

I.A  
**Executive Summary to the 2007 Annual Update**

**SOMERSET COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



*“Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you, an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.”*

*Sir Winston Churchill*

**I. PROGRESS**

Somerset County students, families, teachers, and community are seeing significant progress in the educational system and learning which in turn, is stirring pride and inspiring higher goals and achievement. The challenge is considerable:

Unite the best efforts of our entire community in order to assure that **all** students achieve high standards, graduate from high school and are equipped with the skills and behaviors needed to attain success in a rapidly changing world.

*(SCPS Master Plan Mission)*

Nonetheless, the commitment is clear: Somerset will achieve this mission with its youth, celebrate progress, and persist in continuous improvement.

Progress depends upon both systemic development and incremental change. Incremental positive change can be seen in every one of the 15 *Master Plan 2007 Update* areas. Substantial systemic progress has been made over the last year in professional development; program design, delivery and alignment; in student services; and in capital improvements.

**High Quality Staff and Professional Development**

The quality of Somerset’s teaching and leadership staff is the most powerful determinant of student growth and development. The percentage of core academic classes taught by highly qualified teachers has increased steadily over the last three years. The quantity of high quality professional development provided to Somerset County teachers is noteworthy. At the secondary level (Grades 6-12), all teachers participate in weekly 75 minute professional development improving their knowledge and skills, expanding their repertoire of strategies for effective learning, and building their school based community. At the elementary level, the federal *Reading First* grant, Title I Funds, School Improvement Funds, and Thornton BTE increases have supported an investment of approximately \$250,000. Across all grade levels and courses, the capacity of teachers and administrators to fully utilize technology to engage students and track student progress for intervention and enrichment has been increased and certified. All Somerset teachers must complete the first level of technology competency and may advance to a second and third level of full integration and on-line delivery.

### **Program Design, Delivery, and Alignment**

Progress in measured achievement is dependent upon a tight alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum. Indicators of significant progress in this area are: the building of a strong and useful data warehouse, the staffing of Instructional Facilitators at all sites, the high level of participation in summer assessment workshops, the vertical team meetings convened throughout the year, and the team commitment to development and results analysis of sets of benchmark assessments. Somerset is now poised to collect consistent, aligned data that will lead to relevant applications through an extremely well managed data warehouse.

### **Student Services**

Somerset is committed to providing for the physical, social, and emotional well being of students that is necessary for their academic engagement and achievement. As the recipients of a *21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant* that provides both extended day and year programs for all elementary and intermediate level students, a *Safe Schools/Healthy Student Grant* that staffs learning support and behavior intervention positions and explicitly links all county agencies and their services, and a *GEAR UP* grant to guide students on to higher learning, Somerset's students are receiving critical supports. All three of these are competitive grants with a multiyear awarded total of \$4.9 million. These grants have provided \$1.7 million in fiscal support this year as services to students. As a result: secondary discipline is improving among the hard to manage students; school attendance has increased, graduation rate has increased, and the entering children have exceeded the state standard.

### **Capital Improvements**

Significant planning and work was invested by the school system in working with the local stakeholders, local government, MSDE, legislators, and other State government officials toward developing a Facilities Master Plan that had everyone's support. As a result, Woodson Elementary School was reopened as a completely renovated facility September, 2006. Additionally, a newly constructed, state of the art facility for all 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders in the county is nearing completion and will open for students prior to January 1, 2008. Both projects have served to increase community collaboration, communication, and common purpose. A closed elementary site has been reopened to provide Alternative Education programs for at risk and troubled youth and to house the county's adult education component.

## **II. DEMOGRAPHIC AND FISCAL CHANGES AND EFFECTS**

Somerset County is the state's second smallest jurisdiction with a population of 25,845. There has been a 4.4% population growth in the county in the last five years and a reported 15.6% increase in the Limited English Proficient individuals. Consequently school enrollment in the eight schools in the county is increasing slightly with the school age population projected as a 10.9% increase by 2010.

Somerset County Public Schools fiscal capacity has been vastly expanded over the last five years through the receipt of competitive federal grants and Bridge to Excellence Thornton funding. Over \$11.9 million has been received from the State. For the 2007 fiscal year, 12.7% of the Board of Education's revenue came from Federal sources, 62.7% from the State, and 24.6% from Local government, the third lowest percentage in the State of Maryland. The locals inability to fund at a higher percentage is understandable: Somerset County stands 24<sup>th</sup> in the amount of

revenue received from property taxes as well as the lowest per capita revenue; Somerset is the least wealthy of all counties. Nonetheless, Somerset has the fifth highest cost per pupil of \$10,390, which stands above the state average. Unfortunately, this high per pupil expenditure does not provide the advantages that would be expected. It does provide a solid program within the constraints of a small county unable to benefit from economy of scale and committed to serving an enrollment in which more than half of the students require one or more special services. Consequently, a significant portion goes to meet the needs of a growing Special Education for which the State estimates a per pupil cost of \$14,413, the FARMS students' needs which are also estimated by the State at \$13,948 per pupil, and our LEP students with a per pupil estimated cost of \$13,284. We have reorganized the educational structure and in so doing closed three elementary schools to gain some economy of scale while building a stronger educational system.

Approximately 55% of the county's population is White and 41% is African American. The school 2006-2007 enrollment reflects 47.5% White students, 47.1% African American, and 4.5% Hispanic. Approximately 37% of Somerset's children live in single parent households and 15% live with grandparents. Poverty burdens many in Somerset: 20% of the residents live below the line of poverty placing 57% of all students on Free and Reduced meals. Somerset posts 30% of the adult population having less than a high school diploma, and a mere 11% with a Bachelor Degrees. Somerset has the second highest drop out rate in the state. Education has not been highly valued.

An increasing number of high school youth are testing the limits of the law and appear to be influenced by released adult prisoners who have formed gang liaisons. These concerns have led to close work with police agencies, the Department of Juvenile Justice, state experts on gang formation, and the Local Management Board in seeking grant support to initiate programs and prevent gang development in Somerset County.

The impact of these conditions on education is easily observed: children have basic needs that their families cannot meet. Unmet basic needs yield children with serious emotional and social hurdles requiring more support than is available in the regular classroom. Families have needs that are so overwhelming that they do not become involved in their child's education. Children lack models of educated adults; they cannot envision their future.

### **III. SYSTEM SUCCESS**

Within the *2007 Update* document, Somerset identifies several key successes:

- The Elementary band has made exceptional progress in Reading over the last four years moving from a proficiency of 54.9% in 2003 to 73.1% in 2007.
- The Elementary band has made exceptional progress in Mathematics over the last four years moving from a proficiency of 55.3% to 76.5%
- All Elementary schools made AYP in mathematics.
- The Middle band has made strong progress in Mathematics moving from a proficiency of 33.2% in 2003 to a proficiency of 49.5% in 2007.
- The passing rate on the High School Assessment (HSA) for the Class of 2009 is Algebra-72%, Biology 66%, English 64%, and Government 71%.

- A documented 67% of English Language Learners have met their grade level targets for English Language Proficiency as measured on the AMAO II.
- The drop-out rate has decreased to the lowest rate in five years.
- Attendance is increasing at each level.
- The partnership with Truancy Court is successfully motivating more than 1 out of 3 chronically absent students to attend school regularly.

#### **IV. SUBGROUP SUCCESS**

Somerset County is adamantly pursuing the closing of the achievement gap among the subgroups as identified by NCLB. As the target (AMO) advances each year and expectations increase so too does the effort and commitment of educators. Success that has been realized and discussed in the *2007 Update* includes:

##### **In Reading**

- Two historically disadvantaged groups, the Hispanic and ELL subgroups, have continuously increased their elementary level reading percent proficient over the last four year period.
- The Middle Level African American subgroup has consistently improved in Reading proficiency for four years and continue to narrow the achievement gap.
- At the High School level, all subgroups except ELL have significantly increased in percent passing the HSA/English II assessment.

##### **In Mathematics**

- The majority of the represented subgroups exceeded the elementary math AMO target. Of particular note is the Hispanic subgroups which exceeded the AMO target and has consistently increased in percent [proficient in mathematics for the last four years.
- At the Middle Level, both the Hispanic and Special Education subgroups have consistently increased in the percent achieving Mathematics proficiency.
- Three subgroups have exceeded the AMO target for HSA/Mathematics with the percent achieving proficiency. Although the Special Education subgroup did not meet the AMO target, there has been a steady increase in percent passing from 2003 to 2007.
- There is an increasingly small difference (3.6%) between the HSA: Algebra/Data Analysis Performance of the Ninth Grade Cohort between the White subgroup (83.3%) and the African American subgroup (79.9%). The tested groups were similar in number; one group had 50 members and the other 59.

##### **In Graduation and Drop Out Rates**

- The African American subgroup has the highest graduation rate of all subgroups at 82.69%
- The drop out rate in the aggregate was significantly reduced with the African American subgroup posting the lowest dropout rate (4.45%) of all subgroups.

##### **In Career and Technology Education**

- The African American subgroup of students in the Career and Technology programs is outperforming all other subgroups with a “Completion” percentage of 92% and performing exceptionally well in both “Skill Proficiency” (85%) and “Placement” (81%).

## **V. CHALLENGES**

Somerset County Public Schools faces multiple challenges and has significant opportunities for continuous improvement. As a system we are foremost challenged to focus our efforts on the conditions and issues over which we have influence and which we can change in order to accelerate student performance in the aggregate and among subgroups.

We are challenged to close the widening gap among several subgroups' performances in Reading and the AMO (Annual Measurable Objective). Students who cannot and do not read well will be disadvantaged in every area. We are challenged to transfer the best of what we have learned at the elementary level about being successful with at risk children to our secondary practices; this includes knowledge, skills, strategies, attitudes, and behaviors. We are challenged to provide equity in opportunity-to-learn to all subgroups and avoid disenfranchising any students by circumstances of poverty; lack of transportation cannot be allowed to prevent participation in extended day and extended year programs. We are challenged to brutally face and address the significant difference at the High School level between the White subgroup performance and the African American subgroup performance on the High School Assessments. We know our African American students have the capacity to do well. Special need subgroups and at risk students demand, deserve, and receive significant amounts of time and energy. However, in our efforts to meet those needs, we are challenged to attend vigorously to the growth and acceleration of our average students who present no significant problems, but who also deserve the best we have to offer.

We cannot succeed until we meet the challenge of engaging our students in their learning on a personal and relevant level. We must build a culture of secondary attendance that competes with outside influences. We must resist a narrowing of the curriculum to only the mandated testing areas. We must meet the challenge of hiring and retaining highly qualified, compassionate and persistent staff who draw support and enthusiasm from one another in vibrant professional learning communities and who are recognized and rewarded by their students' achievements. We must provide facilities, equipment, and materials that attract students and staff and engender pride and promise.

## **VI. SYSTEM PRIORITIES**

System priorities were established in the *Master Plan 2006 Update* as integrating the Master Plan strategies and data analysis into daily practice, accelerating secondary students' achievement, and accelerating Hispanic and English Language Learners' achievement. Substantial progress has been made with the integration of planned strategies and data analysis into practice as well as accelerating the Hispanic and ELL subgroups' performances. These efforts must be sustained and as such remain a priority.

Although progress and improvement was realized at two secondary sites, the results are not adequate. Accelerating academic progress, particularly in reading, at the middle and high school levels is the key priority. This is a broad priority that requires high quality staff involved in high quality professional development and a system that overtly prioritizes and personalizes each student's education with one on one attention in developing an individualized plan, monitoring that plan, and providing support as needed. The physical, emotional, and social needs of many

of our students interfere with their academic growth. Therefore, the platform for accelerating achievement is meeting the needs of the whole student, an equally prominent priority for 2008. Large grants have helped us to guide our county in creating safe and healthy learning environments. Unfortunately, other than the nominal carryover funds, support will cease with this fiscal year without a new resource plan.

Completing construction and opening the new Somerset Intermediate School is a system, site and community priority—all have long awaited this facility. Currently housed in an elementary school scheduled for closure, students are cramped and space is an issue. The new school is appropriately sized, contains state of the art science, telecommunication, media, art, and technology education areas and equipment.

## **VI. FISCAL RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION TO PRIORITIES**

Bridge to Excellence Thornton funding has supported Somerset's efforts to meet its priorities over the past five years by enabling:

- a competitive salary scale for recruiting and maintaining highly qualified staff;
- the addition of elementary and secondary academic intervention positions;
- the expansion of student services personnel;
- the increase of regular education and special education staffing
- the provision of a coherent, consistent, and rigorous program of high quality professional development that is impacting student achievement;
- the increase of instructional time for students at the elementary level;
- the development of a K-12 Gifted and Talented Program;
- the expansion of Fine Arts staffing, programming, and facility improvement;
- the development of extended year programs; and,
- the capacity of all staff to access, manage, and apply student data to classroom and intervention instruction.

A major initiative of Somerset County Public schools has been the involvement of the community in the distribution of resources. Each year the Master Plan Steering Team convenes for a one to two day workshop in January to review the past year's progress and establish budget priorities for the coming fiscal year. The *Master Plan 2008 Update*, delineates the distribution of revenue to all challenges including the priorities established by the Steering Team and Somerset County Public School's Leadership Teams. These priorities include a continuation of work to integrate the Master Plan into practice, an acceleration of secondary achievement, a partnership to address the healthy social and emotional development of all students; intentional and explicit assistance to students of special service subgroups; and full scale application of student performance data analysis.

The previous year's priorities have a continuing emphasis and require fiscal attention to sustain the progress made as well as promote on-going improvement. Integrating the Master Plan strategies continues to garner an enormous amount of administrative time and energy of site principals and their key leaders, central office supervisors, directors, and the superintendent through the documentation and analysis of Quarterly Reports, the Annual Summary Progress Report, and the Master Plan Update. A conservative estimate of invested hours times the daily cost of the administrative team yields a projected cost of \$240,000.

Regarding the priority to accelerate secondary students' achievement, new revenue has been allocated to Middle Level reading for staffing, core program materials, intervention, and professional development; and, to Middle Level math for staffing, professional development, and extended day intervention. Professional development resources exceed \$160,000 and are supported by local funds, Thornton, and grants. At the High School Level, significant resources have been designated for HSA support in the areas of staffing, core program texts and materials, intervention, and professional development. At this level, professional development allocated resources exceed \$330,000 with new texts following at \$110,000.

Nurturing the healthy development of our students while assuring them and their parents of safe school environments that are conducive to learning is supported in 2008 by over \$950,000 of dedicated local, state, and federal funds. The approximate breakdown includes 75% for direct services site-based staffing, 25% for training, and 25% for equipment and materials. At least 80% of each one of these categories is funded through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students federal funding which will diminish in 2009 and cease in 2010.

The needs of Special Services groups remain a priority. The English Language Learner program's instructional staff has increased by more than one-third and the expanded program is being fully funded, carefully monitored and supported to promote maximum student engagement and progress.

Impacting academic outcome would not be possible without a data warehouse with quality input producing accurate student performance reports and correlations for teachers analysis and application. Through the addition of a performance coordinator and an expansion of the capacity of the *Performance Matters* data warehouse, Somerset is poised to make significant progress in 2008. Staffing, training, and warehouse contracting, sums to an annual budgeted amount of slightly less than \$100,000.

Anticipating significant need for funds to fully equip the new intermediate school, all '08 fund balance revenue was dedicated to furniture, equipment, and technology. Additional owner costs such as cafeteria equipment, gymnasium bleachers, and media furniture have been supported by the county through one-time awarded revenue. The doors will open near the close of the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year, simultaneously ending and beginning another climb in "*the journey*" toward "*Success for All.*"

