfortunately the SchoolMax scheduling system, that was used this year for

the first time, was responsible for the 8,000 secondary students not having class schedules at the start of the school year!

During the Board meeting on August 27, 2009, there was much discussion about the School Board Members and Dr. Hite not being aware of the SchoolMax scheduling problems until the first day of school. This was blamed on the lack of communication between the school system and the Board Members, staff working on the scheduling Dr. Hite, the communications office, IT, and all others involved. It appears that poor communication continues to be a serious issue with the School System!  
(For more on SchoolMax, see Back to School, 2009 section earlier in this report.)

## **Budget Concerns**

### **Cuts implemented & Resulting Changes**

In July 2009, the School Board approved a budget that the *Washington Post* referred to as “strained.” (“School Board Approves a Strained Budget,” July 2, 2009). They found it necessary, after six months of a variety of considerations, including school closings, eliminating 800 positions, and laying off 270 employees, to dip deeply into their reserve funds, using \$17.4 million of \$21 million.

This summer, the state was, once again, seeking additional items to cut from the budget. According to the *Washington Post* (July 23, 2009 “Cuts May Cost O’Malley Support of Key Groups”), one of the items that was considered, again, was the shift of the cost of teacher pensions, “from the state to counties.” The Board of Public Works, made up of the governor, the comptroller and the treasurer, made \$280 million in cuts on July 22 in the current year’s budget and planned to make more than \$700 million in cuts at its August 26, 2009 meeting, as state revenue projections continued to decline sharply. The state is also facing a projected FY 2011 deficit of \$1.5 billion or more (*Baltimore Sun*, July 22, 2009, “O’Malley proposes \$280 million in budget cuts”).

Maryland is one of the only states in the country that pays for the entire cost of providing pensions for teachers. These costs for the State rose an additional \$137 million this current fiscal year, and in FY 2011 are projected to increase another \$192 million (*Gazette*, Aug. 12, 2009, “Cuts to counties on horizon”). It is likely that the possibility of shifting the responsibility for covering these costs will continue to be considered.

A major increase in assistance from the federal government in the form of stimulus dollars, this year and next year, has spared counties from making even more severe cuts, but this source of aid is currently expected to end after next year. The Governor continued to insist that he planned to spare K-12 education from any cuts at the state level, but if the counties are forced to pick up any substantial portion of the costs, they will likely turn to cutting their share of K-12 funding and other areas. How the school system might cover this large cost, especially with recent budget cuts which have resulted in reorganization, reduction in programs, personnel, larger class sizes, etc. is a major concern.

Many parents expressed concerns regarding the reductions in programs which have proven to be beneficial to students such as AVID and Reading Recovery®. Both programs were threatened with reduction or elimination, and then reinstated, as shifts in

funding were reconsidered. The following descriptions of these programs provide an idea of why strong feelings were expressed over the threat of losing them:

### **Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)**

According to a Prince George's County publication about this program, the 2008 Brief Advancement Via Individual Determination (available on the PGCPS web site), AVID was organized in 1980 "to provide students with experiences that they need to be competitive in applying to four-year colleges." It is now a national organization "dedicated to facilitating the college dreams of all students." When this program is offered to students they become "more aware of the courses, skills and aptitudes required of college bound students, and more positive behaviors are seen." Students are required to take "challenging courses," in which "some students may initially struggle" to meet the increased demands, but they have the support of the AVID course, tutors, peers, and teachers. "School-wide professional development activities," help to promote "rigorous" learning. "The AVID program develops the skills of students in all curricular areas, through tutorials, inquiry, and rigorous study. Increased expectations for students contribute to a college-going culture that improves the academic experiences of all students in a school." This program has been implemented in additional middle schools each year, for several years, and although it was threatened with budget cuts last spring is now available at both Benjamin Tasker and Samuel Ogle Middle Schools.

### **Reading Recovery©**

(<http://www1.pgcps.org/researchandevaluation/index.aspx?id=54594>)

"Reading Recovery© is a short-term, early intervention program designed to assist first-grade students with the lowest achievement levels in reading." "The goal of the program is to move participating students to performing at the class average level in as short a time as possible so that they will be able to benefit from regular reading instruction." "Research indicates that the program is very successful in meeting its primary goal: students who successfully complete the program are able to keep pace with their classmates through the end of first grade without additional intervention. Research on the long-term impact of Reading Recovery© suggests that the reading strategies developed by students who participated in the program enable them to continue to perform at or above their class average in reading through second and third grade."

### **Assistant Principals**

These positions were another resource that was threatened with removal from many schools. The final decision was to remove this position in elementary schools with fewer than 350 students. Locally, this meant that both Tulip Grove and Yorktown Elementary Schools do not have Assistant Principals this school year.

### **Teacher Pay**

A "temporary agreement" (Prince George's County Educator's Association (PGCEA) Newsletter, August 21, 2009) for an extension to the teachers contract (in effect from July 2007 to June 2009) was reached this past summer. This eliminated steps and increment advancements, meaning there would be no pay advancements beyond last year's salaries for the County's teachers.. Beyond this, many employment actions resulted from budget cutting efforts. Some teacher positions were terminated due to teachers not completing certification requirements. Other teachers were reassigned due to position cuts, which, in some cases meant reductions in pay, large enough to cause serious changes for the teachers and their families.

### **Parent Liaisons**

The Prince George's County Public School System, in recognizing the vital role that parents play in the academic success of students, introduced a position of Parent Liaison a few years ago. The 2007-2008 school year showed a very large increase in parents participating in school activities and events. Last year every school in the system had a Parent Liaison. The role of the Parent Liaisons included reaching out to parents, facilitating their visit to schools and assisting in coordinating the System's annual "Bring Your Child to School on the First Day." (Division of Student Services, Department of Family and Community Outreach Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 1, January 2009)

The position of Parent Liaison was greatly reduced as a result of the budget cuts this past summer. Only 87 people remain in this position, leaving only a few working with one school, and most dividing time between two, or among three to five schools each. (List of Parent Liaisons; Prince George's County Public Schools, provided by Acting CFO, Matthew Stanski, August 2009). What effect this might have on parental involvement and participation remains to be seen, in spite of the pledge the school system has asked parents to take regarding involvement in their children's education. (Division of Student Services, Department of Family and Community Outreach Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 1, January 2009).

### **Summer Center Programs for Talented and Gifted (TAG) Students**

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) web site has many press releases describing what wonderful experiences the Summer Center programs offer, as extended learning opportunities for advanced students (TAG Identified) to meet and study special interest topics with "like-minded peers." (MSDE web site <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/giftedtalented/>). Programs are offered through MSDE in partnership with public and non-public agencies and are funded by the Maryland General Assembly.

According to the *Washington Post*, ("A Summer Vacation of Intensive Learning," June 25, 2009) program participants this past summer numbered 747 in grades 4 through 12, although in past years enrollment has been as high as 3,500. Students attended 16 centers across the state, which offered programs such as Alternative Energy at the "Center for Physics or Solar and Wind Power," and Space Robot Building. This program has been successful for 42 years, but has been completely cut from the budget, with no centers funded for 2010. There is a concern about eliminating programs that have proven to be successful, meeting the needs of, or providing additional enrichment for, and adding to the success of students.

### **Stimulus Funds**

Will National Stimulus Funds decrease the budget concerns for PGCPS? According to the *Washington Post*, (Stimulus Funds Are Schools' Stopgap," August 26, 2009) Maryland was not the only area in the country for whom these funds will go toward programs that would have been cut due to the limited funds available this year from their regular sources. A survey by the American Association of School Administrators, (Schools and the Stimulus: How America's Public School Districts are Using ARRA Funds," August 2009) showed that, while the goals were "to save jobs and spur innovation, improve the quality of standards and effectiveness," improve "teacher effectiveness," and support "struggling schools," they were being used to "backfill federal, state, and local budget holes." Responses were received from 160 school administrators in 37 states. Fewer than half of those responding to the survey indicated

that this money enabled them to save teaching positions, with far larger numbers reporting that they were unable to save other positions such as librarians, nurses, art, music, physical education, etc. Only five percent of respondents reported that the funds were directed toward "innovation and reform." Many commented that the restrictiveness of funding, to Title I and IDEA, prevented them from using the money for "regular education, smaller class sizes, adequate salaries to attract quality teachers and administrators, and general support for the basics of providing a school."

### **Areas in Student Education to Watch\***

#### **Special Education**

##### ***MEANS: Making Education Accessible in Neighborhood Schools***

Both Samuel Ogle and Benjamin Tasker Middle Schools have MEANS programs this year. Under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, children with disabilities must be educated in the "least restrictive environment," and be educated alongside children without disabilities whenever possible. The Making Education Accessible in Neighborhood Schools (MEANS) initiative was designed to provide students in special education with additional access to general education classes, in their neighborhood schools. MEANS began in the 2007-2008 school year at the elementary level, expanding further at the elementary level last year, while beginning at the secondary school level.

The MEANS initiative became system-wide beginning with the 2009-10 school year. It was designed to provide students in special education with additional access to the general education population and/or curriculum in their neighborhood schools. Previously, these students were in specialized self-contained education programs. That is, they were receiving all of their core subjects (reading, math, social studies, and science) in a classroom that consisted of up to 17 students, a special education teacher, and a paraprofessional. At the elementary level, a MEANS classroom consists of up to 18 students (with up to nine of the students having IEPs), a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and a paraprofessional. The student to adult ratio is 18:3, or 6:1, which is considered to be very good.

At the secondary level, the MEANS initiative provides increased access to general education classrooms for students with disabilities. The program was piloted only in a few middle schools in the previous school year. At the middle school level, three additional classroom models have been added. The first model, Intensive Resource, consists of a special education teacher that is paired with a paraprofessional with no more than 15 students in a classroom. In the other classroom model (Co-Taught 2), there is a special education teacher and general education teacher teamed up with up to 22 students, but only 11 students can have Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). The third model consists of 30 students with only 15 students having IEPs (Co-Taught1), with both a general education teacher and special education teacher sharing responsibilities for this model.

In addition, the MEANS initiative, which is considered an accessible program, has the following mission (<http://www1.pgcps.org/specialeducation/index.aspx?id=72058>): "to support the education of students in the Least Restrictive Environment, ensuring that students have maximum access to the general education curriculum, receiving rigorous instruction, appropriate supplementary aids and services, and interventions to guarantee

the acquisition of skills for educational success and lifelong participation in a technological, diverse society.” It should also be noted, that the teachers and paraprofessionals in the MEANS classrooms are given ongoing professional development and/or training in the Boundless Learning Competencies through the Special Education Department, and their partnership with the Johns Hopkins University.

### **Special Education in the Prince George’s County Public School System, and Stimulus Money**

Federal funding from the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act/Non-Competition Grants, will provide a projected total of \$29.5 million dollars in stimulus funds to Prince George’s County Public Schools during fiscal year 2010. As a result of these funds, programming services to children and youth with disabilities will be enhanced. Changes included are an additional sixteen (16) full-time employees (FTE) in K-12, and support services, to be hired during SY 2009-2010, included a social worker, “para” educators, transition teachers, and teachers for existing autism programs.

Program improvements, provided by this stimulus funding included an expansion of the MEANS initiative with the hiring of fifty (50) new special education teachers; enhanced collaboration and teaching methods; targeted such areas as assessments, reading and math interventions; and provided staff development. Additional stimulus money funded needed positions in the Office of Compliance, and others. Other positions included a data management technology analyst, and a Child Find Resource Support teacher. (FAB & CIP Committee Meeting, presented by Matthew Stanski, Acting Chief Financial Officer, Prince Georges County Public Schools, Board of Education Meeting, June 17, 2009).

### **Charter Schools**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) referred to Charter Schools, provided federal funding for facilities assistance, grant funding to states and school systems supporting charter programs, and calls for “per pupil expenditures,” to be available for charter schools. In addition, charter schools must provide the same accountability as public schools, (U.S. Department of Education <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/cspguidance03.doc>). Maryland has one of the most restrictive charter school laws in the country; charter schools are considered public schools, and local school boards have primary authority for allowing charter schools to be established (SB75, 2003). There are currently 30 Charter Schools, with 7,149 students enrolled in the State of Maryland.

Charter Schools have been a controversial topic, as, in the education field, some believe that families should be offered these as an additional choice, an alternative method for education reform, especially where traditional public schools are not showing a high rate of academic success. Others feel that providing the school system money to more independent schools siphons resources away from the public schools and toward schools that are less accountable.

*U S Charter Schools* (supported by the US Department of Education)

[http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs\\_docs/o/index.htm](http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/o/index.htm), defines Charter Schools as, “nonsectarian public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools.” The “charter” establishing each school is a contract detailing the school’s mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success. Most charters are granted for three to five years, although this varies. The charter may be renewed, depending on the

contract. These schools are accountable to their sponsor (usually a state or local school board) to produce positive academic results and adhere to their contract. These schools exercise “increased autonomy” in return for “accountability,” for “academic results and fiscal practices, the sponsors, parents, and the public that funds them.” There have been concerns about the validity of studies comparing public and charter schools, as they have compared totally different types of programs. Many charter schools are developed to meet a specific need of students, or to have a special focus. Charter Schools may also have requirements such as parental involvement, and tend to have small class sizes and much smaller total populations, in contrast to public schools.

A recent national study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) “casts doubt on whether the academic performance of students in charter schools is any better than that of their peers in regular public schools,” according to *Education Week*. The study paired Charter school populations with their counterparts, identified by a variety of similarities to get a clearer picture of student accomplishments. Their conclusions include some positives along with the negatives (p. 6). On average charter school students see a decrease in academic growth in reading as compared with public school peers. Specifically, researchers at the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford found that:

- Thirty-seven percent of the taxpayer-funded but largely independent schools posted gains that were “significantly below” what their students would have realized if they had enrolled in their local traditional public schools instead.
- Forty-six percent of charters produced learning gains that were indistinguishable from their local public schools’.
- Seventeen percent of charters posted growth that exceeded that of their regular public school equivalents by a “significant amount.”

“If this study shows anything, it shows that we’ve got a two-to-one margin of bad charters to good charters,” said Margaret E. Raymond, the director of the center and the study’s lead author, “That’s a red flag.”

The State of Maryland’s Charter School Law became effective in 2003. In Maryland, there are currently 30 Charter schools, with 7,149 students enrolled. Maryland is viewed as having one of the most restrictive Charter School laws. Locally, Charter schools in Prince George’s County did not succeed on the MSAs. Students did not perform as well as students in many of the public schools. Three of the four existing Charters did not reach the state benchmarks or AYP this past school year, with one of them being put in school improvement status. Another Charter school has also missed AYP for two consecutive years. The third Charter School opened in 2006 and missed AYP for the first time this year. (“Charter schools’ AYP scores raise concerns,” *Bowie Star*, August 6, 2009.

### **Current Education Related Issue: H1N1**

On August 7<sup>th</sup>, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a plan available on their web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>), providing guidance for K-12 schools this school year, “Guidance for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators for (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-2010 School Year,” which was “designed to decrease exposure to regular seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu while limiting the disruption of day-to-day activities and the vital learning that goes on in schools.” This included the dismissal of

students, which they indicated “should be made locally and should balance the goal of reducing the number of people who become seriously ill or die from influenza with the goal of minimizing social disruption and safety risks to children sometimes associated with school dismissal.” Their recommendations included details of the following basics (see their technical report on the web site for more details):

- Stay home when sick
- Separate ill students and staff
- Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Routine cleaning
- Early treatment of high-risk students and staff
- Consideration of selective school dismissal

In addition, the CDC states that they “may recommend additional measures to help protect students and staff if global and national assessments indicate that influenza is causing more severe disease. In addition, local health and education officials may elect to implement some of these additional measures. Except for school dismissals, these strategies have not been scientifically tested. But CDC wants communities to have tools to use that may be the right measures for their community and circumstances.”

In late August, 2009, PGCPS added information to their web site regarding H1N1 Influenza Resources. This information may be found at <http://www1.pgcps.org/flu/>, and includes information for parents, frequently asked questions, the school system plan and resources at the county, state and national levels.

Statements among the basic information provided assures people that: “With the flu season approaching, Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) is working to keep you informed and updated on the current health concerns including the potential H1N1 influenza outbreak. Being prepared and taking preventative measures are essential in keeping you and your family members protected.”

All PGCPS “offices and schools are stocked with soap and paper towels in the bathrooms for frequent hand washing by students and staff. Every public school bathroom in the county has a sticker detailing appropriate hand washing. Hand sanitizer will also be available in high traffic areas and classrooms in schools and offices.”

### **Conclusion**

Among the issues and concerns that have been included in this report, many need to be monitored as they continue to develop (School Boundaries, SchoolMax, 2010 Budget implementation and FY '11 Budget). Educating students is an ever changing process, which has been complicated this year by the difficult economic situation which will continue to have an impact on the immediate future and beyond. Hopefully, student academic progress will be maintained and continue to increase during this challenging economic downturn.

The schools in Bowie have always been among the most successful in the State of Maryland. Hopefully, with their high standards and expectations coupled with parent involvement and great community support, the schools in Bowie will continue to flourish. While the City of Bowie does not oversee or influence the operation of PGCPS, beyond

offering suggestions and commentary, it will be important to continue to monitor and support this School System that has moved forward through challenging times before, and cheer them on for the difficult decisions they have had to make, and for their efforts on behalf of children.

The business of educating children is not for the faint of heart. The school environment is constantly changing, and PGCPS is making every effort to keep pace during these economically turbulent times.