



Accelerating the Achievement of African American Students



**Worcester County Board of Education
NEWARK, MARYLAND**

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Excellence in Education - In Worcester County,
People Make the Difference



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The formulation of *Accelerating The Achievement of African American Students* began in November 1999 with the Worcester County Board of Education's formulation of a Task Force on Minority Student Achievement. The Charge to the Task Force was to 1) identify the status of student achievement using data disaggregated by race and gender, 2) review current research on best practices in promoting student achievement, 3) state regulations, and 4) review current practices and programs both within the school system and within the community-at-large to create a strategic plan for improvement. After one full year of concentrated study, the Task Force here summarizes its findings in each of the above four areas and presents 26 recommendations for improvement. The recommendations are organized into four separate yet clearly interrelated categories: School Climate, High Expectations/Student Achievement, Parent/Family/Community Involvement, School Improvement Plans.

The report emphasizes in its "Critical Priorities" and "Summary of Recommendations" sections that while the responsibility for implementing the 26 recommendations belongs to the school system, the responsibility for providing the resources and support to make the recommendations become effective strategies for improvement belongs to a much larger group - parents/families, county government, the faith community, the business community - all the stakeholders who are represented in the Task Force membership.

INTRODUCTION

Across our nation, American citizens have demanded a close examination of the effectiveness of American schools. At a glance, test scores reveal that minorities, particularly African Americans, lag behind in the areas of academic achievement and school performance and participation. The initial reaction of some ill-willed individuals is to seize this as proof positive that blacks are genetically, intellectually inferior to whites. However, a more objective analysis of the data reveals the fact that there are gaps in achievement relative to other cultural groups as well as gender and socio-economic gaps. It is important to note that achievement gaps exist for African Americans regardless of their socio-economic status. The more astute observer examining the test result information will conclude the obvious: these problems do not have their root in genetics. Systemic, social, and political inequities create and magnify these academic achievement gaps.

The mission of America's public education has always been and remains to prepare a citizenry capable of improving and sustaining a democratic society, one that serves as a global force and world leader. New knowledge and technology as well as the creation of a global society have created great challenges that obscure the attainment of this mission. Yet, this new knowledge, technology and the global community will provide solutions to the very issues that they create. For the first time in history, world leaders will sit at the negotiating table across from individuals from very diverse backgrounds. Diversity extends far beyond race and ethnicity. It includes values, religion, geography, linguistics, and socio-economic factors. These diversity factors reflect and are shaped and bound by culture.

Our classroom simply mirrors this global picture. Today teachers face a student population which reflects a variety of cultural backgrounds. These backgrounds define student learning needs. All learning needs must be addressed and students must be challenged to achieve better and more than ever. The solutions to meeting diverse learning needs will not come from technology alone. Rather, the solutions are imbedded and deeply rooted in the principles and concepts of democracy which sanction diversity and promotes the inherent worth and rights of individuals regardless of their diversity factor. Educators must acknowledge and apply information and truth derived from such areas of study as ethnography, anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics for these fields of study offer solutions to providing for the diverse learning needs which are culturally laden. Major paradigm shifts in teaching and learning are not only required but also are inevitable. Traditional practices of schooling reflect the scenario of sameness. Everyone receives the same thing in the same way. Educational systems accept as normal a percentage of failures. Frequently those failing percentages include an overwhelming number of poor and minority learners.

In order to provide for the diverse learning needs, schools must abandon this notion of one size fits all. Providing everyone with the same thing may be considered by some as equality. It is not, however, equity. Equity demands supplying that which is needed in order to attain the same high goals and high standards which enable all to benefit from similar opportunities. All too reluctantly, researchers and practitioners today are beginning to realize and acknowledge that our children are neither broken nor defective, but rather our view of their needs is limited. Teaching practices, policies, and organizational structures which favor one style of learning serve few learners.

It is predicted that the classroom teachers, proportionately, will become more white while the student population will consist, proportionately, of more minorities and low income white students. Schools that have been successful in closing the achievement gap and raising academic achievement for all students have not done so by instituting a series of adjusted programs, after school activities, and/or annual events. The focus for successful systems has been to identify the varied learning needs of all students and to employ appropriate practices to meet these needs. In situations where this approach has succeeded, it has been because teacher effectiveness was monitored and/or sustained. The goal of efforts to reduce the achievement gap and to improve student achievement overall must not be to overhaul the system, point blame, or continue support of the status quo. The goal and objective of such efforts must be to identify those components of our current school programs and practices that support student learning and to use those components to meet the learning needs of all students paying special attention to those cultural diversity factors which affect learning. These efforts must include the following: a total public commitment of the school system to closing the achievement gap; a community and school system commitment of resources; effective school staff training; the application of the skills acquired in the training and monitoring of the effectiveness of the application; and finally a system of continuous evaluation and augmentation of all improvement efforts.

From the Superintendent to the custodial staff, from the politician to the constituent, it must be clearly understood that the system will do whatever is necessary to close the academic achievement gaps among cultural groups in order to ensure the highest student achievement for each and every student. Student achievement must be the center focus of all budgetary consideration. The determination to close the academic achievement gap must be infused into the school program. Appropriate funding for training and staff development must be made available. The training must include the concepts, skills and principles as well as the activities which have been approved by the Maryland State Board of Education in May of the year 2000. Once trained, teachers must be provided a non-threatening, risk-free opportunity to practice these new strategies. Teacher effectiveness must be supported and monitored by using the regular appraisal process. A systemic evaluation program will then allow for on-going augmentation and inevitable success.

With strong leadership, commitment of all staff members, appropriate staff development, and accountability and monitoring achievement can be improved for all students. The gap will be eliminated. To do less will continue the process of creating a lost generation of young people.

Agnes Purnell
Educational Consultant

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Mission of the Worcester County Public Schools is to empower all students to:

- **grow** physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially with enthusiasm for life-long learning;
- **achieve** high academic and performance standards; and to
- **function** responsibly as productive citizens.

ORGANIZATIONAL BELIEFS OF THE WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- We believe that every student can learn and must have equal access to a public education which promotes optimal individual growth.
- We believe that every child is unique and different from every other child.
- We believe that the public school program must be based on the needs, characteristics, interests, and capacities of the children it serves.
- We believe that the student, family, and community must be involved in the educational process.

To achieve this mission, we must have clearly defined goals fully supported by our community. All resources - human, material, and financial, must be concentrated on goals of continuous improvement in student learning.

CHARGE TO THE TASK FORCE

In November 1999, the Worcester County Board of Education formed a Task Force on Minority Student Achievement. The Charge to the Task Force follows:

- Identify the current status of student achievement using disaggregated data by race and gender including attendance and dropout rates, Maryland School Performance Assessment Program scores and other test and achievement data.
- Review educational research to identify strategies, programs, and best practices currently being used to address the issue of student achievement.
- Review the state regulations and initiatives such as the Education That is Multicultural Bylaw and the task force report "Minority Achievement in Maryland: The State of the State".
- Identify current practices and programs currently provided by our school system that address the challenge of the achievement gap.
- Identify programs in our community that address the challenge of the achievement gap.
- Identify additional practices and programs that should be considered for future implementation.

- Create a strategic plan for our school system and school community to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap.
- Develop a procedure to assure the continual assessment of our progress in raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap.
- Provide the Board of Education with periodic updates as appropriate and make a final report by October 1, 2000.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- *Current Status of Student Achievement in Worcester County:*

As we study the results of state and national assessments, we are finding patterns of student achievement in our school system similar to those found in school systems across the state and nation. Generally, we are finding that white students are achieving at higher levels than African American students and girls are being more successful than boys. These consistent differences in student results are often referred to as achievement gaps. What follows here is an identification of the gaps between African American and white students in several assessments - the MSPAP results for 1999 in Reading and Math, the Functional Reading and Math tests, CTBS5 results, and SAT scores.

- **MSPAP - Reading.** As illustrated in the following charts, the discrepancy in reading between the African American population and the white population decreases as students move through the grades. The difference decreases from a gap of 30.2 percentage points in grade three to a difference of 12.8 percentage points in grade eight. It should be noted that reading scores in grade eight for both white and African American students are significantly lower for white students and somewhat lower for African Americans than in grades 3 and 5.
- **MSPAP - Mathematics.** The difference between mathematics scores of African American and white students at grade three is 32.4 percentage points with an increase to 36.9 at the fifth grade level. This occurs because the scores of white students increased by 7.2 percentage points with the increase in African American scores only 2.7 percentage points. By the time students reach grade eight, the difference is reduced to 27.1 percentage points. This results from the fact that white students' scores increased only .5 percentage points over fifth grade scores with African American students' scores increasing 10.3 percentage points beyond the math score obtained in grade five.

**Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP)
1999**

GRADE 3		Reading	Mathematics
Excellent Standard		25	25
Satisfactory Standard		70	70
All Students	E	9.1	8.7
	S	43.8	40.4
African American Students	E	2.6	1.9
	S	23.1	17.9
White Students	E	12.0	11.7
	S	53.3	50.3

GRADE 5		Reading	Mathematics
All Students	E	9.6	13.3
	S	38.4	46.9
African American Students	E	4.4	2.8
	S	22.8	20.6
White Students	E	11.7	18.0
	S	43.1	57.5

GRADE 8		Reading	Mathematics
All Students	E	3.6	15.4
	S	27.8	49.6
African American Students	E	1.8	3.9
	S	18.8	30.9
White Students	E	4.3	21.3
	S	31.6	58.0

• **Maryland Functional Reading Test:**

- **Grade 9** - As indicated in the following chart, there is no statistically significant difference in scores between white and African American students. Both groups achieved the EXCELLENT level of achievement.
- **Grade 11** - As indicated in the following chart, both groups achieved a pass rate of 100% meeting the EXCELLENT standard for grade 11.

• **Maryland Functional Math Test:**

- **Grade 9** - As illustrated in the following chart, a 10.2% difference exists between the percent of white students who had passed this test and African American students (91.9 white, 81.7 African American). White students in the area of mathematics met the EXCELLENT standard. African American students met the SATISFACTORY standard for grade 9.
- **Grade 11** - As illustrated in the following chart, the difference between the scores of white and African American students at this level is 5.2 percentage points with white students at 97.0 and African American students at 91.8. White students met the SATISFACTORY standard. African American students did not meet the SATISFACTORY standard at the 11th grade level.

**Maryland Functional Testing Program
Percent Passing**

	Grade 9		Grade 11	
	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics
Excellent Standard	97	90	99	99
Satisfactory Standard	95	80	97	97
All Students	98.6 = E	89.3 = S	100.0 = E	95.5 = N
White Students	98.9 = E	91.9 = E	100.0 = E	97.0 = S
African American	97.6 = E	81.7 = S	100.0 = E	91.8 = N

• **CTBS5 - Reading Composite**

Reading composite scores as shown in the following chart for white and African American students are fairly consistent in grades two and four:

CTBS5 Reading Percentile Rank

	Grade 2	Grade 4
White Students	71.3	71.6
African American Students	42.7	42.3
Difference	28.6	28.3

At the sixth grade level, reading scores decrease for both groups with white students achieving at the 64.7 percentile rank and African Americans at the 23.6 percentile rank - a difference of 41.1.

- **CTBS5 - Math Composite**

Although scores in mathematics are somewhat higher than reading as illustrated in the following chart, the same pattern exists in that both scores and differences between whites and African Americans are fairly consistent in grades two and four.

CTBS5 Mathematics Percentile Rank

	Grade 2	Grade 4
White Students	81.3	79.8
African American Students	52.8	50.7
Difference	28.5	29.1

As with the reading scores, math scores for both whites and African Americans decrease at grade 6 for both groups with white students achieving at the 67.0 percentile rank and African American students achieving at the 31.8 percentile rank, producing an achievement gap between whites and African Americans of 35.2.

**Worcester County
CTBS5 - Spring 2000**

GRADE 2	Reading Composite	Mathematics Composite
All Students	59.0	74.2
African American Students	42.7	52.8
White Students	71.3	81.3

GRADE 4	Reading Composite	Mathematics Composite
All Students	61.1	72.5
African American Students	42.3	50.7
White Students	71.6	79.8

GRADE 6	Reading Composite	Mathematics Composite
All Students	54.2	59.1
African American Students	23.6	31.8
White Students	64.7	67.0

- **SAT Scores**

The scores found on the next chart indicate that a 80 point difference exists between the mean verbal SAT score of white students and African American students.

Mean Mathematics SAT scores reflect a somewhat greater difference, 88 points, between the performance of white students and that of African American students.

**SAT Scores
2000**

	Verbal	Math
African American Students	410	405
White Students	490	493

- *Review of Research-Based Strategies, Programs, and Best Practices to Improve Student Achievement*
 - The research surrounding minority achievement clearly indicates that neither program, special events nor trendy curricular activities make a dent in eliminating the academic achievement gap among cultural groups. In fact, closing the achievement gap occurs when effective instruction is in place over the whole educational and experiential life of the student. Recent research regarding brain development and learning requires educators to make a paradigm shift. Educators once believed the intelligence of a child was determined at birth. Students were tested, sorted, and tracked according to their perceived intellectual ability. However, according to the brain research, the brain is only at 50% of capacity at birth. Culture dictates the way in which a learner's cognition approaches exploration and problem solving.
 - Piaget identifies four factors that influence the development of cognition:
 - Biological factors.
 - Equilibration factors which arise through interactions with the environment.
 - General socialization factors (social interaction between individuals).
 - Social factors which differ from one society to another and reflect cultural transmission.
 - Ward states that language and culture virtually program the mind so that the individual as a learner is bound and shaped according to the world and life and the mental process of style of his/her culture (scholarly consensus).
 - Cohen suggests that children develop their cognitive styles through the socialization they receive in their families and friendship groups.
 - In *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students*, Crystal Kuykendall states, "Students who find their culture and learning styles reflected in both the substance and the organization of the instructional program are more likely to be motivated and less likely to be disruptive." In her book, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles*, Janice Hale-Benson suggests that formal education has not worked for many black youth because it has not employed the teaching styles that correspond with students' learning styles. Hale observed that black youth have barely mastered the norm of their own culture when they are confronted with teaching styles that are incompatible with their accepted learning pattern. Obviously, if the achievement gap

is clearly among cultural groups, then dealing with cultural diversity will be core to the solution which is effective teaching.

- The cultural group that benefits most from our current program is the white female. Since the larger portion of our teaching population is white female, it is no small wonder. Teachers naturally include, capitalize upon, infuse, and defer to their own culture as they attempt to teach and socialize. Students whose culture differs from that of the school have learning styles (needs) which differ from the learning expectations of the school. What must happen is that the culture of the student population must be reflected not just the culture of the individuals in charge or of those standing in front of the classroom.
- Racial and ethnic culture differences are obvious in today's society. These differences should not be viewed as negative. Students have a right to define themselves and reflect who they are. These differences are not contrived but rather are deeply rooted to their ethnic heritage, are part of their home and community life, and are shaped by an individual's reaction and interaction with the world. These elements of culture are taught, reinforced, and nurtured from cradle to grave by the home and community. The degree of retention of racial and ethnic cultures varies among members in a cultural group. The home and the community instills a child's identity and that identity is not negotiable. There are many students who live in homes and communities which afford too few opportunities for positive interaction with mainstream America. The research indicates that we clearly know how to educate all children and how to connect to their culture (the essence of our students). The challenge is how to get educators to acquire the necessary skills and then to apply them consistently and effectively.
- **How can effective instruction happen?**

Research tells us that **effective teaching occurs when competent teachers:**

- Know their content thoroughly,
- understand the cultural background of their students,
- are proficient in a variety of instructional strategies and activities,
- are able to assess and address learning styles,
- establish with ease a rapport with students and parents,
- have a long term commitment to the community they serve, and
- are able to inspire children to rise above unfair challenges and to make a difference in the world.
- **Effective teaching relies upon a well trained staff that has had the opportunity to participate in staff development which:**
 - Develops in teachers the skills to teach with cultural competence and responsiveness,
 - provides a mechanism for monitoring effective use of these skills, and
 - provides ongoing support and coaching.
- **Effective teaching requires a supportive administrative/supervisory staff that:**
 - Provides the resources needed by the teacher,
 - provides an atmosphere of risk taking,

- holds teachers and staff accountable for student achievement,
 - establishes a climate of mutual respect,
 - models behavior they seek to create in teachers, and
 - serves as a teacher of teachers.
- **Accountability is essential to effective teaching and should include:**
 - Multiple assessments of student progress using both norm and criterion referenced assessment instruments,
 - routine, informal assessments designed to drive instructional planning and lessen augmentation,
 - assessments of administrators' effectiveness in communicating, supporting, and modeling, and
 - assessments of teacher effectiveness in the skills needed to increase student achievement.
- **Core to effectively educating all children is the community connection that:**
 - Eliminates parochialism,
 - eliminates racism, sexism, and bigotry,
 - eliminates political jousting,
 - supports principals missions and goals mutually established,
 - supports teachers efforts,
 - assists with educating and informing parents,
 - assists with the socialization process, and
 - respects and values the input of parent and community members.
- **Most important to effective teaching is an inclusive climate which includes:**
 - High expectations with support "spikes" embedded in the lesson activities and attitudes that promote mutual respect and valuing diversity,
 - opportunities to share one's essence and to learn about others in an aura of acceptance, and
 - respect for various heroes and leaders.
- Each of the above characterizations are readily observable in schools and school districts which are void of academic achievement gaps among culture groups.

•*Review of State Regulations/Initiatives on Improving Student Achievement*

As noted in the Maryland State Department of Education publication, *Toward Achievement: Programs and Practices*, "student achievement is the major focus in education today - not just achievement for some, but for all".¹ To this end, Maryland has authored regulations and has embraced several initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning so that all students succeed.

Probably the most familiar regulation is the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. Establishing baseline data in 1993, MSPAP sets standards of accountability for public schools. To measure achievement, students in grades 3, 5, and 8 are tested each year in reading/language usage, mathematics, social studies, and science using criterion referenced tests that require individual and group problem solving and that integrate the subject disciplines.

In 1993, legislation was passed in Maryland to set guidelines for Education that is Multicultural. The intent of the law has been to assist local school system personnel in the design, management, implementation, and evaluation of education that is multicultural. Each local school system has developed a plan which includes goals and objectives to guarantee, among many things, curriculum, instruction, and staff development that promotes education free of stereotyping, discrimination, bias, and prejudice.

Currently in the pilot stages, the proposed High School Assessments, adopted by the State Board of Education in December, 1997, will bring accountability to the secondary level. Students may be required to pass State-developed end-of-course tests to receive credit for core subject high school coursework. In January of 1998, the State Board of Education adopted a resolution to put into place a comprehensive K-12 program of intervention assistance for students not succeeding in reading or mathematics or in one of the tested content areas.

The focus on improving minority achievement, in particular, became sharp in the nineties in Maryland Public Schools as the enrollment data showed a tremendous growth in the minority population of school-aged youth. From 1993 to 1998, the enrollment growth for African American students in Maryland was four times that of the white enrollment growth. Additionally, the Hispanic enrollment growth was on the rise. The only minority population of school-aged youth that did not grow as fast as the white population was Asian during this period of time.

The Maryland State Education that is Multicultural Advisory Council produced a final report in September of 1998 entitled *Minority Achievement in Maryland: The State of the State*. In this document, achievement data were compiled with the assistance of State Department of Education staff and recommendations to increase minority achievement in Maryland were provided. Following this report, the *Achievement Initiative for Maryland's Minority Students (AIMMS) Council* was established and charged with recommending to the State Department of Education and the State board of Education policies and programs that will improve minority performance and eliminate existing achievement gaps.

¹*Toward Achievement: Programs and Practices*, Ed. Dezmon, MSDE, April, 1999.

In the spring of 1999, a publication on effective instructional practices in Maryland was published. The initial volume, *Toward Achievement: Programs and Practices* has been considered a significant step in identifying promising school programs that have been successful in producing solid student achievement results. This publication provides abstracts of nationally recognized school improvement initiatives such as *Accelerated Schools*, *Coalition of Essential Schools*, *Reading Recovery*, and *Success for All*, to name a few. Noted in detail are practices from Maryland local educational agencies which are making a difference in student achievement. In the fall of 1999, *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner* was adopted by the State Board of Education as Maryland's PreK-12 academic intervention initiative. This plan was in direct response to the 1997 authorization of the development of exit exams in core content areas as part of the new high school improvement program.

Through regulations and school improvement initiatives, the State of Maryland has recommended strategies to increase the achievement of all students through academic intervention, educator capacity, and student readiness. The goals have been to "assist local efforts to change the systems that affect children's development and learning and to focus resources (including time and money) more sharply on individual students who are struggling to meet the state's increasingly rigorous standards."²

- *Current Practices/Programs in the School System to Address the Achievement Gap*

The Worcester County Public School System continues to focus on the academic achievement of all students. As previously indicated by the disaggregated data in the Maryland School Performance Report and other achievement measures, the academic achievement of African American students falls well below that of white students. The school system has placed special emphasis on accelerating the academic achievement of African American students through programs including the following:

- **Elementary and Middle Grades**

Low Class Size

Class size is one of the most significant variables in promoting student learning. In order to maximize student learning, the Worcester County Public Schools sets the highest budget priority on the maintenance of small class size at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

PreKindergarten Programs

MSPAP data indicates a high correlation between disadvantaged and minority students and low student achievement. PreK programs in all elementary schools assist young, disadvantaged children by providing early instruction in the basic skills.

Title I

The funding from this grant provides personnel and resources in four Title I schools to provide assistance to help at-risk students reach their highest level of achievement in reading, mathematics and science. Students falling below grade level in reading participate in an intensive Reading Recovery Program. Staff development activities in the Title I

²*Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of Individual Learners*, MSDE, October, 1999.

schools provide training to professional and support staff to help underachieving students reach their potential.

Targeted Poverty I Grant

The funds in the grant are used to provide workshops and materials for the parents of students in Title I schools.

Computer Curriculum Corporation (CCC) Laboratories

Equipment and software in the CCC Labs provide an instructional and diagnostic Mathematics Program to meet the needs of individual students. The lab provides additional math instructional time for students in the elementary grades and provides opportunities for remediation and enrichment to increase math skills.

Programs to Increase the Involvement of Parents of Disadvantaged and At-risk Students

Parent workshops have been scheduled during the day and evening to increase the involvement of all parents and especially the parents of at-risk and disadvantaged students. There are Home/School/Community facilitators in three Title I schools. They focus on the involvement of parents of children who need extra academic and emotional support. Special emphasis is placed on promoting the involvement of African American parents. Parent centers have been established in the schools to provide materials, assistance and guidance. Parenting classes have been implemented in the elementary schools.

Elementary Summer School

Underachieving students entering grades 1, 2 and 3 are able to participate in a 4-week summer program, which provides opportunities for academic improvement in reading and mathematics. Physical education, music, art and drama activities are provided to support reading and math skills. The program is available in all elementary schools.

Kindergarten Program

Formative and summative assessments in kindergarten identify students with academic needs. These students receive targeted assistance through additional tutoring, extra help from an educational assistant, and additional computer assisted instruction.

Goals 2000 Grant: Project Outreach

In the Berlin area, Project Outreach emphasizes reducing the academic achievement gap between African American and white students. The grant provides additional teaching staff who work in the school and in the after school centers. Three churches in the community are used as center sites. Identified students receive additional instruction in reading, writing, language, and mathematics. A variety of activities are used to help students. In addition, laptop computers and software are being used as instructional tools.

Goals 2000 Grant: Project Intervene

In the Pocomoke area, Project Intervene emphasizes reducing the academic achievement gap between African American and white students. The grant provides additional teaching staff who work in the school and after school centers. Two churches in the community are used as center sites. Identified students receive additional instruction in reading, writing, language, and mathematics. A variety of activities are used to help students. In addition, laptop computers and software are being used as instructional tools. Project Intervene also provides funding for a two week extension of the summer school program.

Targeted Poverty II Grant

This grant provides funding for a guidance counselor, four teachers and an educational assistant to serve disadvantaged students by providing needed programs.

Goals 2000 Grants - Project Reach and Project Pass

In the Snow Hill and Pocomoke schools, Goals 2000 Grants are focused on reducing the achievement gap between primarily African American students and white students in the areas of reading, writing, language, mathematics, and science. The funding provides resource and computer technology teachers who work with students, model lessons for classroom teachers and provide teacher training in the area of best practices to meet the needs of underachieving students.

After-School Programs

These programs provide tutoring assistance, homework help, peer assistance and arts/crafts activities. Classroom teachers and community volunteers staff the program.

Partnership with Head Start

Title I elementary schools have initiated partnerships with area Head Start Programs to provide for the involvement of eligible students in the school system's early childhood (PreK) program.

- **High School**

Functional Summer School

An intensive and focused instruction in functional reading, mathematics, writing, and citizenship provides students with additional assistance to pass the state functional tests. Student participants are those who have not passed one or more of the state functional tests. At the end of the instruction, students have the opportunity to take the tests required for graduation.

Maryland State Future Leaders of America/Skills USA-VICA

The high school sponsors have targeted the involvement of African Americans in the local and state chapters. An African American female student from Stephen Decatur High School was the state president during the 1997-98 school year. Four African American students from our schools served in state office positions as state secretary, state reporter, state historian, and state news anchor for the 1998-99 school year. Skills USA - VICA develops leadership skills and awards academic achievement of Career and Technology education students. Two African American students from our schools serve in state and national offices.

Maryland's Tomorrow Program

The program targets students whose academic performance is two grade levels below actual grade level. Beginning in the ninth grade, students participate in Maryland's Tomorrow Program which provides additional instruction and guidance to succeed in school. The program continues with identified students through one year following graduation.

Review Credit Summer School

High school students have the opportunity to successfully earn high school credit in courses of study, which they have previously failed.

Summer Youth Employment

The summer program provides instruction and job training for disadvantaged youth 14–18 years of age. Students in the program attend classes to review and support their academic skills and receive on the job training at various work sites.

Upward Bound

A six week summer and academic year pre-college program at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore gives highest priority to 9th grade students who will remain active throughout high school. This program provides an opportunity for students to strengthen academic skills and build self-confidence and social skills necessary to pursue post secondary education and succeed in school and life.

- **General**

Minority Recruitment

A plan has been created and implemented to attract African American teachers to the school system. The Board of Education has declared minority teachers as a critical need area. Teams of Worcester County teachers, annually, visit college campuses in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Delaware, including historically African American college campuses, to attract minority teachers to Worcester County.

MESA

The Maryland Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement Program (MESA) has been initiated in Pocomoke and Snow Hill schools. The program focuses on encouraging African American students and all females to investigate science, mathematics, and engineering studies and careers. During the 1997-98 school year, two African American Pocomoke High School students participated in the annual National Society of Black Engineers Conference in Anaheim, California. MESA teams from Worcester County have consistently won high awards at State MESA competitions. Worcester County students have become eligible for and won college scholarships through participation in MESA.

School Improvement Plans

A comprehensive analysis of MSPAP and functional test data has been the basis for the elementary and middle school improvement plans. The disaggregated data indicates significant gaps in the performance of minority and white students. Each school has developed plans which focus on reducing gaps and increasing the achievement of minority students.

Meetings with NAACP

Meetings involving school administrative staff and members of the local NAACP have been ongoing for approximately 11 years. The purpose of the meetings is to improve communications, share ideas, and address any concerns in meeting the needs of the African American students in Worcester County Schools.

ESL Program

The program provides additional staff and materials to work with students who are limited English proficient.

Peer Mediators

Peer mentors have been trained to assist students to deal with conflict, adjust to new school situations and work on academic achievement. Peer mentors work under the direction of guidance counselors and classroom teachers.

Professional Training

The utilization of consultants with expertise in the education of African American students has been used for administrative and supervisory sessions, teacher training, multicultural training and for opening ceremonies. This assists in providing a continuous emphasis on meeting the needs and being sensitive to different ethnic groups, especially those of the African American students.

The most pressing county-wide teacher training needs are focused on meeting the needs of African American students in the areas of mathematics, language arts, kindergarten, reading, and social/emotional needs. Teacher training, modeling, and staff development reflect greater use of best practices and strategies designed to increase African American student achievement. Consultants with expertise in the achievement of minority students are used to provide training and assistance.

Elementary and middle school staff development activities are based on the disaggregated school data on MSPAP and Worcester County performance assessment tasks. Staff training activities emphasize the need to focus on the achievement of African American students.

Staff development activities provided by the Maryland Reading Network have been coordinated with local efforts to improve reading instruction in the elementary grades of schools serving at-risk students.

Multicultural Plan

The Worcester County Board of Education adopted a Five Year Plan for Education That Is Multicultural. In response to the Maryland State Board of Education regulations to assure Education That Is Multicultural, this plan outlines the Worcester County Public School's initiative and efforts to provide curricula, instruction, staff development, and instructional resources that are multicultural while recognizing our common grounds as a nation.

Worcester Model

The Worcester Model is a research-based instructional framework for planning, observing, and evaluating teacher's classroom performance in the areas of teacher scholarship, human relations, planning lessons, establishing learning objectives, classroom organization and management, and the use of materials and resources.

Mentoring Project

The goal of this project in Pocomoke Middle School is to increase the achievement rate of students by providing on-going, during-the-school-day staff development for 30 (first, second, and third year) teachers while encouraging them to remain at Pocomoke Middle School after they receive tenure.

- *Community Programs Addressing the Achievement Gap.*

In each geographical locale in Worcester County there are close partnerships among schools, churches, and other community organizations to provide beyond-the-school day assistance to students at risk of failure. These partnerships were supported by Goals 2000 funding. Tutorial assistance as well as mentoring students on a regular and ongoing basis throughout the school year by community volunteers is provided. Project Outreach (Northern Worcester County), Project Reach and Pass (Central and Southern Worcester County) and Project Intervene (Southern Worcester County) have all enjoyed high levels of community participation and support.

In addition to these school/community partnerships, there are a number of highly successful **Community Based Programs** carefully designed to encourage and support student success and achievement both in school and in the community. A brief description of these programs, as presented at the April 26, 2000, Minority Achievement Task Force Meeting follows.

Northern Worcester County:

- BRAVE - Berlin Reclaims Attitudes and Values Enhancement Project

BRAVE is a community based organization in Berlin, Maryland, whose mission is to raise the standards and quality of living for the greater Berlin community. BRAVE achieves such standards and qualities of living by implementing cultural and educational programs for youth. BRAVE encourages our youth to gain self-worthiness and a desire to reach out for a life of positive action and strength.

- Just Us Girls (JUG)

JUG is a mentoring program for girls ages 6-13. Focused on teaching basic life skills, participants learn etiquette, take field trips to local businesses, visit nursing homes, learn how to cook, sew, knit, and become involved in cultural activities.

Central Worcester County:

- Community Chat Program

The goal of Community Chat 2000 is to remove uncertainty about health and maturity issues as well as to help adults and children to "Make A Connection". Community Chat evolved from concerns over the link between adult child communication problems and increasing risk behaviors among teenagers.

- Haven House After School Tutorial Program

Sponsored by Oasis Ministries of Snow Hill, this after school program provides tutorial assistance to K - 6th grade students four nights per week.

- Young Men and Women United

Young Men and Young Women United are staff to student mentoring organizations that are designed to support students in making choices that lead them to pathways of success regarding their academic, social, and physical well-being. Students who participate in these organizations are encouraged to accept leadership roles in school and in the community. While these organizations are community based, both are supported by Snow Hill High School and the Worcester County Board of Education.

- YMCA

Children in grades K-6 have the opportunity to complete homework and enjoy recreational activities while being supervised by state certified staff. The program operates from dismissal until 6:00 p.m. every school day.

- Just for Girls

An after school program for 5th, 6th, and 7th grade girls focusing on healthy lifestyle choices. The program is held four days a week (Monday to Thursday) from 3:20 to 5:30 p.m. at Snow Hill Middle School. This program includes social and bonding skills, abstinence education, homework assistance, arts and crafts, physical activity, service learning projects, field trips, and cultural arts. It recruits and trains peer educators from Snow Hill High School who serve as mentors with the program. Homebound transportation is provided. This program is funded by the Governor's Council on Adolescent Pregnancy and administered by the Worcester County Health Department.

- Just for Guys

An after school program targeting latchkey children for 5th, 6th, and 7th grade boys. This program is held four days a week (Monday to Thursday) from 3:20 to 5:30 p.m. at Snow Hill Middle School. Just for Guys is designed to prevent unhealthy behavior choices and providing structured and supervised after school activities which focus on improving academic performance and strengthening social and bonding skills. This program includes homework assistance, life skills training, service learning projects, weekly recreational outings, field trips, and cultural arts. Homebound transportation is provided. This program is funded by the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention and administered by the Worcester County Health Department.

Southern Worcester County:

- Save the Youth Program

The goal of this program in the Pocumoke area is to redirect troubled youth and to teach job related skills. Youth are taught how to find jobs, groomed for employment, how to write a resume, and receive a high school diploma.

- YMCA

Children in grades K-6 have the opportunity to complete homework and enjoy recreational activities while being supervised by state certified staff. The program operates from dismissal until 6:00 p.m. every day there is a full day of school.

KEY ISSUES IN IMPROVING AFRICAN AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENT

A list of key issues in minority student achievement was compiled as a result of the first Task Force deliberation on January 31, 2000:

- Family Involvement
- Students' Responsibility For Their Own Learning
- Teacher Qualifications
- School Climate/Environment
- Resources/Community Involvement
- Communication
- Peer Pressure
- Drug/Alcohol Abuse
- Economics/Poverty
- Expectations
 - Gender
 - Race
- Attitudes
- Baggage, Biases
- Building Children's Self Esteem
- Role Models/Mentors
- Student Management

These issues and the considerable amount of discussion which surrounded them at each Task Force Meeting have been helpful in reviewing current practices and procedures within the school system. **More importantly, these key issues have been carefully considered in the development of the recommendations found in this report.**

CRITICAL PRIORITIES IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We must help all children to be more successful and all schools to be more productive. The disparity in **student achievement by race and gender must be erased**. It is important that we close the gap between the achievement of white and African American students. There are no easy answers.
- **We must work together** with a focus on this problem and give careful attention to what is working and what is not. We must collaborate and implement a goal setting process involving all stakeholders which is based on thorough study of the results of our efforts. We need to ask the hard questions: What does the data show? Are student results improving? etc.

- **Intensive collaboration within the school system, within schools, and with the entire community is required to raise the achievement of all students while accelerating the achievement of African American students.** We must find ways to empower parents and community groups to be equal partners in their children's education. By collaborating with county government by partnering with advocacy groups, the faith community, and civic organizations, by tapping the resources of the business community, and colleges/universities, our school system strengthens its capacity to prepare all of our students to become productive members of society and meet the challenging demands of the future.
- **Staff Development** - In the words of Nancy Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, **"Effective schools, effective teachers, effective instruction can and do transcend conditions that otherwise predict failure."** Effective programs demand an attitude of continuous improvement on the part of education professionals. High quality learning happens when teachers carefully examine the results of student performance, provide quality/constructive feedback to students, and adjust their teaching to meet student needs. High quality learning happens when teachers hold themselves accountable for student learning. Ongoing staff development which will be of direct, daily, on-the-job assistance to teachers in their efforts to address the needs of learners in their classrooms is essential to teacher effectiveness.
- **Teacher Recruitment** - The teacher shortage is real. Projections indicate that over the next two years 11,000 teachers will be needed in Maryland. Teacher training institutions in Maryland are producing, currently, only about 2,600 teachers annually. **The effectiveness of any program to increase student achievement demands the services of high quality professionals who can respond competently to the challenge.** Efforts of teacher recruitment with special attention to the recruitment of teachers in essential content areas as well as **special attention to the recruitment of minorities to teaching must intensify.** Local school systems must allot, organize, and seek sufficient resources to expand efforts in this area. Much attention is currently given to the "grow your own" strategy which focuses attention on high school students and provides scholarships for post secondary education when students commit to "return home to teach" after college graduation. Support from community organizations, local businesses, and governmental agencies is essential to the success of the teacher recruitment effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

This plan establishes four broad, interrelated focus areas which will guide the development of school system efforts to accelerate the achievement of minority students. These four interrelated focus areas are *School Climate*; *High Expectations/Achievement*; *Parent/Family/Community Involvement*; *School Improvement Plans*.

- Create and Maintain a *School Climate* Conducive to Learning

Major Elements:

- Physical Environment and Organization
- Minority Professional Representation
- School Diversity Policies and Procedures

- Multicultural Curriculum Content and Instructional Materials
- Orderliness and Efficient Routines for Effective Learning Environment
- Inclusion
- Efficient Use of Instructional Time
- Positive Discipline Programs
- Attitudes of Students and Teachers
- Cooperation vs. Conflict

Recommendations:

- **School Improvement Teams will annually survey students, parents, and staff to determine levels of satisfaction and need (on a disaggregated basis) with regard to programs and practices related to closing the achievement gap.**
 - **Worcester County Schools will provide training to all certificated employees and support personnel to address cultural diversity. A diversity awareness course will be required for all staff including substitute teachers.**
 - **Worcester County Schools will establish a position responsible for coordinating efforts in multicultural education, minority student achievement, and staff development.**
 - **Worcester County Schools recruitment committee will continue to attract, recruit, employ, and support minority employees and encourage them to seek opportunities for advancement and promotion.**
 - **Worcester County Schools will review policies and procedures related to the retention of quality teachers and teacher turnover in schools with high percentages of students in poverty and at risk of failure.**
 - **A briefing on the African American Student Achievement plan and progress will be made a component of the Worcester County Public Schools annual Teacher Induction Program.**
 - **A yearly report on School Climate will be made to the Board of Education.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will review programs of character education to expand student awareness of appropriate behavior and social decorum in school.**
- *High Expectations/Student Achievement*

Major Elements:

- Positive Self-Image of Learners Through Success in Challenging Course Work
- Interventions to Ensure Success
- Teaching Adapted to Student Needs
- Proactive Methods for Involvement and Success
- Participation in PSAT and SAT
- Drop Out Prevention/Attendance Programs
- Variety of Teaching Strategies

Recommendations:

- **Building on existing partnerships with community agencies, Worcester County Public Schools will provide intensive early childhood instructional programs which**

develop and monitor individual learning plans for students in order to promote their success in school.

- **Worcester County Public Schools will provide expanded opportunities for minority students, particularly African American students, to participate in accelerated and enrichment opportunities within and beyond the school day at the elementary, middle, and high school levels through programs/activities such as MESA, Young Men United, Young Women United, after school academies, etc.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will establish intensive intervention programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in the areas of reading and mathematics which target those students who have been identified from data as needing additional support and assistance.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will provide assistance in the establishment of tutorial/laboratory centers with computer instruction in reading and mathematics for students identified by data as needing such support.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will provide training in "Teaching Strategies Adapted to Student Needs and Learning Styles." All teachers will be required to take the course "Differentiated Instruction".**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will continue efforts to maintain small class sizes at the elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school levels.**
 - **The Worcester Model (a research-based framework for planning, observing, and evaluating instruction) will continue to guide teachers' classroom performance in the areas of: teacher scholarship, human relations, planning lessons, establishing learning objectives, classroom organization and management, and use of materials and resources.**
- *Parent/Family/Community Involvement*

Major Elements:

- Providing information about home/community centers that support learning.
- Providing information about school programs and student progress.
- Soliciting volunteers for before, during, and after school programs, activities, events.
- Adjusting school schedules to permit broadened opportunities for volunteering.
- Providing help to parents in monitoring, assisting, and interacting with children about classwork.
- Encouraging participation and providing training for involvement in decision making related to school improvements.
- Providing/coordinating students and families' access to community and support services - recreational, tutorial, health, cultural, etc.
- Establish effective mentor programs and supply training in minority achievement strategies to all mentors.

Recommendations:

- **Worcester County Public Schools will provide training for parents in critical areas such as conferencing with teachers, homework assistance, school/system policies and procedures, discipline, grading and reporting, and SAT/PSAT.**
- **Schools and teachers will communicate with parents on a regular basis about the academic progress of their child.**

- **Worcester County Public Schools will continue to support off-site extended day programs.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will continue to form partnerships with churches, Head Start, and community organizations and governmental agencies to benefit children i.e. Community Chat, study circles, family resource centers.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will continue to encourage the participation of the African American community in all school volunteer and mentoring programs.**
 - **Worcester County Public Schools will seek grant funding to provide an early childhood educational resources outreach program for county day care centers/child care provider facilities.**
- *School Improvement Plans*

Major Elements:

- Identification of databases on student participation and student performance.
- Compilation of data
- Analysis of data
- Conclusions of data
- Determination of root causes
- Goal development
- Prioritization of goals
- Specific School Year Objectives/Activities
- Identification of Research Based Strategies
- Implementation of Activities
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Progress

Recommendations:

- **Each Worcester County Public School will identify and compile databases on the achievement and participation of African American students.**
- **Each School Improvement Plan will (1) monitor the effectiveness of all efforts to improve the achievement and participation of African American students, (2) research best practices in teaching and learning, and (3) establish goals and objectives for making progress based on results and new learnings.**
- **Each Worcester County Public School will provide a progress report quarterly and annually on its implementation of the recommendations of this report.**
- **Worcester County Public Schools will provide yearly updates on academic achievement to the Board of Education and community through forums, churches, civic organizations, business groups, and the media.**
- **The Worcester County School System will provide human and material resources, including on-going staff development, to support school improvement efforts in constructing, implementing, and evaluating school improvement plans.**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

While the responsibility for implementing the following recommendations belongs to the Worcester County Public Schools, the responsibility for providing the resources and support to make these recommendations become effective strategies in accelerating the achievement of African American students belongs to more than the school system. Only with the interest, support, and actions of parents and families, county government, the faith community, and the business community will our school system strengthen its capacity to effectively prepare all students to meet the challenging demands of the future. As indicated in the Critical Priorities section of this report (p. 19), "We must work together."

School Climate

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**High Expectations/
Student
Achievement**

- Building on existing partnerships with community agencies, Worcester County Public Schools will provide intensive early childhood instructional programs which develop and monitor individual learning plans for students in order to promote their success in school.
- Worcester County Public Schools will provide expanded opportunities for minority students, particularly African American students, to participate in accelerated and enrichment opportunities within and beyond the school day at the elementary, middle, and high school levels through programs/activities such as MESA, Young Men United, Young Women United, after school academies, etc.
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Community
Involvement**

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**School
Improvement Plans**

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Pruitt, Jane
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Roundtree, S.T.
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Shockley, Gerald
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Smith, Terry

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Tilghman, Norman
Tindley, Kimberly
Tomlin, Lehman
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Tull, Denise
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Washington, Davida
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White, Juanita
Williams, Lana
Woolford, Dornell
Zimmer, Tom

* Steering Committee Member

**1999-2000 Only

Listing of Meetings

January 31, 2000	First Task Force Meeting
March 7, 2000	First Steering Committee Meeting
April 5, 2000	Second Steering Committee Meeting
April 26, 2000	Second Task Force Meeting
May 1, 2000	Third Steering Committee Meeting
May 18, 2000	Fourth Steering Committee Meeting
July 12, 2000	Third Task Force Meeting
August 15, 2000	Fifth Steering Committee Meeting
October 11, 2000	Sixth Steering Committee Meeting