

MEMORANDUM

TO: City Council

FROM: David J. Deutsch, City Manager

SUBJECT: Education Priorities

DATE: October 6, 2010

The Education Committee has produced the attached report, which will be presented at the Worksession on October 11, 2010.

DJD/asf

Attachment

2010 City of Bowie Education Priorities Report Bowie City Council Worksession October 11, 2010

The City of Bowie Education Committee, in preparing the 2010 Education Priorities Report, again, as in years past, encountered many challenges in determining which topics related to education should be addressed. The Committee felt that many issues from last year's Education Priorities Report needed to be followed-up with updated information because of their potential to impact educational successes.

The Prince George's County Public School System (PGCPS) has faced many obstacles in trying to maintain programs and increase academic achievement, while struggling to make ends meet with reduced funding, due to a struggling economy. Those same obstacles continue with even further reductions in staffing of teachers and administrators, loss of parent liaisons and other vital positions. In addition, planning time for many employees has been reduced, as they went from being 12 month employees to 11 month employees, or 11 to 10 month employees, and having furlough days further lessen their work week. School morale cannot be good amongst those who have had to make personal sacrifices due to unexpected and/or unplanned salary decreases as a result of the FY'11 budget shortfall.

The 2010-11 school year is off to a great start! Dr. Hite stated that "97% of students had class schedules," which is a far better beginning than last year's SchoolMax scheduling nightmare, where many secondary students sat in either gymnasiums, or multi-purpose rooms for days, waiting for schedules. PGCPS has a newly updated website, which states that it is "designed to provide better access to information." Hopefully, this means that PGCPS will continue this effort in having information available and updated in a more timely fashion than has been experienced in the past.

Overall, everything appears to be going as well as can be expected in education in the state of Maryland, and more specifically, in the PGCPS. However, there are many issues related to education that continue to be addressed across the nation, at all levels of government, and a number of challenges are causing concern right here in the County.

Highs and Lows of the Prince George's County Public Schools' Budget

A Washington Post article "Deep budget cuts approved for Prince George's Schools" (February 28, 2010), reported that the PGCPS budget called for the elimination of 800 positions, including 355 in the classroom. Class sizes would rise by 2 students at every level except Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. More than 120 jobs of people who work as liaisons to parents and the community would be cut, and employees would have to take up to two weeks of furlough leave. Bus service to specialty programs would be modified ... School lunch prices would rise by 50 cents. There would be \$20 million in cuts at the central office.

A P.G. Primer article “Council approves budget” (June 3, 2010), indicated that the “Council would be expected to provide an additional \$6 million to supplement the school system...” With this surplus, many employee positions originally slated to be moved from 11 month positions to 10 month positions were reinstated. Additionally, all employees’ furlough days were reduced by one day. That is, administrators went from 10 furlough days to 9; and teachers went from 5 furlough days to 4.

According to a Washington Post article “No teacher layoffs, but 360 jobs will be cut” (August 12, 2010), “School officials had previously estimated 800 layoffs, including 128 teaching positions—were needed to balance the \$1.6 billion budget. The number was lowered to 360, however, after \$6 million in County surplus funds were given to the school system in June ... The funding allowed teaching jobs to be saved, but class size was expected to increase by two students,” said Superintendent Dr. Hite.

In this same article, Christian Rhodes, Union Representative, Prince George’s County Educators Association (PGCEA) said, “250 new teachers were hired this year, compared with years past when as many as 1,500 new teachers were hired.” As previously mentioned, “the additional funding has also been used to reduce furlough days by one for all school system employees.”

A Carroll County Times article “County to get slice of new funds slated for schools” (August 17, 2010), stated that “County education officials are in a wait-and-see mode anticipating a share of \$10 billion in emergency funds that Congress approved last week to strengthen state budgets facing school cuts and teacher layoffs. The measure signed by President Obama is to bring \$179 million to Maryland to fund the equivalent of around 2,500 jobs across the state,” according to the U.S. Department of Education. Recently, at a meeting of the PGCPSS Board of Education (August 30, 2010), it was stated that “PGCPSS would receive over \$20 million from this initiative.”

In addition, in a PGCPSS’ Employee E-News (September 3, 2010), the Superintendent, Dr. Hite stated “We will receive additional revenue in the form of Ed job funds from the federal government. These funds are restricted to certain expenditures, but we will be working with our unions as we identify ways we may be able to reverse some of the budget reductions for FY’11.”

Maryland High Schools Continue to Rank High

According to Newsweek magazine’s annual “America’s Top High Schools,” “Maryland public schools rank first in the nation in the percentage of high schools offering—and students taking—college-level courses.” In addition, a Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) press release dated June 15, 2010 stated that “the magazine lists 98 Maryland high schools among its top 1,622 schools—the top 6 percent in the nation.” Also, according to the same press release, “*Education Week* ranked Maryland public schools as the nation’s best for the second consecutive year, and the College Board found that Maryland schools ranked first in the percentage of students scoring at the college mastery level (scores 3-5) in Advanced Placement.”

A PGCPSS press release dated June 17, 2010, noted “High Schools from 15 different Maryland counties made the Newsweek list. In Prince Georges County, Eleanor Roosevelt, Oxon Hill,

Bowie, Laurel, High Point, Central, and Parkdale High Schools were recognized.” In this same press release, Superintendent Dr. William R. Hite, Jr. stated “This is great news for Prince Georges County Public Schools. This recognition shows that our students are some of the best and brightest in the nation.”

Further, on the home page of the MSDE web site, State Superintendent, Dr. Nancy Grasmick stated “For the second straight year, Maryland’s public education system received number one rankings in 2010 from Education Week; the College Board for Advanced Placement performance; and, once again, Newsweek for the highest percentage of rigorous high schools in America. We should all be truly proud for these consistent and remarkable accomplishments.”

2010 MSA/HSA Results

A PGCPs press release dated July 20, 2010, indicated that “Prince Georges County Public School students made dramatic gains on the 2010 Maryland School Assessments (MSA), with schools making 20- to 30-point leaps in reading and math scores, according to data released (today) by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The rise in MSA proficient or advanced scores at each grade level and in every subject is an example of the success that can be achieved through strong academic programs, highly effective teachers, and improved instruction.”

Further, Board of Education Chair Verjeana M. Jacobs noted that “During our tenure as a Board of Education, we have created policies and provided support to our schools to improve student achievement, and this year’s MSA results show that everyone’s hard work is paying off and our students are succeeding academically, we realize however that we are in the midst of reform and still have much more to do.”

Bowie elementary schools, as in the past, performed better than the majority of the rest of the schools in PGCPs in both reading and mathematics. The exceptions are High Bridge Elementary School, who moved into School Improvement status and Northview Elementary School, who failed to meet AYP for the first time since opening.

Bowie School MSA/HSA Results

School	Principal	2010 AYP	2009 AYP	TAG
Bowie High School	Ms. Jane Spence	MET	MET	TAG Honors; AP; Summit Program
Tall Oaks Vocational High School	Mr. Larry McRae	Portfolio Assessments or ALT-MSA*	Portfolio Assessments or ALT-MSA*	N/A
Benjamin Tasker Middle School	Ms. Karen Coley	NOT MET	NOT MET	TAG enrichment pull out program & honors classes

Samuel Ogle Middle School	Ms. Kathy Brady	NOT MET	NOT MET	TAG Honors Curricula; & HS level courses**
Heather Hills Elementary School	Ms. Patsy Hosch	MET	MET	TAG Center
High Bridge Elementary School	Mr. Charles Eller	NOT MET	NOT MET	Pull-out TAG
Kenilworth Elementary School	Mr. Chris Mills	MET	MET	TAG in the regular classroom
Northview Elementary School	Ms. Judith Bissett	NOT MET	MET	Pull-out TAG
Pointer Ridge Elementary School	Ms. Mary Stephens	MET	MET	Pull-out TAG
Rockledge Elementary School	Ms. Pamela Landry	MET	MET	TAG in the regular classroom
Tulip Grove Elementary School	Mr. Brian Baudoin	MET	MET	information not available
Whitehall Elementary School	Mr. Jerenze Campbell	MET	MET	TAG in the regular classroom
Yorktown Elementary School	Ms. Cheryl Hughes	MET	NOT MET	information not available

* According to the MSDE website, Alt-MSA is an alternate assessment designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in a regular assessment, even when accommodations are provided.

**High School level courses in all areas, including World Languages.

A PGCPS press release dated July 20, 2010, stated “no middle school in PGCPS made AYP.” However, it should be noted that from information posted on the individual school websites, Samuel Ogle MS came up short in only 2 subgroups in Math (Free and Reduced-priced Meals and Limited English Proficiency); whereas Benjamin Tasker MS struggled in several subgroup areas. Benjamin Tasker MS missed making AYP by coming up short in 7 subgroups (Reading – Free and Reduced-price Meals and Special Education; Math – All Students, African American, Hispanic, Free and Reduced-price Meals, and Special Education).

Each year there is an annual rise in the benchmarks, called Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO), as mandated by the No Child Left Behind law. According to that law, all students must be proficient in math and reading by the year 2014. The good news is that school board chairwoman Verjeanna Jacobs (at large) is aware of the problems facing the middle school grades and stated “the scores aren’t exactly where we would like to see them ... And that sort of fits into our need for secondary [curriculum] changes.”

Graduation Rates

Of the 50 Largest School Districts in the United States, Prince George’s County ranks 17th in size and 30th in graduation rates at 59.3%. (Washington Post, Jay Matthews article, June 10, 2010), Bowie High School has a graduation rate of 86.27% and Eleanor Roosevelt High School’s graduation rate is 93.44%. This is quite impressive in comparison. More than ninety-nine percent (99.8%) of students in each of these schools have passed all 4 HSA exams (Algebra, Biology, English, and Government) (www.MarylandReportCard.org).

Secondary School Reform

According to a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) information sheet, available on the PGCPS website, the purpose of Secondary School Reform is to “design, implement, track, and monitor curricular and instructional programs that move PGCPS substantially forward in graduating all students college and/or workforce ready.”

In reviewing attendance areas in County high schools, PGCPS determined that, while there are some differences in utilization of high school seats across the county, with some schools under and others over the enrollments set by their State Rated Capacities (SRCs), it would make more sense to offer programs that would attract students to them, in order to adjust these numbers, rather than considering only boundaries and enrollment. At the end of this process, PGCPS hopes to “emerge with a strategy to balance enrollments among high schools by having students and their family request” participation in “specialized programs and educational themes” (PGCPS Phase III Comprehensive Boundary Review, www.pgcps.org/phase3/). Input related to high school reform was received at “Stakeholder meetings” held in the spring of 2009.

The plan that was presented to the School Board on February 3, 2010 included:

- Current utilization of County high school seats

- The mission, “to design, implement, track and monitor curricular and instructional programs that move PGCPs substantially forward in graduating all students college and workforce ready.”
- The statement that “Rigor is sought in all courses to move our students from proficient to advanced.”
- The ideas behind what will be a long-term, phased in plan
 - Raise expectations
 - Provide options and opportunities
 - Students transition success
 - Empowered teachers, leaders and schools
- Planned for implementation in SY 2010-2011, include raising expectations of what students can achieve in areas of
 - Course and credit requirements
 - Better tracking of academic progress
 - Counselor training (to enroll students in rigorous coursework)
 - Information provided to students and parents regarding course selection and college access
 - “Content specific training for parents” will be provided
 - Development of a “strategic plan for creating a systemic college-going culture that begins in PreK”
 - “Develop and implement advisories in all middle schools for transition grades 6th or 7th. (Monitor and adjust their implementation in all high schools.)”
- High schools will be divided into five clusters based on “geographic proximity.”
 - Bowie is included in Cluster 1, along with DuVal, Roosevelt, and Laurel High Schools.
 - Clusters will offer a variety of “options and opportunities,” such as Science and Technology, International Baccalaureate, Comprehensive Career and Technical Education (CTE). Other programs will be offered in North and South County: Visual and Performing Arts, World Languages and Non-Traditional High School Alternatives (which might include Arts, Business, Construction and Design, Health and Medical Services, Information and Technology and/or others).
 - “Innovative schools of choice” would “expand opportunities.”
 - Interventions would be implemented to “turnaround chronically low-performing schools.”
- A program for student transition success will be developed, as will as a “comprehensive dropout prevention program.”
- Enhancement of “effective teaching and school-based leadership,” as well as professional development for teachers and principals.

Following this presentation to the School Board, forums were held across the County to provide parents and community members with the opportunity to address their suggestions, thoughts, and reactions to the changes being proposed.

An education forum, sponsored by the Education Committee, was held at Bowie City Hall on April 12, 2010. Chief Academic Officer Dr. Duane Arbogast and Academic Officer Lateefah

Durant, presented the complexities, purposes and long-term possibilities for secondary school reform. Dr. Arbogast explained that it would probably take about 7 years to implement the plan and it would require a change in many areas such as assessments, in order to develop the appropriate changed expectations and “culture” of academic success.

There are many promising aspects of the proposed changes, and it will be exciting to watch for the upcoming improvements, although the school system will face challenges in implementing extensive changes if the economy continues to require budgetary limitations.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices

The 2010-2011 school year will begin with a new policy for students that addresses, “Cell Phones and other Electronic Devices.” Students using cell phones or other Personal Electronic Devices (PEDs) that disrupt the learning environment have become far too common. The use of these devices has graduated from minor texting or taking/making friendly phone calls to major bullying, “*sexting*,” videotaping fights and posting them to websites, such as Facebook and YouTube.

In reference to Policy 5132, Dr. Hite stated "I see students now using cell phones in hallways, in classrooms, during tests." In addition, "Right now we have phones that are confiscated and no one accepts liability... This [Policy 5132] is to standardize protocol" (*Gazette Newspapers, Prince George's board bans cell phone use during school hours, June 24, 2010*).

The disruption has been acknowledged by the Board of Education and the Code of Student Conduct has addressed the issue in an Administrative Procedure that has been enforced at varying degrees at different schools. However, the Board directs the school system under the new Policy to uniformly apply the policy and its consequences district-wide.

Now that the Board has adopted Policy 5132, electronic devices are spelled out to include cell phones and PEDs such as iPods, “smart” phones, etc. “that are capable of placing and/or receiving telephone calls, text messages, “sexting”, creating and distributing videos, taking photographs and the like.” Further, school property is defined along with the specific hours that students are allowed to use phones. Most interesting for the Council to note is that previously, students were able to have cell phones and PEDs visible as long as they were in the silent or vibrate position. Policy 5132 disallows cell phones and PEDs to be visible or in the silent or vibrate position. Additionally, the policy disclaims the school from responsibility of a lost or stolen cell phone or PED. Section E, Numbers 1 through 3, outline the specific, gradual steps that the administration should take if a student violates the policy as follows:

- Confiscate the device for the remainder of the day;
- Confiscate the device until a parent retrieves it; and

- Prohibit the student from bringing the device for the remainder of the school year.

A reference back to Administrative Procedure 10101 is made at the end of the policy.

This Policy states that schools should make parents aware of the policy and determine a procedure of disclosure for which parents (and students) are responsible for its content. A cursory review of Bowie High School, Tall Oaks Vocational School, Benjamin Tasker Middle School, and Samuel Ogle Middle School's websites show no evidence of the district- or school-wide statement of expectations and/or consequences for the use of cell phones and other PEDs. However, on the front page of the PGCPS website, there is a copy of the policy and a disclosure statement that is to be signed by both students and their parents.

Anne Arundel County Public School Policy 902.15 (revised in 2004), Montgomery County Public School Policy COG-RA (revised 2007), and the District of Columbia Public School Policy Chapter 25, Title 5 all detail similar procedures and consequences for the use of cell phones and other PEDs.

Suspensions

Current suspension data indicates a rise in numbers of students suspended during the 2009-2010 school year. It is likely that the reasons for the rise in suspensions related to a shift in the categories used (*PGCPS School Performance Report*, June 24, 2010, p. 15-17).

The school system developed the Suspension/Expulsion Reduction Task Force in February 2009. The primary role of this task force was to investigate reasons for suspension, discuss school system policy, and make recommendations to the Board. The focus of the task force was to shift administrators' position on suspension thereby providing students with alternatives to suspension such as in-school suspension, counseling, and serving "time" at a nonprofit organization. The goal of the task force was to keep students in class as much as possible.

In 2007-2008, the Maryland State Department of Education announced that "the county has the 10th lowest percentage of students being suspended" (*Bowie Star*, June 2009). In this school year, 25,446 students were suspended from school. Two years later (2009-2010), the suspension rate was lowered by 30% and 14%, respectively.

For school year 2008-2009, the data is similar; however, it is unreliable since suspension data was being input into the new computer system, SchoolMax, for the first time. SchoolMax experienced a myriad of reporting problems including inaccurate reporting of data for grading, attendance, and discipline.

Programs such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and the deployment of Pupil Personnel Workers (PPWs) to most schools were found to be effective in this school year (*Bridge to Excellence Master Plan Report*, 2009, www.pgcps.org). The total number of

suspensions (including in-school, out-of-school, and expulsion) totaled 19,729 incidents. Loitering/Class Cutting had the most incidents with 4,578. Bullying received the lowest with a total of 42 occurrences reported.

At the June 24, 2010 Board of Education Meeting, both the Board and Superintendent expressed concern about the increase in suspensions during the school year. Board Vice Chairman, Ron Watson stated “When I look at this data, it looks like a school system out of control.” (Gazette Newspapers, Prince George's schools see rise in suspensions, *July 1, 2010*).

There was an increase in in-school suspensions (+1,215), out-of-school suspensions (+1,045), and expulsions (+3). The total number of suspensions totaled 21,992 incidents, an increase of 2,263 occurrences (Table 1). Although *Loitering/Class Cutting* decreased by 3,791 incidents, *Failure to Follow School Policy* increased by 3,347 occurrences. *Bullying* increased by 104 incidents (most probably due to the stricter procedure). Students/parents are permitted to self-report these situations. Classroom disruption was next in line with an increase of 1,624 incidents. It is interesting to note that most suspensions occur during the 9th and 10th grades. Suspensions count on an individual basis although a student may be suspended multiple times. It will be interesting to note how Policy 5132 (Cell Phones and PEDs) plays into suspension data for 2010-2011.

According to PGCPs employees, administrators were instructed not to suspend students for attendance related issues (i.e., *Loitering/Class Cutting*). It may be assumed, then, that administrators suspended students using the *Failure to Follow School Policy* code, as opposed to *Loitering/Class Cutting*.

Montgomery County has 143,000 students compared to Prince George's County's 128,000. MCPS reported 5,900 suspensions in 2009-2010 (Gazette.net, *Prince George's schools sees rise in suspensions*, July 1, 2010). The Task Force is calling for a disaggregation of data by school instead of by system.

The suspension situation must be watched, although the numbers seem to vary from year to year. While those suspended represent a small percentage of students (many are repeat offenders), teachers are charged with documenting interventions with non-complying students, and have little time to deal with possible solutions. With limited resources due to a struggling economy, it is unlikely that any new programs will be implemented or additional personnel (Pupil Personnel Workers, Psychologists) added to assist with improving student behavior therefore impacting these numbers. Parents may not have the means to seek alternative interventions for their children who may have behavior concerns, as many are working long hours to make ends meet in this economy. This may add to the problem, due to lack of time and/or attention to children and the inability to provide outside counseling.

Choice Seats(www.pgcps.org/choice)

PGCPS offers school CHOICE programs that allow parents to choose which school their child will attend outside of the regular attendance boundary. Choice schools are classified into 3 categories:

- **Enrichment and Specialty (ESP):** ESP schools offer 5 different areas of study: Creative and Performing Arts, French Immersion, Montessori, Biotechnology, and Talented and Gifted (TAG). Program acceptance is based on the lottery application process. Only 17% of the students who make application to these programs are accepted county-wide. There were 5,979 seats, of which 1,023 students were accepted; 374 (6%) students chose to attend another program, 547 (9%) were not eligible, and 4,035 (67%) were wait-listed. Also of interest is that none of these programs are offered within the City, with the exception of the TAG Center at Heather Hills Elementary.
- **Charter and Contract:** Charter schools are schools that are classified as public and are under the same accountability agreement with the State as PGCPS is, but they are allowed academic flexibility to meet the standards. Acceptance is based on the lottery process. On the other hand, contract schools are independent public schools that operate under an academic theme or focus. They are also required to meet the same academic standards as PGCPS. Acceptance is based on application. Funding comes from the per-pupil spending allotment established by PGCPS and the State. Currently, PGCPS operates 5 Charter Schools and 1 Contract School. None of these schools operate within the Bowie City limits. 3,152 applications were received last year for Charter and Contract schools. (One of each, Charter and Contract schools was added this year.) Just 10% of the students were accepted (325 students); nine percent (268) chose another program; and 82% (2559) were wait-listed (PGCPS Board presentation, *Prince George's County Public Schools , School Choice*, June 25, 2009).
- **International Baccalaureate and Biomedical Programs:** These are separate programs that individual students can choose to participate in if offered in his/her attendance school. These schools are by application, but are not part of the lottery CHOICE process.

Talented and Gifted Programs (www.pgcps.org/tag/)

TAG students are offered opportunities in 3 different settings: Centers, TAG Regular Classroom (TRC), and Pull-out. Students receiving these services must have already been identified or be in the identifying stage*. In the 2008-09 school year, 3,311 students were screened; 1,732 were identified. Screening typically occurs in grades 2-6. According to the Talented and Gifted [PGCPS] website (updated March 2010), TRC students receive “differentiated instructional

strategies in the regular classroom” including curriculum compacting, tiered assignments, and concept-based/interdisciplinary units (to name a few). Pull-out is the most frequently used model. This model provides for a minimum of 2 hours of pull-out instruction, where the student(s) receive “opportunities for developing critical and creative thinking skills and advanced research skills through independent study” (www1.pgcps.org/tag/). Students accessing both of these models live within the regular attendance boundaries.

School Improvement Plans (on school web sites) reveal that individual TAG programs are offered at middle and high schools through grouping and extended curriculum in a variety of content areas, including World Language, for TAG identified students. Frequently, high functioning, non-identified students are grouped with these same students. The courses are identified as Honors, or Advanced Placement (AP).

The goal of the TAG Center is “to provide TAG identified students with full-day advanced, enriched, accelerated educational experiences to meet the unique and specialized instructional, social, and emotional needs of gifted learner” (www1.pgcps.org/tag/). Students are exposed to the laboratory approach to learning, gain exposure to World Languages, participate in interrelated arts, and experience off-site educational and artistic opportunities.

Assistant Principals in area Elementary Schools

According to each of the school’s websites, the following elementary schools have Assistant Principals this school year: Heather Hills, High Bridge, Kenilworth, Northview, Pointer Ridge, Rockledge, and Whitehall Elementary Schools. Tulip Grove and Yorktown Elementary Schools do not have Assistant Principals. We know that the role of the Assistant Principal is integral in that they are able to serve as instructional leaders alongside the Principal and assist in articulating the school’s vision to the community. The county has set a formula that determines which schools are assigned Assistant Principals. Schools with under 350 students are not assigned an Assistant Principal. An important note of information is that all of the PGCPS’ elementary, middle, and high schools in Bowie will begin the school year with the same Principal.

Early Learning

According to the State of Maryland’s *Ready at Five Report*, “There is good news related to student readiness for kindergarten! The 2009-2010 State of Maryland school readiness data indicates that 78% of Maryland’s kindergartners are fully ready for school. Maryland kindergartners are ahead of statistical projections. There has been a 29-point improvement since 2001-2002 and a 5-point jump since last year.

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) is an assessment or “readiness tool” that is used by teachers each school year “to evaluate what each kindergartner knows and is able to do.”

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) releases the MMSR data every March, providing vital information about the school readiness of Maryland's children.

Data in the most recent report (March 2010), reveals four key skills that have been found to correlate with children's readiness for kindergarten, and "serve as strong indicators of children's success."

- The ability to attentively listen
- The ability to comprehend and respond
- The ability to solve problems
- The ability to identify, describe and compare different objects

These are the areas where support of students increases their likelihood of success. The early years are the most important learning years in a child's life.

The greatest gains were found among children enrolled in child care centers the year prior to kindergarten, where "84% are now fully ready," which is "up from 45% in 2001-2002." It is felt that at least a portion of the difference "stems from the increase in high-quality early care and education programs in which children were enrolled." Public Pre-K enrollment in Maryland has increased 30.5% and currently serves 42.6% of Maryland's four-year-olds. As of now, Maryland has more than 790 accredited (MSDE, regional, or national accreditation) center-based programs and credentialed family child care homes, a dramatic increase from approximately 120 programs in 2002.

The State's readiness data shows that Prince George's County has also shown an increase in school readiness. Sixty-eight percent of kindergarten students are fully ready for school, which is an increase from 36% in 2001-2002, and is within 10 points of the statewide full readiness level of 78%.

According to this same report, "Pre-K Promotes School Readiness."

- 73% of kindergartners who had been enrolled in Pre-K programs are fully ready for school, compared with 50% of those who were at home or in informal care the year prior to kindergarten.
- Considering that Pre-K serves a high percentage of children from low-income households, this data is significant in the context of addressing the achievement gap.
- Prince George's County's Pre-K Program (PGCPS website) is available for children who turn four years old by September 1, 2010 and meet the following criteria:
 - Resides within the identified school boundaries or is homeless.
 - Meets the income guidelines set by the 2010-2011, U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for free and reduced-price meals. However, due to limited program space, no above income families will be placed on a waiting list or enrolled in Prekindergarten.OR:

- Child exhibits a lack of readiness or demonstrates developmental delays as identified by an IEP placement or Early Entrance testing. These children will be admitted on a space available basis. Children eligible for Early Entrance testing must turn four between September 2nd and October 15th.

Indeed, if “early childhood is the foundation that carries a young person through success in school and into success in career and life pursuits, and research indicates that investing in early childhood intervention with disadvantaged children improves the workforce, increases productivity of schools, reduces crime, and generates a fiscal return of 15% to 17% on the original early childhood education investment,” one would hope that in the future Pre-K programs might be expanded to include more students, especially those who may not meet the income requirements, but for whom other effective resources may not be affordable.

The following Bowie schools offer Pre-K programs: High Bridge, Kenilworth, Northview, Pointer Ridge, Rockledge, Tulip Grove and Yorktown Elementary Schools..

Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (core standards) are a collaborative effort (comprised of 48 states, District of Columbia, and 2 U.S. territories) coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This state lead initiative is designed to prepare all students for success in college and the workforce.

The core standards define the knowledge and skill sets students should have in kindergarten through 12th grade in the subject areas of English/Language Arts and Mathematics. The initial core standards were developed only for English/Language Arts and Mathematics since these are the two subjects frequently tested on assessments. The core standards also incorporate different learning abilities including that of English language learners and students with disabilities. (http://marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/E0DD0074-EE7C-46F4-B826-383DC48146B4/24618/Common_Core_State_Standards_July2010.pdf)

English Language Arts Standards

The English Language Arts (ELA) standards define what students should know and be able to do at various levels. The ELA standards have three main sections: (a) a comprehensive K–5 section, (b) ELA for grades 6–12, (c) and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technological subjects for grades 6-12. The ELA standards can be found in its entirety at www.corestandards.org.

The ELA standards seek to prepare students for college and the workforce so that the student may successfully do the following:

- demonstrate independence

- build strong content knowledge
- respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline
- comprehend as well as critique
- value evidence
- use technology and digital media strategically and capably
- understand other perspectives and cultures

Mathematics Standards

The Mathematics standards also define what students should know and be able to do at various levels. The Mathematics standards consist of the following sections: (a) kindergarten, (b) 1st grade, (c) 2nd grade (d) 3rd grade, (e) 4th grade, (f) 5th grade, (g) 6th grade, (h) 7th grade, (i) 8th grade and (j) high school. The Mathematics standards can be found in its entirety at www.corestandards.org.

The Mathematics standards seek to prepare students for college and the workforce so that the student may successfully do the following:

- Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them
- Reason abstractly and quantitatively
- Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others
- Model with mathematics
- Use appropriate tools strategically
- Attend to precision
- Look for and make use of structure
- Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning

Maryland's Adoption of the Core Standards

In June 2010, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted the core standards. Because Maryland includes Pre-K in its state curriculum, it will expand the core standards it adopted to include Pre-K. Maryland has given itself a year to work with its state educators to analyze and compare the core standards with the Maryland state curriculum standards. Then in June 2011, a draft of the core standards will be presented to the Maryland State Board of Education for its possible adoption. If accepted, then professional development on how educators will implement the core standards will begin.

(http://marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/E0DD0074-EE7C-46F4-B826-383DC48146B4/24618/Common_Core_State_Standards_July2010.pdf)

Race to the Top (RTTT) Program

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) implemented the Race to the Top (RTTT) Program (ARRA §§ 14005 and

14006). RTTT is a \$4.35 billion education initiative that rewards states for implementing significant reforms in education, including enhancing standards and assessments, improving the collection and use of data, increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution, and turning around struggling schools (RTTT Guidance and FAQ, May 27, 2010, www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/faq.pdf - A-1).

RTTT: Phase 1 and Phase 2

There were two phases in the RTTT program. During phase 1, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) selected Delaware and Tennessee as 2 of 16 finalists, and awarded Delaware \$100 million and Tennessee \$500 million to reform their education programs.

(<http://www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases>). The state of Maryland did not submit an application for phase 1, but did submit an application in phase 2. On July 27, 2010, USDE selected Maryland as one of 19 finalists for phase 2 of the process.

(<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/pressrelease>). On August 24, 2010, USDE announced that Maryland was one of 10 (out of 46) phase 2 applicants, that will receive RTTT funding.

(<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/nine-states-and-district-columbia-win-second-round-race-top-grants>). The other winning phase 2 applicants included the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island.

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) on RTTT

Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, stated that “Maryland’s plans build on the state’s strengths as the nation’s leading public school system, while targeting areas that have vexed all states: strengthening achievement for all students and reducing gaps in performance among student subgroups.” By September 30, 2010, Maryland will receive \$250 million and have 4 years to implement the plans enumerated in the phase 2 application and to spend all of its grant money (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/pressrelease>).

A Baltimore Sun article dated August 24, 2010 stated “Most of the federal money will be passed to local school districts for new programs. The remainder will go to statewide projects, including training teachers in a new national curriculum and building a more sophisticated data-collection system to track teachers and students. Baltimore City will get at least \$46 million; Baltimore County, \$15 million; Prince Georges County, \$20 million; Anne Arundel, \$6 million; and Howard, \$700,000. Montgomery and Frederick counties, which refused to sign the application, will not receive any money.”

Maryland intends to do the following with the RTTT funding

(<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/pressrelease>:

- Revise the Pre-K–12 Maryland State Curriculum, assessments, and accountability system based on the Common Core Standards to assure that all graduates are college and career ready

- Build a statewide technology infrastructure that links all data elements with analytic and instructional tools to monitor and promote student achievement
- Re-design the model for preparation, development, retention, and evaluation of teachers and principals
- Fully implement the innovative Breakthrough Center approach for transforming low-performing schools and districts

State Rated Capacities (SRC)

State Rated Capacities are state numbers upon which school populations are based. While reviewing and listening to the concerns of parents regarding the Phase II boundary proposal through the original process and various changes this past spring and summer, one of the most confusing items was related to the State Rated Capacities (SRCs) for local schools. Apparently the State was updating these numbers, but the new numbers were not reviewed or available for all of the schools at the same time. Numbers obtained from the school system differed from those being provided by the State's Interagency Committee on School Construction (IAC), which confused parents who were calling to check on this matter. As it turned out, the State was revising SRCs for some of the schools, and later for others, so when the numbers changed it was unclear as to what would define a school as overcrowded or not. The differences in numbers resulted in PGCPS reversing an earlier decision to move some students from Whitehall Elementary School, due to the earlier calculation of overcrowding there, to Kenilworth, which turned out to be more crowded than originally determined.

According to State Superintendent, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, in a response dated June 8, 2010, to questions sent by the City regarding some of the confusion this spring, "Although there is no formal schedule for updating the State Rated Capacity of a school facility, the rule of thumb is that SRC should be updated every three years if either a school has undergone significant renovations and/or additions, or if the school's educational programs have changed significantly. Outside of the CIP process, SRC review for existing schools is usually triggered through a request from the Local Educational Agencies (LEA)."

While some of this policy makes perfect sense, it would seem that if there are no renovations or major program changes these numbers might be calculated on a regular basis, with all schools undergoing this process at around the same time. For example, when turning in the enrollment numbers for each school every fall, the SRC could be reviewed and modified, if needed, for the next school year! Or this might be evaluated on odd or even numbered years, or reconsidered or checked every three years. School systems and others would then know when to expect any changes to be made, beyond the special situations. School Systems could still request an evaluation of the SRC if they were considering boundary or program changes.

To add to the confusion there may be a discrepancy between the County and State SRCs. In addition, “a comprehensive school that contains a regional special education program, the comprehensive program and grade levels are counted at the same capacity as for the school without such a special education program”(Nancy Grasmick, June 2010). If we understand this correctly, this would mean that even if a special education class has fewer students in a class than a comprehensive class does, the school’s capacity is still calculated the same way!

Internet Safety

This is a topic that is covered in the news fairly regularly, and continues to be a real concern for parents and others who have any responsibility for children. While the internet is a wonderful source of information, it also provides many dangers for children who may not understand what those dangers might be. While students should be able to use a computer to do research for school projects and reports, they must be supervised to avoid many often unknown dangers. Parents are unsure as to the best way to protect their children and still encourage them to do their schoolwork independently.

To assist parents, grandparents and others who spend time with and are responsible for children, the Education Committee has planned an Internet Safety Forum here at City Hall on October 27th at 7 pm. The presenter will be Marlene Trestman, Special Assistant to the Maryland Attorney General.

The FBI has created information for parents and students, which is available on their web site, <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/parentsguide.pdf>, to guide them in this area. In addition, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also has information available on their site, NetSmartz[®] <http://www.netsmartz.org/uyn/uynfaq.htm#>. Resources for teens may be found at <http://www.oag.state.md.us/WiseBuys/index.htm>, the Maryland Attorney General’s home page. Other information about internet safety is located at www.isafe.org, the Web site of I-Safe America. (This site is recommended by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General, although it apparently has a membership requirement to obtain information.)

Conclusion

The schools in Bowie, Maryland continue to thrive and have always been among the best in both the county and the State of Maryland. The success of these schools may be attributed to a number of things including consistent leadership in the principal position at the individual schools. In addition, high standards and expectations, coupled with great parental involvement and support from the City of Bowie, continue to add to the motivation to produce high achievement and/or assessment scores. Both the elementary and high schools in Bowie – except for Northview ES and High Bridge ES – have consistently made adequate yearly progress

(AYP). Last year, Yorktown and High Bridge Elementary Schools struggled, and did not make AYP. However, Yorktown succeeded in their effort this year, while High Bridge continues to have problems. (It should be noted that High Bridge has a large Special Education population, unlike the other elementary schools in Bowie.) High Bridge moves into School Improvement this school year because students have not made AYP in three consecutive years. In addition, the middle schools are also having difficulties in making AYP – Benjamin Tasker Middle School having lower numbers of students successful on the MSAs than Samuel Ogle Middle School.

The Prince George's County Public School System, as a whole, continues to have difficulty maintaining student programs with limited resources. Again, the School District had major budgetary concerns because of a worsening economic situation. However, the 2010-11 school year had a promising start in that 97 percent of all students had schedules, unlike last year's fiasco with SchoolMax.

Education continues to be a priority, receiving much press at both the State and national levels, in areas such as Secondary School Reform, Race to the Top funding, and the addition of the Common Core Standards.

PGCPS continues to have obstacles to school improvements beyond the budgetary concerns. One concern is why there are so few seats for TAG identified students in the CHOICE TAG programs, when so many students are applying. Another is why the school system continues to be on the bottom of the lists in test scores, including SAT scores and graduation rates, in the State? This is a concern here and across the County, as people looking for family friendly communities, such as Bowie, in which to reside, are sometimes scared away by these facts. While the System continues to seek and implement plans for a variety of improvements, such as Secondary School Reform, the budget concerns may unwittingly postpone possibilities for improvements for the immediate future!