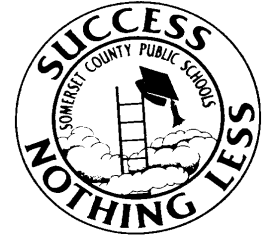


I.A
Executive Summary to the 2008 Update

SOMERSET COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Executive Summary for the 2007-2008 Master Plan Update



“We are building a learning community where everyone matters.”
SCPS Commitment 2008

I. INTRODUCTION

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:

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.

(SCPS Master Plan Mission)

Nonetheless, the commitment is clear: Somerset will achieve this mission with its youth, celebrate progress, and persist in continuous improvement. As a true learning community, Somerset educators know that each and every one matters and that our task is getting better every day at everything we do.

Progress depends upon both systemic development and incremental change. Incremental positive change can be seen throughout the *Master Plan 2008 Update* areas. Substantial systemic progress has been made over the last year in professional development; in the integration of technology; in program design, delivery and alignment; and, in capital improvements.

A. 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 significant investments in a professional development program that introduces new skills and strategies to teachers, recognizes individual’s needs and preferences, and rests on a structure of embedded site based professional development support through instructional coaches. At all levels, the primary tool for linking high quality staff and professional development to student achievement has been collaboration.

B. Integrated Technology for Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

Across all grade levels and courses, the capacity of teachers and administrators to fully utilize technology to engage students in instructional tasks and maximize learning has increased during 2007-2008. Reaching the goal of a seamless integration of technology in learning and teaching requires a strong training program with supportive follow up, skilled leaders at each site, and on going models, suggestions, and ideas for embedding the tools in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This is critical work which is being taken very seriously. To assure a thorough job, the Technology Division has contracted with a “Thinking Partner” from Technology Any Time, Any Where Incorporated.

Teacher skill in tracking student progress for intervention and enrichment through technologically managed data has been enhanced and supported through improvements in the data warehouse, the staffing of an Assessment Coordinator, and coach led collaboration sessions among common grade level and subject teachers. Somerset teachers have come to recognize the true power of technology in their own and their students’ hands.

C. Program Design, Delivery, and Assessment 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 collecting and analyzing consistent, aligned data that leads to relevant applications through an extremely well managed data warehouse, *Performance Matters*.

D. 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 Capital Improvement Plan critical to Somerset’s students’ progress and within the fiscal capacity of the county and the state. A four year Reorganizational Plan was created, adopted, and implemented. It concluded in January, 2008 with the opening of the newly constructed Intermediate School for 6th and 7th Graders. The Reorganization has served to increase community collaboration, communication, and common purpose.

II. BUDGET NARRATIVE

A. Context

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 nine schools in the county is increasing slightly with the school age population projected as a 10.9% increase by 2010.

Somerset’s public school students are comprised of approximately 48% White students, 47% African American students, 5% Hispanic students, and less than 1% Asian or American Indian students. Nearly 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 as having less than a high school diploma, and a mere 11% with a Bachelor's Degree. Somerset has the second highest drop out rate in the state. Education has not been highly valued.

B. Fiscal Climate

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. Approximately \$10.8 million has been received in increases between 2003 and 2008. For the 2008 fiscal year, 62% of the Board of Education's revenue came from the State, 23% from Local government, 12% from Federal sources. An additional 3% of the available '08 funds came from the prior year's balance. The state has increased its appropriation to Maryland's public education by an average of 80%, while Maryland's Local governments have increased by an average of 34%. Somerset County was cited in the *MGT of America* Report to the legislators as representing the lowest local increase in per pupil appropriations at \$163 additional per pupil dollars over 5 years. This compares to neighboring Worcester County which had a local increase of \$3,299 per pupil over the same period. Somerset's local contribution represents the fourth lowest percentage of a county's educational portion from their General Fund in the State of Maryland.

Somerset has reorganized the educational structure and in so doing closed three elementary schools, combined two middle schools and moved all 8th Graders to academies at the high school sites. This has been done to gain some economy of scale while building a stronger educational system.

The local's inability to fund at a higher percentage is understandable: Somerset County stands 24th in the amount of revenue received from property taxes as well as receiving the lowest per capita revenue in the state; Somerset is the least wealthy of all counties. Nonetheless, Somerset has the third highest cost per pupil of \$11,308, which stands above the state average.

Unfortunately, this high per pupil expenditure does not provide the anticipated benefits. Somerset's student population is small but comprised of 13% Special Education Students, 1% students with 504 plans, 53% students in poverty, and 4% LEP students. Former state estimates place a per pupil cost of \$14,413 for Special Education Students, at \$13,948 per pupil for the FARMS students, and \$13,284 for LEP students. Somerset is a sprawling peninsula county with limited transportation options making per pupil transportation costs 8th from the highest in the State. Through Bridge to Excellence Thornton funding, Somerset's students are closer to receiving an equitable education than any time in the past. But, we are not there yet and current national, state, and local conditions threaten a widening gap.

1. Increased Revenue Distributions Over Six Years

The following categorical increases have been made with State and Federal revenue over the previous six years:

Category	% Increase to Category	% of Total Increased Revenue
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Administration	22%	1.3%
School Support Service	36%	5.8%
Instructional Salaries	44% Greatest \$\$	39.1%
Textbooks and Supplies	29%	1.3%
Other Instructional Costs	151%	5.8%
Special Education	53%	8.2%
Student Services	166%	2.3%
Health Services	73% Lowest \$\$	1.3%
Student Transportation	38%	6.8%
Operations of Plant	45%	7.2%
Maintenance of Plant	17%	1.4%
Fixed Charges	46%	15.0%

According to the MGT study of the impact of five years of Thornton BTE funding and consistent with our own tracking, these increases specifically brought:

\$2.15 m in Educational Program Materials & 15 positions
 \$7.30 m in Instructional Process Additions & 23 positions
 \$.86 m in Professional Development
 \$.39 m in Technology Programs and Data Use
 \$2.03 m in Utilities, Transportation, & Facilities & 2 positions

2. **Planned Targets for Increased Resources for 2008**

The establishment of budget priorities each year includes the identification of needed resources for increasing academic progress, division's identified needs, and the Master Plan Steering Team's annual identification of top priorities following a review of the system's progress. The following 2008 Budget Priorities were set:

Resources for Core Progress

- New Elementary Science and Social Studies Texts
- New Secondary English I Texts
- Additional Media Center Materials for the Intermediate School
- Up-Graded CTE Equipment

Staffing for Core Progress

- 1 Kindergarten Assistant
- 1 Media Specialist replace NHQ
- 2 Elementary Classroom Teachers
- Math Intervention Retiree Tutors
- 1 Elementary and Secondary Assessment Coordinator
- 1 Intermediate Technology Integration Specialist
- 1 Intermediate Reading Coach
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Staffing and Resources for Subgroup Progress

- Summer School Intervention Program
- 1 Additional HQ ELL Teacher
- 1 Transition ED (SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS) Teacher
- .5 Speech Therapist

- .5 Occupational Therapist
- Additional Special Education Staffing Increases

Staffing and Resources for Attendance and Graduation Progress

- Attendance Clerks
- 3 Secondary Teachers (Science and Social Studies)
- HSA Texts and Resources
- Contracting with Retirees to provide Math and English Intervention Tutoring

Resources for Increasing Highly Qualified Status

- Recruitment and Signing Bonus Increase
- Mentor Stipend Increase
- Site Managed Professional Development Accounts

Resources for Encore Studies

- 2 Additional Music Teachers
- 2 Additional Elementary Art Teacher

3. Eliminated or Adjusted Resources for 2008

In order to ultimately balance the 08 budget which experienced a 12% state revenue increase, <1% local revenue decrease, and 4% federal revenue decrease to meet the negotiated agreements of the SCPS' three bargaining units, the following adjustments had to be made:

- Remove Elementary Music Position of Strings Instruction (Impact: Elem Encore)
- Reduce Assessment Coordinator position to .5 (Impact: Core/Subgroup Progress)
- Decrease Site Professional Development by 1/3 (Impact: HQ)
- Eliminate Academic Intervention Tutorial Funding (Impact Subgroup Progress)
- Remove Elementary Attendance Coordinator Positions (Impact Core Progress)
- Remove Appropriate Assistant Position (Impact Special Education)
- Remove Instructional Aide Position (Impact Subgroup Progress)
- Remove .5 Instructional Aide Position (Impact Core Progress)
- Remove .5 Instructional Facilitator Position and Fill with Existing Staff (Impact Core Progress)
- Substitute Aide for Teacher Addition (Impact Special Education)

C. Fiscal Priorities of the SCPS System for 2009 and Distribution of Resources to Priorities

Somerset has two driving goals for 2009: to embed quality teaching and learning in all work with students and with one another; and to effectively integrate technology in teaching and management practices in order to enhance learning. Somerset's capital improvement goal is to move forward with the next critical phase of facility up grades and complete a Limited Systemic Renovation of Washington Academy and High School.

Within the framework of these driving goals, Somerset's 2009 Budget Process of internal and external stakeholders established the following priorities in sequential order of importance: High School Assessment Proficiency, Elementary Reading Achievement, Graduation and

Drop Out Rate Improvements, Elementary Math Achievement, Intermediate Reading Achievement, Professional Development Access, Intermediate Math Achievement, High School Reading Achievement, Highly Qualified Educator Retention, Attendance Improvement, High School Math Achievement, Bullying and Harassment Prevention, Suspension Reduction, and Special Education Achievement.

1. New Funds

Somerset has no additional funding for 2008-2009 in the operating budget but conscientiously prepared for the revenue “drought.” The process of embedding quality teaching and learning throughout the system is a professional development initiative that depends upon highly qualified, well trained coaches and site leaders to guide and reinforce collaborative planning, quality instruction, targeted assessment, data analysis, and intervention. The leaders are in place; the time is in place through secondary weekly After School Professional Development (APD), Elementary Team Collaborations during the day, and Early Dismissal Professional Development each quarter (EDPD). This goal priority is being met with no new funds for 2009.

The Somerset Commissioners did elect to support two of the three Technology Initiatives for 2009 which include a one to one student laptop program for 7th Graders and the full technology equipping of all 8th Grade classrooms through Non-recurring Funds.

Frugal use of 2007 year’s increased revenue coupled with several unfilled positions and greater number of retirements and resignations than anticipated resulted in a substantial prior year revenue available for use in 2009. Previous years’ fund balance carryover has always been applied to capital expenses, not operations. However, in order to preserve positions critical to students’ progress, a large portion of these funds were allocated to instructional salaries.

2. Continuing Funds

In order to meet critical budget priorities, funds from the following areas were reduced or eliminated:

Redistributed Funds for ‘09

- \$199,500 Reductions in External Professional Development Funds
- \$ 41,400 Reductions in Elementary Textbooks
- \$506,988 Eliminated Positions through Attrition and Reassignment
- \$ 60,500 Delay of Media and Furniture Replacement
- \$ 50,000 Reduction in External Consultants
- \$ 98,200 Redistributed Revenue to Instructional Technology Equipment
- \$ 67,000 Elimination of Recruiting and Retirement Bonuses
- \$ 20,000 Elimination of Maintenance Vehicle Purchase

Retargeted Funds

- Principal Position Transferred to Instructional Position of CTE Teacher Academy Teacher and Coordinator of Bridge Program for HSA
- Itinerant Teacher Position at Woodson Elementary Transferred to Open New Kindergarten Section
- Instructional Coaches and Deans Given Instructional Responsibilities
- Teaching Positions Moved to Intervention Assignments

D. Summary Statement

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

- the addition of nine (9) academic intervention positions;
- the expansion of site based instructional coaches in reading, math, science, and technology
- the expansion of student services personnel by an additional nineteen positions (19);
- the increase in special education staffing by fourteen positions (14);
the provision of a coherent and consistent program of high quality professional development;
- the increase of instructional time for students at the elementary level;
- the addition of extended year programs for elementary and middle level students; and,
- the capacity of all staff to access, manage, and apply student data to classroom and intervention instruction.

Federal competitive grant funds have provided two critical programs: (1) After School and Summer Academic Intervention (21st Century Grant), and (2) Team Based Student Services-Learning Support Program at each site (Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant). Both will reach the end of their cycle in 2009.

The withdrawal of Thornton Bridge to Excellence revenue, the closure of Federal Grant support, and the diminishing Federal Funds for Title I threaten to eliminate the significant progress of Somerset's students.

II. GOAL PROGRESS

A. Maryland School Assessments/High School Assessments

Progress on the Maryland School Assessment of Achievement has been substantial and encouraging, particularly at the elementary level. In Elementary Reading, students have exceeded the AMO target for the fifth year in a row with the aggregate percent proficient closing 63% of the gap since 2003. All seven subgroups have increased in percent proficient. Somerset Elementary students will reach the 100% target by 2014. While reading performance is not as strong at the Middle Level, the 2008 scores reveal a 21percentage point proficiency gain in number of students proficient, with Grades 6 and 7 students exceeding the AMO targets for the first time in four years. At the High School Level, Somerset was particularly encouraged to see the continuing gains made by the African American subgroup in English II progress.

Mathematics achievement continues to improve at the elementary level showing a 24.7 percentage point proficiency gain since 2003 and all subgroups except Special Education Students meeting the AMO target. At the Middle Level, students met the AMO target for the first time in four years with the Special Education subgroup continuing its upward trend in percent proficient at each year's assessment. At the High School level, the aggregate results of math proficiency-Algebra Data Analysis have steadily increased over the past four years with the aggregate groups at both high schools exceeding the AMO target.

Somerset's secondary students continue to make significant progress in passing the HSA gate to their high school graduation. The class of 2009 includes less than 25 students who have not passed all four assessments. This is a small number of students with whom we can provide the necessary encouragement and preparation to enable meeting the 1602 composite or successfully complete the alternative Bridge projects.

B. Special Education Subgroup Progress

LSS Response to Clarifying Question(s): The Special Education subgroup sustained progress at the elementary level, made encouraging progress at the Middle Level particularly in reading, and plunged to exceptionally low performance at the High School Level. Continuing in the same vein and working harder will not be sufficient to move this subgroup forward. SCPS believes that a more individualized and structured instructional program that recognizes each student's disability while creating supportive means for full participation will result in greater success for each special education student. Specifically, the system will follow Dr. Thomas Hehir of Harvard Graduate School of Leadership's "Guidelines for Special Education Decision Making," by 1) Reviewing each Special Education student's diagnosis for accuracy and appropriateness of accommodations; 2) Considering the family's capacities and desires for their child; 3) Involving special education students in decisions about their own education and thereby nurturing and reinforcing their self determination; 4) Building on each student's strengths in skills and modes of expression; 5) Keeping integration as a priority at all levels and maximizing co-teaching to the benefit of the class as a whole; 6) Promoting high standards in instruction, expectations, and intervention; 7) Assuring full access to opportunities to learn of each special education student. Implementing these strategies is requiring full scheduling changes at the high school; advisory assignments of all staff to special needs students; increased trainings, supervision and monitoring of co-taught classes of both the special education teacher and the regular education teacher; and the establishment of monthly or bi-weekly benchmark goals for special education students' performances at each site within departments. One strategy that has been successful at the elementary level with special education and other subgroups of students is Response to Intervention (RTI)-the proactive instructional efforts to support and intervene in learning before the identification of a serious problem or deficiency. Moving this approach to the secondary level for core instruction will support increased success for students. A second elementary strategy that has proven exceptionally effective and one which is now being implemented at the secondary level, is collaborative planning of lessons, team debriefing of instruction, and shared assessment of student work.

C. Limited English Proficient Students

Progress of Limited English Proficient students as measured by the AMAO II continues to increase with the group exceeding the target. Success is strongest at the middle level with 90% of the students meeting their targets. Similar outstanding gains are seen in the LEP subgroup performances on the MSA. On this measure, the elementary subgroup has for the first time exceeded the Reading and Math AMO targets.

D. Adequate Yearly Progress

Each of Somerset County's elementary schools and intermediate school successfully met Maryland's AYP criteria for 2008. Of the two high schools, one made AYP through the Safe Harbor guidelines. The other high school missed the AYP target due to Special Education Students' shortfall and a seriously diminished graduation rate. This outcome reverses the previous year's AYP results. In 2009, both schools intend to meet AYP.

E. Highly Qualified Teachers

In spite of serious shortages of teachers in particular secondary fields, Somerset will have 92% of all classes in the county taught by Highly Qualified teachers this year. Each shortfall is at the Secondary level where we continue to pursue and develop highly qualified teachers in Science and Mathematics. Our efforts to date do represent a 39 percentage point gain since 2003. The retention rate of Somerset County teachers is 92.2% for 2008 and stands as the highest percentage in three years.

F. Safe Schools

Somerset does not have any schools identified as “Persistently Dangerous,” in “Probationary” status, or exceeding the identified suspension limits. The majority of schools were official PBIS schools in 2008; all will be in 2009. Although Somerset’s overall suspension rate exceeds an acceptable number, 2008 did see a substantial reduction in suspensions due to harassment and bullying and a small decrease in overall suspensions.

G. Specific Student Groups

Expansion of the Career and Technology Program came through the addition of a Fire and Rescue Program and the addition of the second year program to the Teacher Academy Program. Both of these programs are in the Human Resources Cluster and have proven to be engaging programs motivating student enrollment and providing challenging and rigorous study and field experiences. At the beginning point of Somerset’s public education, those children who enter kindergarten fully ready to learn continue to demonstrate potential that exceeds the state’s average. Somerset continues to develop its Gifted and Talented Program striving to maintain an open door to all students of various cultures with primary programs delivered to all and designed to help teachers recognize giftedness and talent. The program was expanded to upper elementary during 2008 and will continue to be developed in 2009.

H. Cross Cutting Themes

Educational Technology has been a continuing priority for the past several years and has moved to forefront as one of two critical goals for 2009. Readiness for fully utilizing technology as a tool to increase student achievement and teachers’ effectiveness has been an underlying initiative impacting training and facilities. During 2008, staff knowledge and skill to integrate technology into instruction substantially increased through the achievement of 91% of the staff successfully completing the Technology I hands-on assessment, required of all administrative and teaching staff and an additional 115 teachers completing Level II Technology Certification enabling their fluent integration of various technologies into instructional delivery and student involvement. Equipping of the new Intermediate School which opened in January of 2008 included providing a wireless facility, Promethean Boards and Activotes in all classrooms, audio enhancement in each classroom, document cameras, and carted laptops for classroom use. Of importance and continual attention to Somerset is equity. Somerset’s students and staff continue to gain equitable access to appropriate technology resources.

Within the area of Education That Is Multicultural, Somerset continues to make progress in two goal areas: first, extending and institutionalizing a culture of respect; and secondly, enriching curriculum and instruction with multicultural resources aligned with the Maryland State Voluntary Curriculum.

I. Local Goals and Indicators

Somerset has completed the Reorganization Phase of its capital improvement initiatives with the opening of the Somerset Intermediate School (Grades 6 and 7) in January 2008. This was

a major accomplishment and stands as a point of pride in Somerset County among its students, community, and staff. Its benefits are only beginning to be reaped. Of equal importance but less prominence has been the development and implementation of an effective Master Plan document, program of implementation, monitoring, and assessment. Strategic planning was a new experience for Somerset County Public Schools and community six years ago. Our charge now is to make it less cumbersome and more productive, although it has clearly fostered Somerset's excellent progress. As a school community and a Board, Somerset has been focused on increasing all stakeholders' pride in the Somerset Public School System. While nothing works more effectively than excellent education and progress by students spawning informal comments throughout the schools and community, several explicit events have hurled this goal forward. One is the continuation of an annual State of the School Luncheon held each Spring for our commissioners, legislators, economic development council, businesses, institutions, service providers, community, and parents to provide a report on our schools and their progress. It is extremely well received. Additionally, Somerset was fortunate to have its Teacher of the Year named as Maryland's State Teacher of the Year bringing many accolades and recognitions to Somerset.

IV. CONCLUSION

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' performance in Reading and the 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; we have seen outstanding growth and proficiency at some levels in some areas. We are challenged to better conquer our Special Education Students learning hurdles and lead them to proficiency. Special need subgroups and at risk students require, 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 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.

We cannot do this without resources. The Thornton Bridge to Excellence funding provided a remarkable increase in the capacity of Somerset to serve its children. It has been used well and must continue at a level that sustains and does not diminish the opportunities to learn so needed and deserved by the children of Somerset.

Dr. Karen-Lee N. Brofee, Superintendent of Schools
Somerset County Public Schools
2008 Update to the Master Plan

