

Executive Summary

I. INTRODUCTION

The Somerset County Public School staff, students, and community are in a transitional year in 2011-2012. New leadership for the school system has set direction and focus. In addition, Board members are relatively new, with only one of five, serving in a second term.

It is also in transition in regard to the third wave of reform undertaken by the state of Maryland; Race To The Top. Somerset, like the twenty three other LEA's in Maryland, will continue to meet the requirements of the Bridge to Excellence while transitioning to the Race to the Top. The challenge remains the same with the following Master Plan Mission statement set nine years ago:

To 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.

Somerset is making its mark on Maryland's educational success. In spite of economic hurdles, increased standards of performance, and diminishing revenue, Somerset County students, families, staff, and community are seeing significant progress in the educational system and learning. There are miles, many miles, yet to go but it is clear that by building one student at a time, we will secure a future of promise.

Progress depends upon both incremental change and systemic development. Both are seen in the progress of Somerset County Public Schools during the 2010-2011 year. Incremental change will be addressed in this summary in brief narrative on the progress the school system is making in accelerating student performance and eliminating achievement gaps, a summary of the plan to align with the state Race To The Top plan, an overview of the goals for reform areas in year two and success in year one of the system's plan.

II. BUDGET NARRATIVE

A. System Priorities

Somerset County's main priority going into the FY 12 school year is to retain staff and core programs. Falling operating budgets since 2009 have forced Somerset to reduce expenditures including staffing costs. As personnel have left the system, many positions have not been replaced. SCPS has maintained programs through the shifting and adding of responsibilities to those remaining.

Structured collaboration, utilizing CFIP (Classroom Focused Improvement Process) strategies, has come to be recognized by Leadership Teams and staff as one of the most powerful formats for professional growth and development of teachers of all subjects

and experience levels. Collaboration has been maximized at the elementary and middle levels with designated weekly times for grade level teams to focus on the analysis of student progress in reading or in math, collaboratively designed instructional plans as well as intervention, and then share reflection on their classroom experiences with implementation. Structured collaboration also involves the mastering of a new skill taught by an instructional coach, group problem solving, and benchmark design followed by analysis of performance. The results of this collaboration can be seen in the continued academic progress of Somerset's elementary and middle level students. The CFIPS model has been carried on into the high school and is beginning to show the same kind of success as in the earlier grades.

Of key importance is the role of the instructional coach for successful collaboration. A major priority will be to maintain this embedded professional support, and expand it to include all areas in the high schools. Presently each high school is staffed by only one instructional coach. As SCPS continues in meeting the demands of NCLB as well as transition to the Maryland Common Core Goals and PARCC (Partnership for Assessments of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments, more leadership in the structured collaboration or CFIPS model is needed.

Somerset County Public Schools is committed to assisting every student in crossing the digital divide regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, family income, geographic location, or disability. This means that every teacher within the system is fully trained and demonstrates competence in effectively integrating appropriate technology in instruction and assessment to engage learners and maximize their academic progress. Somerset has long envisioned the full use of individual student issued laptops to enhance instructional mastery and promote student development of the 21st century skills of communication, problem solving, collaboration, independent learning, creativity, and critical thinking. That vision became a reality in 2008-2009 as each 7th Grader in the county was issued a laptop to use throughout the school day. The program was moved into grades 8 and 9 during the school year 2010-2011. SCPS will move the 1 to 1 initiative into the 10th grade this year. Professional development for teachers will be provided to insure the most effective use of the laptops. Elementary staffs will continue to improve the use of Promethean Boards in daily instruction and better utilize computer labs which are staffed with computer lab teachers.

On July 1, 2011, Somerset welcomed a new Superintendent, Dr. Marjorie Miles. Dr. Miles set sail to continue the improvement seen over the last nine years under Superintendent, Dr. Karen-Lee Brofee. Two priorities she brings are to reorganize leadership throughout the system and to reorganize the special education division. As in many systems, the special education subgroup suffers achievement gaps in some sites and levels in Somerset; it also experiences much success in some sites and levels. Consistency throughout the system is a priority for Special Education.

B. Fiscal Outlook

Maryland was recently named the wealthiest state in the nation and was identified in the 2009 “Overview of Maryland Local Governments” by the Department of Legislative Services as having “one of the lowest poverty rates in the nation” at 8.3%. The US poverty rate is 13%. Maryland’s Median Household Income is \$68,080. Although one of the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland; Somerset County does not mirror these numbers in the least.

Somerset, with a second smallest population of a Maryland County, posts a poverty rate of 20%, just 2 percentage points below Baltimore City. Of greater significance, Somerset posts the lowest Median Household Income in Maryland at \$33,700 which is less than 1/2 of the state median and a mere third of Maryland’s highest county’s median. Somerset also holds the spot as the county with lowest per capita total revenue at \$2,307, and the lowest assessable base. Somerset has the lowest taxable income in Maryland, therefore the 3.15% income tax (the second highest in the state), does not yield significant revenue. That is, even with one of the highest income tax rates in the state, the assessable base in Somerset is so low it does not yield significant revenue. Thus, even if an income tax increase were to be entertained, it would not bring in a corresponding increase in revenue.

Somerset has experienced an 8.6% increase in minority population between 2000 and 2007, and a 5.2% over all population increase.

Somerset’s enrollment is 2919 and is comprised of approximately of 45% White students, 42% African American students, 6% Hispanic students, 5% more than one race, and less than 1% Asian and American Indian students. Approximately 37% of Somerset’s children live in single parent households; and 58% of all students are on Free and Reduced Meals. The 2000 census cites 30% of Somerset’s adult population having less than a high school diploma and 11% with a Bachelor’s Degree or higher.

The State General Assembly’s enactment of the *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act* in April, 2002 remains a major investment in Somerset’s capacity to provide quality education to its children. Somerset County Public Schools experienced significant increases in funding as a result of Thornton and demonstrated the positive educational impact of those increased resources by outstanding gains in meeting standards (*An Evaluation of the Effect of Increased State Aid to Local School Systems Through the Bridge to Excellence Act* MGT Report, 2005 and 2008). Specifically, between 2004 and 2008 Somerset experienced an increase of over 63% in state revenue. However, no provision for continuing BTE funding beyond June 30, 2008 was made. The result has been continuing decreases in State funding for the last three years.

The Federal Government passed the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)* during 2009. This infused large sums of money into education to prevent the massive reduction of services to students as school systems nationwide were encountering financial difficulties. These funds were provided for a two year period which ended September 30, 2011 and had unprecedented accountability and reporting requirements. The Board received over \$1.9 million for FY 2010 and FY 2011 under this Act but allocated the funds cautiously in order to avoid funding issues at the end of the grant period. However, the loss of these funds has been felt in program, staffing, and services.

Somerset County Public Schools has decreased staff and certain programs over the last three fiscal years capitalizing on attrition and severely limiting replacements; retargeting and redistributing funds to the greater areas of need; restricting funding to current initiatives rather than new; working under the guidelines to save positions rather than increase salaries or benefits; and “shaving” all non-critical areas to bare bone essentials. The approved Budget for FY 2012 reflected a loss of \$33,497 in State revenue and over \$1.4 million in Federal revenue (ARRA) in comparison to the FY 2011 Budget as original and approved.

Recognizing the efforts of the Board to reduce costs, engage in cost saving initiatives such as energy management, and work cooperatively with the local government, the commissioners provided non-recurring cost funds to enable the schools to continue the stalled technology one-to-one initiative begun in 2008. This was an extremely well appreciated supportive gesture.

C. Climate Changes

Somerset County Public Schools, like other systems in Maryland, is operating in a totally different environment over the last four years, as compared to the period from 2002-2008. The climate is one of declining revenue, with increasing needs, and increasing accountability. Throughout this most recent downturn, the position of the Somerset Board of Education has been one of maintaining as many staff and programs as possible.

Even though a priority, the reality of declining budgets has taken a toll on Somerset. Over the last four years, the system has lost 30.5 positions. Somerset has gone through a period of not replacing departing staff, reallocating positions and reducing program offerings. Several programs have seen a reduction in staff or been eliminated altogether. These include reducing the number of staff in Choral Music, the CTE Business Program, Foreign Language and Learning Support Services. The Agriculture and Family and Consumer Science programs were discontinued when instructors retired.

Staffing and programming loss would be even more severe had Somerset County not carefully used Thornton funding from 2003-2008. Positions were added to support the requirements of NCLB keeping in mind the limitations and scheduled leveling of the

funds. Local funding remained constant also, as Maintenance of Effort funding has remained fairly level since 2003. Local funding in the form of non recurring costs did increase during this time period however and this allowed the district to improve infrastructure and implement the one to one laptop initiative. This combination of school district and local government management kept the district from drastic reductions as the economy suffered severely beginning in 2008. ARRA funding has allowed Somerset to strategically cut and/or redirect staff through attrition without the use of wholesale reductions in force and/or furlough days. This has also allowed Somerset to provide steps and/or small increases to remaining staff which has kept retention of highly qualified staff high.

The FY2012 budget reflects a loss of 7 positions among the cuts. This would account for the -4.30% difference from the FY2011 budget for Instructional Salaries. Other areas cut and showing a difference from the FY2011 budget are: Instructional Textbooks and Supplies, -13.18%, Other instructional Costs, -19.57%, Special Education, -1.94%, Student Personnel Services, -10.99%, Operation of Plant, -0.97%, Maintenance of Plant, -4.25%, and Capital Outlay, -6.35%. Categories showing an increase over the FY 2011 budget are: Administration, 0.28%, School Support Services, 3.15%, Health Services, 0.08%, Pupil Transportation, 4.92%, and Fixed Charges, 8.18%.

As funding and resources are decreasing, accountability is increasing. All parts of the operation come under some kind of regular reporting or auditing scrutiny. Recently a report was prepared for the SCPS local Board of Education that outlined and listed all auditing and/or reporting that the system is subject to. There are approximately 42 audits or reports SCPS is required to complete to show accountability. Twenty are required annually, 9 are required more frequently. This does not take into account the student achievement progress that NCLB requires or the new Race To The Top initiatives will bring along.

III. GOAL PROGRESS

A. Race to the Top Scope of Work

Somerset County is completing the first of the four year initiative; Maryland's *Race To The Top*. SCPS's plan is fully aligned with Maryland, and remains focused on improving student achievement in reading and math, incorporating rigorous STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) objectives, and participating in National and Statewide Evaluation of the *Race to the Top* program. The plan includes projects in the four areas of Standards and Assessments, Data Systems to Support Instruction, Great Teachers and Leaders, and Turning Around the Lowest performing Schools.

In the planning stages of the development of the Somerset County Race To The Top Scope of Work, it became apparent that SCPS was dependent on MSDE for direction and development in order to implement a sound plan. With that thought in mind, the first

year plan called for SCPS to participate in MSDE activities, in order to obtain an accurate direction and focus, and then proceed with local initiatives. Even with this approach, there were parts of the plan that may have been overly ambitious in regard to the capacity in producing and/or keeping the timeline and schedules. As the descriptions of projects and initiatives from the goals are described in the following paragraphs, it will become apparent that the Somerset County RTTT grant will need to continually be amended. These amendments will be minor in respect to overall major objectives and will be confined to timelines, budget amounts, changing a process to reach an objective, or abandoning a project because the state plan will develop it.

Section B: Standards and Assessments

SCPS completed several projects in the area of standards and assessments during year one. These included:

- SCPS staff participated in MSDE sponsored curriculum activities, including content area meetings.
- Twenty teachers completed a beginning workshop in writing through Salisbury University in May of 2011
- All schools in the district sent teacher teams to the Educator Effectiveness Academy in Wicomico County on July 13, 14 and 15
- All teams completed a plan to transition to the Maryland Common Core Curriculum
- Provided two in-service days for elementary and secondary core area teachers to introduce the Common Core Standards
- Purchased *Read 180*, a reading intervention software program, for the high schools, and provided professional development for teachers implementing it
- Provided a two week STEM academy for 60 incoming sixth graders in July, 2011

One of the projects in section B, curriculum and assessments, was moved from year one back to year two, with funding amended correspondingly. Project seven called for existing local assessments, which are now administered by paper and pencil, to be converted to online applications provided by the SCPS data warehouse vendor, *Performance Matters*. As the central office planning group began examining the most cost efficient method to do this, it was realized that our existing assessments would be obsolete by 2013-14 when the new Common Core Curriculum was fully operational. Staff returning from MSDE briefings were also indicating the new Maryland Curriculum Tool kit would include an assessment bank from which items could be generated. This project was then moved back into years two and three; however as the new tool kit is rolled out, if a new assessment bank becomes available, the project may be abandoned altogether and funds diverted to other under budgeted projects.

The major emphasis for the year two plan requires SCPS to begin transitioning to the Maryland Common Core Curriculum. This will be done by infusing the *Math Practices, Capacities of a Literate Individual* and Writing into the existing curriculum this school year, and begin the actual examination of curricular materials, texts, etc. to align the

formal curricular documents to the Maryland Common Core. The major objectives include:

- Train staff on math practices, capacities of a literate individual and writing and begin to familiarize them with the common core curriculum
- Develop a local plan for implementation of the Common Core State Standards.
- Conduct gap analysis to identify specific curriculum areas that require change or revision
- Begin to create curricular documents in parallel format for all curricular areas (including STEM) to ensure that Maryland's students have a rich and full education and that classroom teachers are supported in the effective implementation of Common Core State Standards.
- Ensure that educators in all schools are trained in the new Common Core State Standards, the revised State Curriculum and Assessment system, and effective differentiated instructional practices.
- Continue implementation of Maryland's high-quality summative assessment system (MSA/HSA) until a new system tied to the Common Core State Standards is operational.
- Provide professional development to staff in the area of writing
- Develop a STEM professional learning community

Another second year initiative for SCPS is to form a group of teachers who will take the lead on developing and using STEM lessons. The lead STEM teacher from each school attending the Summer Educator Effectiveness Academies will help identify other individuals within the schools to form this group. SCPS will use RTTT funding to pay an extra duty stipend for work done in this area after regular teaching hours.

School teams have developed transition plans which will begin work this school year transitioning to the common core curriculum and familiarizing staff with STEM lessons. District staff will finalize transitioning plans and begin work at summer workshops during the summer of 2012.

Section C: Data Systems to Support Instruction

SCPS is proud of the strides it has made in the area of technology. Classrooms from grade three to eight have promethean boards; the one to one laptop initiative is in place from grades seven through ten. Staff continually improves technology skills; Somerset offers three levels of technology certification. However, even with all this, SCPS must upgrade its technology infrastructure and data reporting capabilities to meet the demands of the Race To The Top initiative.

Early projections by the Technology Director indicated an increase in bandwidth of approximately five times the present capacity. Given the expense of an increase of this size, along with limited engineering qualifications of SCPS technology staff, the first

project in the area of data systems to support instruction was to bring in an outside consultant to help in determining specifications required as well as some idea on equipment needed. INACOM Information Systems, from Salisbury, Maryland, was contracted to do the consulting. SCPS is facing two options for upgrade. The first will involve becoming part of the Maryland Broadband Grant which will install fiber optics down Route 13 and 413. One set of equipment would meet this setup, if it becomes available. If this does not develop, a county wide wireless set up would be required, which would be more costly. Neither of these options would connect the outlying schools; Deal Island Elementary and Ewell Elementary. These would continue to be connected through the standard hook up presently used, which will be much slower with limited capacity.

Another major limitation needed to be addressed in this section is the lack of sufficient personnel in the data reporting department at SCPS. Basically one staff member handles all data reporting to MSDE, all student data through *Power School*, and all instructional data through the student performance data system, *Performance Matters*. Increasing data collection and reporting, requires increasing staff which will be addressed by hiring another Data Specialist with RTTT grant funds. This will be done in year two.

As LEA's begin to design teacher evaluation tools which include student growth, human resource programs must be able to connect teachers with students. SCPS will need to purchase a new software program to complete this task. This is included in the following year two goals for section C of the RTTT grant:

- Provide adequate bandwidth to implement an Instructional Improvement System to support classroom teachers in real time data-based planning and instruction.
- Select the state provided Instructional Improvement System components that SCPS will use
- Investigate and purchase available applications for remaining IIS components that SCPS will use
- Hire a data specialist
- Purchase a new Human Resources software management program

Section D: Great Teachers and Leaders

Section D of the RTTT initiative revolves around two major areas; providing new teacher support as well as developing teacher and principal evaluations that include student growth as a measure. SCPS accomplished year one goals for revising the Teacher Induction Program as required by COMAR 13A.07.01. A teacher induction coordinator was hired July 1, 2011, and has revised the program to bring it in line with requirements. The coordinator and one teacher mentor attended the Teacher Induction Academy in August, 2011, and used new strategies learned during the SCPS New Teacher Workshop, August 10-12, 2011. The revised Teacher Induction Program is in operation with a ratio of 2 mentors to 16 teachers.

The teacher and principal evaluation instrument development activities were moved back to year two. SCPS was ambitious in its attempt to develop these instruments by the end of the first year of the RTTT grant. The original timeline was developed in line with the Governor's Task Force which originally set December 2010 as finishing and giving recommendations. This date was not able to be kept, thus pushing back Somerset's development. This objective has been amended with timelines and funding moved to year two. The objectives for year two are:

- Develop a plan for teacher evaluation that embraces the state model of student growth which will be adopted by MSDE
- Implement a mentoring system that complies with regulations of the Comprehensive Teacher Induction Program
- Provide an incentive for "Highly Effective" staff to work in a low-achieving school
- SCPS will examine the instruments that are under development in the seven pilot LEA's for Teacher/Principal evaluation. The projects to complete the development evaluation instruments will remain, only timelines have been amended.

Section E: Turning Around Lowest Performing Schools

SCPS does not have any schools listed as lowest in the state. However, several schools are in some phase of school improvement. Both middle/high schools (grades 8-12) were in Corrective Action in 2010. One school made AYP in 2011 and will remain in Corrective Action; however the other did not meet AYP requirements and has moved on into Planning for Restructuring. One of the four elementary schools did not meet AYP and is in Local Alert for 2011.

A high point for the system is that Somerset Intermediate School exited school improvement in 2011. SIS has made a steady climb over the last four years and has employed the strategies used by the more successful elementary schools in the district. These proven strategies are having difficulty being implemented in the two middle/high schools.

SCPS completed several projects in the area of turning around lowest performing schools during year one. These included:

- Both middle/high schools completed the Teacher Comprehensive Needs Assessment as required by MSDE
- Completed one in-service for "Data Leaders". A cornerstone for achievement is having teachers analyze student data to identify weaknesses in instruction. SCPS has found this an ineffective strategy without trained staff to lead groups of teachers through the process. Project 17 identifies and trains a skilled teacher in each high school subject area to lead a content area group. This reduces the demand of the limited number of instructional coaches presently available.

- Integrate technology into instruction; the one to one laptop initiative will extend on up into to the tenth grade this school year, which will reach HSA classes. Although funding from the RTTT is not supporting the initiative, SCPS considers it an important piece of turning around lowest performing schools.
- All schools sent teams to the PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies) conference this past summer
- Both middle/high schools became a part of the MDS3 grant through MSDE. This grant provides strategies to improve the climate within a school. This correlates with project 20, dedicated funds to conduct climate surveys. MDS3 will provide the surveys.
- One of two budgeted instructional technology facilitators was hired in July, 2011, and will coach teachers in effective instruction using the student one to one laptops.

Year two activities extend the objectives of year one of section E. The year two objectives are:

- Conduct robust needs assessment to determine priorities for district action.
- Focus on teacher and principal effectiveness.
- Network with Breakthrough Schools to strengthen capacity.
- Use technology to accelerate school performance.
- Improve school culture, climate and support to increase performance.
- Hire an Instructional Technology Facilitator for high school level. (This will provide one for each school)

SCPS will be working with the Alternative Governance group at MSDE to develop a plan for restructuring for Crisfield Academy and High School during the school year 2011-12.

B. Core Content Areas

1. Maryland School Assessments/High School Assessments

Although slowing in pace, elementary students' progress demonstrated by increased percentages achieving proficiency continues in both reading and mathematics. In 2011, 86.2% of the elementary students achieved reading proficiency or higher and 88.5% achieved Math proficiency or higher. Challenges with subgroups in Reading remain; Special Ed achieved 82%, FARMS 84.2, and African American 79.8%. African American Males achieved the lowest at 78%. Math subgroup challenges include: African American at 80.7% and Special Ed at 79%. Females are lower in math; African American at 80.7% and Special Ed at 67.5%.

Both middle level reading proficiency and mathematics proficiency continue to increase as a whole in the middle level band with reading scores for the all student group at 84.7% and math also at 79.4%. Challenges in both reading and math remain with the Hispanic, African American and Special Education subgroups. Hispanic males showed the largest gap in both reading and math.

Somerset is not experiencing similar leaps of success in the HSA English measure, moving from a 76% pass rate in 2010 to 75.8% in 2011. The secondary mathematics measure also shows a slight drop over the last two years, going from 81.9% proficiency rate in 2009 to 79.1% in both 2010 and 2011. All students met the HSA graduation requirement for the Class of 2011, through demonstrating proficiency on the assessment, achieving a 1602 cumulative score of all four HSA assessments, or completing HSA Bridge projects. Bridge projects needed by graduates for the class of 2011 were more than doubled over the last two years.

2. Limited English Proficient Students

Somerset County presently shows an overall ESOL population of 151 which includes exited students. Seventy-five students are active in the program and receiving services from three ESOL teachers. AMAO I, II and III were met in 2011. Somerset is without a full time supervisor for this program and as the central office is in transition, a new instructional supervisor will be assuming the supervisory role.

3. Adequate Yearly Progress

As AMO's continually rise, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Somerset County Public Schools to meet the needs all students and every subgroup in meeting AYP. In reviewing the most recently released MSDE Official AYP Analysis data (9/28/2011), the measure of All Students meeting proficiency in Reading is 84%, slightly below the current AMO of 84.9%, and the measure of All Students meeting proficiency in Mathematics is 83.4%, above the AMO of 80.4%. FARMS did not meet AYP in Reading. Standing significantly below all other subgroups is Special Education with a system performance measuring 74.9% proficient in Reading and 69.9% proficient in Mathematics. In neither subject does the performance fall within the confidence interval. Of concern also is the African American subgroup, which did not meet the low band of the confidence interval for reading as well.

In reviewing the three levels, all students and all subgroups in Mathematics performance met AYP at the Elementary Level. However for the first time, the African American subgroup did not meet AYP in Reading. At the Middle Level which involves Somerset's Intermediate School and High School Academies (Grade 8), AYP was met in both reading and math by all students and all subgroups, a huge turnaround from previous years.

At the High School Level, Reading AYP was not met by the African American and FARMS subgroups and only by safe harbor by the Special Education subgroup. All students and subgroups met AYP in math. High schools did not meet AYP in Cohort year 5 graduation rate.

When reviewed by site and not system, three of four elementary schools met AYP in 2011. Woodson Elementary did not meet AYP in Reading for the African American and Special Education Subgroup. Somerset Intermediate School met AYP for all

students and all subgroups for the second year in a row and exited school improvement.

Both high schools are in Corrective Action, missing AYP, the last two years. Washington High met AYP for 2011 and will remain in Corrective Action. Crisfield High however did not meet AYP and will move on into Restructuring Planning.

4. Highly Qualified Teachers

In 2003-2004, the percentage of core academic classes taught by Highly Qualified teachers was 53.4%. Through the focused work of the Human Resources division, the increase in resources through Thornton Bridge to Excellence funds, and the high quality and effective leadership of building principals and their leadership teams, Somerset has moved that percentage to 100% for 2010-2011. Somerset met all the goals in the "Highly Qualified Staff" section of this update.

5. Safe Schools

Safe schools are of primary concern to the Somerset community, particularly when community occurrences have threatened safety at home. Somerset reports no persistently dangerous schools, decreasing numbers of suspended students, a data based conclusion that bullying, harassment, and intimidation are the exception rather than the rule and 100% of Somerset Schools are involved in PBIS practices. However the system remains highly concerned about the numbers of students suspended in school and particular subgroups' overrepresentation.

6. Specific Student Groups

Somerset remains committed to the implementation and expansion of CTE Programs of Study within Career Clusters and is experiencing an increase in enrollment from 156 in 2010 to 178 in 2011. There is an excellent partnership between the CTE program and home schools with all teachers focused on academics as well as the area of career and technical study.

At the other end of the spectrum, Early Learning, Somerset achieved a composite score of 85% on the MSSR assessment, ten percentage points above the state target. This represents exceptional readiness growth among two subgroups: African American and FARMS students. In comparing Somerset's Pre-K and Head Start students with Informal Home Care students, students in Somerset's Pre-K and Head Start are significantly better prepared. SCPS continues to make strong collaboration efforts to partner with Head Start and other childcare programs.

Another specific student group is Gifted and Talented. A strong, fully inclusive program, *Primary Talent Development*, is in place for Pre-K to 2nd grade students. This curriculum provides opportunities for all children to develop and demonstrate advanced learning behaviors. Targeted identification and differentiation begin in 3rd grade and continues through the remainder of elementary, middle and high

schools. Budgetary constraints in recent years have limited the amount of available resources and professional development in the GT area, however there have been improvements in the overall program including the implementation of an annual Elementary GT Challenge for students to showcase their creative projects as well as training for staff who are working with the GT identified students in 3rd-5th grades.

7. Cross-cutting Themes

Educational Technology has been an area of priority and significant progress for Somerset County throughout the Master Plan initiative for both students and staff. Staff knowledge and skill in integrating technology into instruction and with the Maryland Technology Standards continues to increase. All staff must meet “Tech 1” certification, a required assessment of skills, during the first two years of employment. There are opportunities to move through two more levels of instruction, certification, and acquisition of addition classroom tools. Equitable access to appropriate technology resources has advanced with the adoption of *Promethean* white boards, The 1:1 laptop program has extended from the seventh through tenth grade level and is intended to move with the students through their secondary years.

Education That Is Multicultural represents a second cross cutting theme. Two goals drive Somerset’s attention to ETM: first, a commitment to increase institutional understanding and effectiveness with students and families of diverse cultures; and secondly, an effort to enrich students’ multicultural classroom and field experience learning in alignment with the Maryland State Curriculum. Progress has been made in providing the beginning steps of professional learning experiences in cultural proficiency. Multicultural learning activities continue to grown in number and diversity among all three levels. SCPS entered into a year long professional development in *Beyond Diversity* from the Pacific Group in 2010-2011. All administrators participated in the year long training.

8. Special Education

Somerset County system has struggled with improving the special education subgroup achievement over the years. Many strategies have been presented and discussed. A system wide reform has not successfully been implemented. However SCPS has sites where the special education subgroup performs at or above the aggregate in Reading or Math. At Greenwood Elementary School, and Somerset Intermediate, the special education subgroup met or exceeded the AMO in both reading and math. Under new leadership this year, the central office supervisory responsibilities are being shifted. The special education division will undergo reorganization over the next year with the objective being that all sites can reach the same level of success as Greenwood and Somerset Intermediate.

Conclusion

The progress of Somerset County students and staff in the last eight years is undeniable. The link of resources as a primary cause of that progress is also undeniable: the MGT report provided the specific data based correlation between the achievement of children of poverty and expenditures per pupil. It should not be ignored. Somerset cannot continue to do this without resources. The Thornton Bridge to Excellence funding provided a remarkable increase in the capacity of Somerset to serve its children and help them to discover their strength and promise. Somerset's funding has been used well; but as it diminishes so does our support to our students. Revenue that sustains and further develops Somerset's programs is critical to delivering the opportunities to learn that the children of Somerset need and deserve.

*Further explanation and clarification of the Executive Summary section can be found on pgs. 283 to 288.