Achieve! 1.0

Wicomico County Public Schools

Donna C. Hanlin, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
February 2017
Dear Community Members, Families and Staff of Wicomico County Public Schools,

I am pleased to share with the community **Achieve! 1.0**, my report on your Wicomico County Public Schools. This report encompasses a Listening and Learning phase, Vision Points, and a Leading Phase for the remainder of the 2016-2017 school year.

The Listening and Learning section provides the community with a glimpse of the work in which I've been engaged since being appointed as your Superintendent of Schools almost a year ago. Many of the strategies have already been accomplished. The report also includes four Vision Points developed from all that has been accomplished during the first five months of my tenure. Following the Vision Points, the Leading Phase describes major initiatives planned as part of the very important work that lies ahead.

This work must be approached through a careful balance of a sense of urgency and an understanding of the factors that bring about true adaptive change, the most important of which is collaboration across the entire Wicomico County community. Therefore, **Achieve! 1.0** largely focuses on building collaborative, productive relationships with all who have a stake in the success of public education in Wicomico County: individuals, groups, businesses, elected officials, agencies, higher education, faith-based partners and many others. We can all contribute to and benefit from a successful public education system that supports the community’s overall success.

This report is created and shared as a vehicle for establishing a culture of trust with stakeholders in Wicomico County. Through the activities described in this report, I have gained and will continue to gain great insights into the strengths and needs of our students, staff, school system, and community as a whole. These insights will inform future plans toward the goal of achieving excellence for our school system.
Superintendent’s Core Values

Core values drive human behavior. Therefore, this report to the community begins with my strongly held beliefs about the education of children. These values guide my daily work as a leader in education and strongly influence the Vision Points articulated and the initiatives described in Achieve! 1.0.

- Children come first. We must be committed to equity and opportunity for ALL students.

- All children can learn. Children have limitless potential. Through effort-based education in an effort-based environment, people (students) will become smarter.

- The development of the whole child happens inside the classroom when students learn to think critically, work together to solve problems, and explore interests.

- Teachers and principals are our most valuable resources. We must support them and empower them to provide transformative instructional experiences for all children.

- Schools are learning organizations where respectful and productive relationships are cultivated, and critical reflection, shared accountability, and continuous improvement are promoted.

- Parents, guardians and families are our partners; they are the primary custodians of their child’s learning. Our role is to work in partnership with parents to provide students with the education they need and deserve.

- We are trusted stewards of public resources. As such, we should work in collaboration with the community to improve conditions impacting student learning.

- Fairness, consistency, and compassion breed loyalty, trust, and motivation to accomplish goals. Open and honest communication with the entire community leads to engagement and fosters success. Listening is paramount.

- Relationships are central to what we do. Education is a people business and the impact on human beings should always be carefully considered.
Listening and Learning: July-September 2016

This phase of listening and learning was accomplished through school facilities tours, attendance at school system and community events, and interviews, meetings, or focus group sessions with key internal and external stakeholders. Not only did these opportunities provide insight into strengths and areas of need, but they also allowed relationships to be established and for me, as the new superintendent, to have a positive presence in the community. Ultimately, this phase was designed to lead to a coalition of support for Wicomico County Public Schools and the continuing academic progress of all students. The following four goals with specific strategies were designed as part of the phase.

Goal 1: Establish a strong collaborative working relationship with the Board of Education.

Strategies:

1. Meet with the Board of Education to develop a clear understanding of responsibilities, expectations, Board governance structures, and communication systems to promote an effective and efficient Board-Superintendent working relationship.

2. Collaborate with the Board to determine the Superintendent evaluation process, procedures, timelines, and goals.

3. Schedule one-on-one meetings with individual Board members to broaden perspectives on issues associated with school system operations.
4. Establish a weekly communication protocol to keep the Board of Education aware of general system events/activities.

5. Establish regular meeting times with the Board President to review Board meeting agendas and to discuss school system matters.

6. Review all current Board of Education committee work, policies, and procedures.

7. Schedule Board work sessions to discuss governance issues, vision, school system matters, and regular professional development training for the Board and the Superintendent as needed.

Goal 2: Establish productive, collaborative relationships with all community stakeholders.

Strategies:

1. Meet with civic, business, faith-based, political, media, and educational leaders to listen and learn about the community and the school system from their perspectives.

2. Conduct School Learning Tours. Meet with students, teachers, principals, and employee groups to listen and learn about the school and school system from their perspectives.
3. Meet with representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Salisbury Committee, and other organizations to listen and learn about the school system and community from their perspectives. Become involved via memberships as appropriate.

4. Attend and participate in city and county events as appropriate. Attend campus gatherings (athletic events, family nights, open houses) to build strong relationships with the Wicomico County school community.

5. Meet with parent organizations to listen and learn about the school system from their perspectives.

6. Meet with each employee association leadership group to listen and learn about the school system from their perspectives.

7. Meet with the school system’s communication staff to gain an understanding of the roles of staff, Superintendent, and Board of Education with respect to current internal and external communications practices.
Goal 3: Ensure high levels of achievement through equal opportunity and access for every student.

Strategies:

1. Evaluate all available data relative to the academic achievement of students including local benchmark assessment and standardized test results, other pertinent literacy data, graduation and College and Career Readiness data, and discipline data to identify trends in the academic progress of students across the school system.

2. Inventory all instructional initiatives. Pay specific attention to literacy and math instruction, the use of instructional learner-driven technology, the existence of a digital learning plan, and aligned professional development. Assess levels of bandwidth and Wi-Fi access to ensure opportunities for digital learning in all classrooms. Ensure that professional development is based upon teachers’ and administrators’ needs and is teacher-led when appropriate.

3. Meet with Assistant Superintendents and instructional directors to discuss the academic performance, culture, and climate of schools to establish a sense of urgency in working together as a team to promptly and effectively analyze the performance of all schools and provide the appropriate support to school leaders.

4. Assess the extent to which a culture of high expectations exists, specifically for populations of underperforming students. Assess underlying beliefs about learning.

5. Evaluate placement of staffing to ensure that the most talented principals and teachers are working in the schools with the greatest needs. Encourage principals to be innovative and submit proposals for rethinking structural and instructional approaches in their schools. Implement an Innovation Network to bring instructional leaders together to identify, explore, develop, and scale great ideas.

6. Evaluate the extent to which resources are targeted for the improvement of early learning. Support parents to help with language development at home by partnering with Ready at Five.
7. Work with partners to assess availability and access to high quality Prekindergarten, and after-school programs and wraparound services at all levels.

8. Conduct Learning Tours in all schools to observe and analyze instructional programs, course offerings, practices, curriculum, and intervention programs and determine level of effectiveness in improving student achievement.

9. Evaluate system efforts to improve graduation rates for all students with a special focus on English Language Learners, special education students, minority students, and students of low socio-economic status. Pay specific attention to human capital targeted for a reduction in the dropout rate.

10. Meet with higher education leaders to assess opportunities for students who are college-ready such as dual enrollment, P-Tech, and/or the Wicomico Economic Impact Scholarship.

11. Meet with students to listen and learn their perceptions of the quality of school climate and access to academic rigor in their schools.
Goal 4: Examine, develop and implement systems that support safety, climate, attendance, and discipline in all schools.

Strategies:

1. Evaluate safety policies, procedures, and personnel to determine level of effectiveness. Collaborate with community groups to examine the root causes for high levels of student suspensions, including disparity in suspensions.

2. Conduct school tours to determine if systems have been effective in supporting the teaching/learning process and increasing staff morale.

3. Examine student attendance, tardiness, and truancy data to determine if systems have been effective in increasing student attendance rates and decreasing tardiness and truancy.

4. Examine student discipline data (in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension) to determine if systems are in place to deter inappropriate behavior and establish a safe and orderly school environment.

5. Conduct safety, climate, attendance, and discipline program evaluations and document reviews to determine effectiveness. Specific attention will be paid to the extent to which PBIS is implemented with fidelity. Additionally, alternative levels of intervention including Choices Academy will be examined to ensure restorative practices are the foundation for such programs.
Visioning: October-December 2016

This phase consisted of analysis and planning. All data collected during the Listening and Learning phase were analyzed to identify trends and themes. These trends and themes were then prioritized in areas of strengths and opportunities. These strengths and opportunities were then used to craft the following Vision Points that will focus our work moving forward.

Vision Points

Wicomico County Public Schools – We aspire to be:

- **a public school system rooted in a culture of respect, transparency, and collegiality; where trust, the quality of relationships, and empowerment are clearly understood to be the foundation for success.**

- **a public school system committed to safe schools; created through a careful balance of clearly communicated and enforced expectations and an atmosphere where students know that teachers and administrators believe in them.**

- **a public school system dedicated to meeting the needs of each student from the most gifted to the most challenged; focusing on early literacy, student engagement in authentic problem solving, innovative instruction that encourages creativity, and preparing students with 21st century skills necessary to successfully enter college or the world of work.**

- **a public school system our community believes in - where teachers compete for jobs, employers compete for well-prepared graduates, families choose to live, and businesses aspire to relocate because of its reputation built upon the pursuit of excellence in providing an outstanding education for our community’s students.**
This phase consists of moving from identified Vision Points into strategic action planning and implementation. Here, the Vision Points have been translated into strategic priorities and some of the major initiatives planned for the future are outlined. In addition to these major initiatives, the strategies outlined and employed in the Listening and Learning phase are very much aligned with these Vision Points/Strategic Priorities and will be integrated continuously throughout my tenure as Superintendent of Schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision Points</th>
<th>Establish a culture of trust and empowerment</th>
<th>Ensure safe and positive school climate</th>
<th>Ensure a systemic approach to rigorous and relevant curriculum</th>
<th>Create a school system the community believes in</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a system-wide climate survey with that will result in school-specific application of best practices for improved climate and safety.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Hold a visioning day for digital learning involving community stakeholders to create a digital learning plan for system improvement and innovation.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Increase resources to support greater communication within and outside the school system.</td>
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<td>Convene a task force of community stakeholders to develop recommendations for meeting the needs of highly able learners.</td>
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<td>Conduct an independent review of the Code of Conduct. Clearly communicate and consistently enforce student expectations.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Design additional alternative K-12 programs to meet the unique needs of students outside the traditional classroom.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Design innovative summer school options to address early literacy needs of students to minimize summer learning loss.</td>
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<td>Explore career-connected instructional pathways and school signature themes and/or academy-like curricular options providing for school choice. This initiative is long-range but is intended to not only serve as an instructional benefit but will also serve as a potential means for balancing school enrollment.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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Conclusion

In Wicomico County, we are working together to create a school system of excellence. Inequities in school readiness and performance exist even before children enter school, highlighting the fact that our work must be a community effort. While our test scores show improvement, these and other data points reflect that Wicomico County student progress falls below the state average. Average or below average expectations and performance are not acceptable. Our goal is to make sure that every student graduates from high school well prepared to enter college or the world of work. This will require an innovative mindset and hard work from all of us to ensure that Wicomico County students are equipped with a strong educational foundation and a 21st century skillset that will serve them in the future.

The work of improvement is complex. It places great demands on people’s time and requires a change in thinking about the education of children. Achieve! 1.0 presents four Vision Points and strategic initiatives to begin to address the needs of students in Wicomico County Public Schools. Certainly, these are not the only areas of focus that are priorities for a Superintendent of Schools. However, in the first year the close examination of student achievement, school climate, and community engagement requires a laser-like focus. This plan is simply the beginning. I look forward to our work together to benefit our students and our entire community. Thank you for being an important partner in this effort.

Sincerely,

Donna C. Hanlin, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools