Achieve! 2.0: A Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Community Members, Families, and Staff of Wicomico County Public Schools,

Last year, Achieve! 1.0 launched my first letter to the community as your new Superintendent of Wicomico County Public Schools. The document provided a three-phase overview of my first year – the listening and learning that led to four Vision Points and a description of major initiatives moving forward for Wicomico County Public Schools (WCPS).

With Achieve! 1.0 as the foundation, Achieve! 2.0 presents a narrative describing where we are focusing our efforts in my second year as Superintendent of Schools, for the 2017-2018 school year and beyond. The report begins as it did last year with my Core Values, as I believe it is important that the community be reminded of the values that guide my daily work as a leader in education, and that strongly influenced the creation of the Vision Points. The Vision Points then follow, articulating the aspirations of community and staff for our public schools and focusing our work moving forward.

Achieve! 2.0 then delves more deeply into our major priorities for the 2017-2018 school year and into the near future. These priorities have been designed to move WCPS closer to achieving our Vision Points. They provide a clear focus for our work, and serve as the foundation for the development of the FY19 Wicomico County Board of Education General Fund Budget. The achievement of our goals and the associated strategies are conceived with the ultimate aim of achieving excellence for our school system and for our students.

Whether you are a student, family member, employee or community member, you are an important part of our schools and the success of our school system. I thank our entire community for its support and commitment to continuous improvement in Wicomico County Public Schools. WCPS is very fortunate to have exceptional teachers, outstanding administrators and excellent support staff who are helping students reach their full potential every day. Together, we are providing students with the knowledge and resources they will need to carry them well into the future.
Superintendent’s Core Values

- 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.
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 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 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 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.
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<th><strong>Vision Points</strong></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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### 2017-2022 Strategic Priorities

#### Ensure that students in Wicomico County Public Schools are reading on grade level by Grade 3.

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Increase the percentage of students who enter Kindergarten ready to learn from 33% to at least 38% by 2022, as measured by the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.</th>
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**Strategies:**
1. Plan for and implement Universal Prekindergarten, including wraparound services for our youngest students.
2. Collaborate with Ready at Five for enhanced resources for families such as Ready Rosie and Parent Learning Parties.
3. Collaborate with private childcare providers for professional development.
4. Work with community partners to raise awareness and implement community-wide strategies to increase early literacy.
5. Communicate relevant information, research, and success stories about early childhood education widely in the community.

#### Ensure that students graduate from Wicomico County Public Schools college and/or career ready.

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Increase the percentage of students who enter grade nine and graduate 4 years later from 82% to at least 87% by 2022, as measured by the 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate.</th>
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**Strategies:**
1. Continue instructional visioning project to create a common language document to promote innovative 21st century learning.
2. Conduct climate surveys annually to inform school-specific initiatives for the continuous improvement of school climate.
3. Establish a High Performing and Highly Able Learners Advisory Committee to make recommendations on curriculum changes.
4. Conduct training in Restorative Practices as a tool in the continuous improvement of school climate.
5. Plan for and implement career-connected pathways and/or signature themes in middle and high schools.
6. Develop and implement alternative academic pathways that lead to graduation, including online learning opportunities, increased dual enrollment, and early college opportunities.
7. Communicate relevant information, research, and success stories about engaging instructional opportunities widely in the community.

#### Ensure a high-performing workforce.

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Decrease the employee 3-Year Average Turnover Rate from 20% to at most 15% by 2022, by recruiting and retaining a high performing workforce.</th>
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**Strategies:**
1. Establish a teacher recruitment task force, and organize a WCPS Recruitment Fair, with a specific focus on minority recruitment.
2. Conduct a salary study for all employee groups and implement priority recommendations.
3. Work with new teacher cohort and other staff groups to better understand supports needed and develop recommendations for improvements in induction program and other factors related to working conditions.
4. Communicate relevant information, research, and success stories about teacher and staff success widely in the community.
Rationale

The selection of the three (3) goals reflected in the matrix above was based upon the strong belief that with focused attention on these areas our ability to achieve our Vision Points will be greatly enhanced. Early childhood education, a higher graduation rate thanks in part to engaging instructional programing, and a consistently strong workforce are priorities that have been proven to contribute to the success of high-performing school systems; and that is exactly what we want in Wicomico County Public Schools.

Early Childhood Education

Too few children in Wicomico County (33%) enter our Kindergarten classrooms with the academic skills they need to succeed. For children who come from low-income households that figure is even more striking (28%). For Hispanic (22%) and African-American families (26%), even fewer students enter Kindergarten in Wicomico County ready to learn.

These achievement gaps are concerning. Mathematics and reading abilities at Kindergarten entry are powerful predictors of future school success, and children who enter Kindergarten already behind face many challenges if they are unable to catch up in the primary years of school. The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that students who are not reading on grade level by 3rd Grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, and that increases to six times more likely for those children coming from low-income households.

Research also suggests that participation in high-quality early childhood education programs can enhance children’s development, reduce achievement gaps at Kindergarten entry, and even have long-term benefits for children’s school experience. Such students are more likely than their peers to enjoy later academic success, attain higher levels of education, and secure employment. Because of this tremendous potential to improve children’s outcomes, Wicomico County Public Schools is committed to offering Universal Prekindergarten to all students whose families choose to take advantage of this opportunity. Imagine a Wicomico County public school system where all students have access to high quality Prekindergarten and a much greater percentage of students enter Kindergarten ready to learn. Just imagine...
Engaging 21st Century Instructional Programming

Students who graduate from high school are more likely to meet with success in college, career and life, and to become productive, engaged members of society. Conversely, dropping out of high school not only has a lifelong, devastating impact on a person’s future, but also negatively affects our community and our nation, as a whole. High school dropouts have a greater likelihood of being unemployed, living in poverty, having poor health, and/or having children who will also live in poverty.

Currently, only 82% of students who enter Grade 9 in Wicomico County Public Schools graduate with their peers four years later. Because our mission is to graduate 100% of students from our high schools, we want to ensure that our instructional programs are highly engaging and personalized for our students. Personalized learning maximizes opportunities for every student. It is a student-centered approach to help all students develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will prepare them for college, a career, and life. In schools that are working to personalize learning, teachers, school staff, and other adults in the community work to prioritize trusting and caring relationships; understand each student’s strengths, interests, and needs; connect students’ interests to real-world learning opportunities; target instruction and resources to help students progress at their own pace; equip teachers and students with technology and data to enhance learning and assess student progress; and create flexible learning environments.

Imagine a Wicomico County Public School System where student choice is offered with greater opportunities in career and technology education, the arts, finance and business, STEM, International Baccalaureate, expanded dual enrollment and early college programs. Just imagine...
High - Performing Workforce

Attracting and retaining a high-performing workforce is one of the most important drivers of a well-functioning school system. A persistently high rate of turnover contributes to a concentration of inexperienced and underprepared staff in schools, and threatens students’ success in school. When high numbers of staff members leave the school district, student learning is impacted as is the cost to taxpayers.

Aside from factors that are personal in nature and beyond the control of the school system such as pregnancy, childcare, or relocation of spouse, research generally cites four major factors for high staff turnover. Those factors include:

- Challenging working conditions
- Lack of support for new staff
- Inadequate preparation
- Dissatisfaction with salary and benefits

With a three-year average turnover rate of 20%, Wicomico County Public Schools is focused on improving the consistency of a high-quality, experienced workforce for the academic welfare of our students. Imagine a Wicomico County public school system where teachers and other staff begin their careers here and remain committed to the education of our students for their entire career. Just imagine...
Conclusion

Imagine Wicomico County Public Schools as we achieve these major priorities: Kindergarten students entering school ready to learn because of the availability of Prekindergarten for all; higher graduation rates because of personalized, engaging career pathways based upon student choice; and a workforce of teachers and other staff who establish their roots for the long term in Wicomico County Public Schools. The goals that have been set for the near future will be continually evaluated as we continue to move the needle for the ultimate benefit of our students and community.

Together we can make these things happen for our students and our community. I look forward to our continued work together and to celebrating our successes. Just imagine…

Sincerely,

Dr. Donna C. Hanlin
Superintendent of Schools