Blueprint for Maryland's Future:

First Implementation Plan, Phase Two

Garrett County Public Schools
March 2024 Submission

Systemwide Blueprint Implementation

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future will improve the quality and equity of Maryland's education system so that ALL Maryland students, regardless of where they live, their household income, race, ethnicity, gender, language spoken at home, disability, and any other unique characteristic, can leave high school globally competitive and prepared for success in postsecondary education, work, and life.

To reach this outcome, Maryland public schools must transform by rethinking and redesigning existing policies and practices to create a system that equitably serves all students and prepares them for success. This is your opportunity to share how your district has been approaching this change and its plans for the future.

Be sure to include or address the following points in your response:
- How are your district's vision, goals, strategic plan, and other system and school-level plans aligned to the Blueprint? Consider the connections across pillars and how the expected outcomes of the Blueprint intersect with and align to district programming
- How your district is communicating its goals and plans with those implementing the Blueprint in the district, including principals and educators; soliciting feedback; and adapting its communication strategies to improve stakeholder understanding of the Blueprint's purpose
- How your district is making systemic changes to support ongoing Blueprint implementation; consider the strategies that have and have not been successful in your approach to reaching the Blueprint's expected outcomes
- Your district's three greatest challenges to Blueprint implementation, including the rationale for selecting them, the specific initiatives/programs/strategies the district will implement to address them, and how your district will transform to implement these strategies effectively
- How the district will monitor progress towards addressing its three greatest challenges to reaching the Blueprint's expected outcome

Criteria for Success
- Describes how the district is creating a system that equitably serves all students and prepares them for success in alignment with the Blueprint's expected outcome   - Addresses all of the bullets in its response clearly, concisely, and comprehensively

Garrett County Public Schools (GCPS) is committed to achieving the outcomes outlined in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint) as we work collectively with staff, students, parents, and community for a brighter tomorrow for all students. To achieve this, GCPS continues to transform systems and structures as outlined in our Blueprint Implementation Plan to equitably serve all students. To elevate this work as a priority for the school system, the Blueprint Implementation Plan acts as the system's strategic plan for how we will realize the expected outcomes of the Blueprint. As such, the Blueprint priorities are embedded throughout district-wide initiatives and integrated into various system plans such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan, draft Literacy Plan, as well as school improvement plans. Furthermore, as the district further develops the Math Comprehensive Plan and MTSS Support Framework, alignment with Blueprint outcomes will be a priority.

District Alignment with the Blueprint
How are your district's vision, goals, strategic plan, and other system and school-level plans aligned to the Blueprint? Consider the connections across pillars and how the expected outcomes of the Blueprint intersect with and align to district programming.

Garrett County Public School's mission, vision, and goals have been in place for many years. During the 2023-2024 school year, GCPS's Chief Academic Officer led a process to tune and adjust its current mission, vision, and goals to reflect a closer alignment with the Blueprint. This process has engaged each of the five pillar leaders in addition to leaders from key community partners and administrators throughout the county. The work has primarily occurred during the monthly Executive Blueprint Committee meetings although engagement from other groups such as the Administrator and Supervisors team and Pillar I Steering Committee have also informed adjustments.

As a part of this work, leaders have engaged in visioning protocols which required imagining the future state of GCPS after 10 years of Blueprint implementation. With this vision in mind, the system has cross walked the priorities outlined in the current mission/vision and found strong alignment with the Blueprint. The GCPS's vision elevates three cross-cutting areas of focus aligned with the Blueprint that will help the system engage in the types of transformation called for by the Blueprint. These areas of focus include:

- **Staffing:** Recruit and retain high quality staff (Pillars 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- **High Quality Instruction:** Ensure all students have access to quality instruction and appropriate support (Pillars 1, 2, 3, 4)
- **Partnerships**: Foster collaboration between schools, community, and families (Pillars 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

A draft copy of the mission and vision work can be found at the following link: GCPS Draft Mission, Vision, and Priorities. The next phase of this work will be to solicit feedback and approval from the Superintendent and Board of Education.

A similar process as described above was also undertaken by the Executive Blueprint Committee to build on GCPS's current goals and make explicit the connections to the Blueprint. The Executive Committee developed cross-cutting goals for school year 24-25 through school year 26-27, aligned to the three focus areas that if accomplished would represent substantive progress towards fulfilling the GCPS Vision/Mission as well as the goals outlined in the Blueprint. This work will eventually turn into a 3-year strategic plan for GCPS and will function in concert with the system's Blueprint Implementation Plans.

First, Pillar Leaders were asked to carefully study the data and progress monitoring requirements in the 2024 Blueprint submission guidance. The committee considered the updated draft mission/vision as well as what we learned from a landscape analysis about the district's assets and pain points. In doing so, the team identified three cross-cutting areas of focus listed above. With these areas of focus in mind and leveraging tools from Strategy in Action and the 5Es framework, pillar leads were able to name how their work connected to these focus areas and began to draft measurable targets in each area. Lastly, we used consensus building protocols to identify 3 to 4 high leverage targets for each of the three priority areas. This enabled the team to begin to map out the key actions in our 3-year plan.

A draft summary of our three year targets and actions can be found here: Three Year Strategic Plan Summary. Once the strategic plan is finalized it will serve as a roadmap for district leaders to implement the Blueprint. The work above captures a strategic shift towards inter-departmental collaboration by focusing on the natural connections between the pillars and setting shared goals. Our belief is that by de-siloing this work we will be better equipped to accomplish the Blueprint's goals.

Communication and Engagement

How your district is communicating its goals and plans with those implementing the Blueprint in the district, including principals and educators; soliciting feedback; and adapting its communication strategies to improve stakeholder understanding of the Blueprint's purpose.

The Executive Blueprint Team has worked together to develop a two-pronged plan for communication that outlines opportunities to "inform and educate" stakeholders as well as to "collaborate and solicit" feedback. Additionally, the plan details how cross-cutting structures such as the GCPS website, steering committees, board meetings, social media, and monthly Administrative & Supervisor (A & S) meetings will be leveraged. The team has prioritized two-way communication and feedback to support the transformations needed to effectively implement its Blueprint plan.

To make the most of the monthly A & S meeting with building leaders, GCPS is sharing key messages that support the 'why' behind each pillar including specifics of the legislation as well as concrete headlines about what will change at the school-level next year and what will stay the same. After each A & S meeting, school leaders are asked to redeliver this content to their staff during an upcoming staff meeting and use a simple google survey to capture stakeholder feedback. Additionally, A & S is being leveraged to help building level administrators understand what makes an effective sticky message to equip them to effectively communicate with their staff about the Blueprint.

The chart below shows topics covered as well as topics planned for future A & S meetings:

A & S Meeting Schedule and Topics					
Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April
Topic: Blueprint Visioning /North Star Discussion & Feedback Connection: All Pillars	Topic: Comprehensive Literacy Plan (Goals & Strategies) Feedback Connection: Pillar 3	Topic: Building Understanding of the Career Ladder: Inform and Educate Connection: Pillar 2	Topic: GCPS Blueprint Draft Priorities and Action Steps Discussion and Feedback Connection: All Pillars	Topic: Elementary: Early Childhood Opportunities & Next Step Discussion and Feedback Secondary: MTSS Framework Discussion Connection: Pillar 1 and 3	Topic: Review of Final Submission and Gather Feedback Connection: All Pillars

GCPS has also prioritized providing monthly Board Blueprint Updates at regular scheduled public meetings. Topics have included highlights and information about the following Blueprint Initiatives: Early Childhood Education, Post CCR Pathways, Career Counseling, Newly Adopted CCR Standard, Community Schools, and the Blueprint Implementation Plan Process.

Below is a list of additional communication strategies across all 5 pillars:
- Two community CCR nights (one at both high schools) were held to share opportunities specific to post CCR pathways including CTE programs, Dual Enrollment, Apprenticeship, and AP pathways. These were heavily attended and successful.
- A meeting with local businesses was also conducted to recruit and support the implementation of apprenticeship pathways.
- Early childhood staff have provided 1:1 collaborative opportunities to support movement towards increasing the quality of eligible private providers. A detailed list of these touchpoints is documented in the GCPS private provider outreach log.

- Blueprint leaders have reflected and adjusted membership on many steering committees to expand stakeholder involvement and ensure a wide variety of participation (added community partners, numbers of teachers/building level administrators, parents, etc.).
- The first GCPS Blueprint Bulletin: Implementing the Next Phase of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future was published for all stakeholders in March 2024 and highlighted Pillars 1 and 2. The next Bulletin will include Blueprint priorities and targets as well as the information about the New CCR Standard. This is a shift away from infographics highlighting a single pillar to a Bulletin highlighting content and connections across pillars.
- The Blueprint Coordinator provided a presentation to the Rotary Club highlighting Blueprint initiatives with plans to present at the Civics club later this spring.

Additionally, pillar leaders are prioritizing focus groups this year as a key strategy to capture feedback from stakeholders. They are also synthesizing themes in the feedback they hear during listening sessions, committee meetings, and focus groups using a simple consistent feedback protocol. To date:
- The Pillar 1 Steering Committee has leveraged surveys and a focus group to understand how GCPS parents were experiencing Pre-K enrollment and programming. These efforts helped the Pillar 1 committee identify barriers and opportunities for improvement that they were able to apply this spring. For example, parents shared that they were hungry for more details about how a school was structured for 3-year olds. As a result, sample school-day schedules will be provided for parents, during in person registration days.
- The Pillar 2 committee has conducted focus groups with NBC teachers and non- NBC teachers to understand their perspectives on barriers and incentives to pursuing this credential. One-on-one meetings were also conducted with members of the Pillar 2 Advisory Group to collect qualitative data around the career ladder and next steps forward.

Systematic Change to Support Blueprint Implementation
How your district is making **systemic changes** to support ongoing Blueprint implementation; consider the strategies that have and have not been successful in your approach to reaching the Blueprint's expected outcomes

There have been many successes in GCPS's implementation of the Blueprint during the last school year. These successes have led to large scale systemic changes as evidenced below.

1. Establishing New Pre-K 3 Classrooms (Pillar 1)
GCPS offers universal pre-K 4 opportunities to all students who desire to attend GCPS. As such, GCPS has focused on expanding three year old public Pre-K by standing up three regional Pre-K 3 collaborative classrooms with Head Start. This has allowed the system to increase enrollment of eligible three year olds in high quality early childhood programming. While these classrooms are successful with the enrolled students, there is an opportunity to reach more eligible students. GCPS has collected parent feedback and analyzed enrollment

trends to determine gaps in its existing approach. Through this qualitative and quantitative data analysis, a need for more diverse models has emerged. By focusing on achieving a mixed delivery system, we hope to provide parents with quality options that are as close to home as possible in addition to our quality regional programs. Access to nearby quality options is especially needed in the more geographically spread out areas.

2. High Quality Staffing: Grow Your Own (Pillar 2)

Over the last two years our "Grow Your Own" initiative has focused on building a pipeline of educators by providing opportunities for staff to pursue additional educational credentials. As a result, our staff has acquired the advanced degrees and certifications shown in the table to the right.

Moving forward we will shift resources to incentivizing our current staff to pursue and ultimately attain National Board Certification in Pre-K through grade 12, while we continue to build our bench by developing an Associates Degree path, in

Degree/Certification	# of Staff
Masters of Arts in Teaching	2
Bachelors Degree	1
Associates Degree	2
Registered Behavior Technician Certificate	12
Child Development Associates	5
Board Certified Behavior Analyst	*5 pursuing*

education, for GCPS students who are interested in careers in the field of education.

3. Aligning Instruction in ELA Classrooms to the Science of Reading (Pillar 1, 3, 4)

Over the last year, GCPS has made tremendous progress in shifting instructional practices in classrooms towards evidence-based literacy practices. By the end of this school year, we will have fully trained all Pre-K3, Pre-K4, Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade teachers as well as all intervention and special education teachers in the Science of Reading. All elementary administrators will also be trained by the end of the school year. Many PK-2 teachers and administrators have also received volume 1 of LETRS training as evidenced by the chart to the right.

LETRS Training	# of Staff Trained
Volume 1 complete	52
Volume 2 (partially complete)	15
Volume 2 complete	23
Early Childhood	23
Administrators	9

Elementary schools have launched new high quality ELA materials. While high schools are piloting materials for struggling readers. District and school instructional leaders have developed and piloted a classroom walk-through tool that focuses on whether instructional practices

aligned to the Science of Reading are in place and plan to tweak it for stronger alignment to LETRS in school year 2024-2025.

While we are well on our way to building the knowledge and skill of our staff and shifting behaviors and mindsets system-wide, we did encounter some challenges early on in our efforts to get our staff trained in LETRS. We learned that a one-size-fits-all approach and providing teachers with only one way to participate in LETRS would not work. Ultimately, we needed to provide options and flexibility for teachers so they could fit LETRS coursework into their busy schedules. One popular option was providing release time during the school day. Building on our past successes and lessons learned, we are continuing to look at ways to provide LETRS training for those who are interested in completing both volumes.

4. Increasing Post CCR Pathways (Pillar 3)

Over the last couple years, our district leadership team has worked collaboratively with Frostburg University, West Virginia University, Allegany Community College, and Garrett College in order to increase access for our high school students to complete dual enrollment courses, apprenticeships, and CTE programs. In a small county, we needed streamlined and coherent solutions to implement elements of the Blueprint. Redesigning our secondary master schedule, reconfiguring grade bands, and implementing a northern campus model have been effective strategies in our context.

In SY 23-24, we launched the Bobcat Academy. Our goal was to provide GCPS students with the opportunity to earn their first full year of college credits from Frostburg State University (FSU). Our initial vision was to provide enrolled students with coursework aligned to five specific pathways. However, we quickly learned from stakeholder feedback that students, parents, and school administrators needed more flexibility and that students wanted the opportunity to take courses of their choice. We also encountered scheduling conflicts that could only be solved with a more flexible approach. Moving towards fall of 2025, GCPS will be rolling out a more flexible model of the Bobcat Academy, that allows students more freedom to choose their FSU coursework provided that they take at least one English and one Math course in order to satisfy graduation requirements.

While establishing robust post-CCR pathways has resulted in positive systemic change for our students, we need to shift efforts to building and implementing a more robust secondary Multi-Tiered System of Support framework. By having MTSS in place, our schools will be better equipped to identify students who may not be on track to college and career readiness and provide them with adequate support.

5. Systemic Structures that Support Cross Pillar Work (All Pillars)

GCPS has been intentional about developing opportunities for coherence across pillars in the areas of Blueprint plan development, vision/mission and strategic planning, resource allocation specific to instructional materials, and communication. GCPS recognizes the interconnectedness of all the pillars which requires an integrated approach to realize the system

priorities. As a small county, communicating across departments is a routine occurrence and has lent itself well to supporting cross pillar work through the Executive Blueprint Committee.

Challenges and Strategies
Your district's three greatest challenges to Blueprint implementation, including the **rationale** for selecting them, the **specific initiatives/programs/strategies** the district will implement to address them, and **how your district will transform** to implement these strategies effectively.

1. Establishing a Mixed Delivery System for Early Childhood

Rationale: GCPS has made great progress with public early childhood programming by providing universal Pre-K 4 opportunities and adding three 3-year old GCPS/Head Start collaborative classrooms. However, Garrett County still has zero eligible private providers offering Pre-K slots. In order to attain Blueprint outcomes, a mixed delivery system is required. Following a parent focus group, an increased need was identified for additional enrollment slots within the local school area. Identifying or expanding private/public enrollment slots through a mixed delivery system will meet this need.

2023-2024 Early Childhood Enrollment (September 30, 2023)	
Eligible Private Provider Enrollment	**0**
Tier 1 Student Enrollment in GCPS Public 3-year old programs	**42**
Enrollment in GCPS 4- year old programs (Universal)	**159**
Student Enrollment in Kindergarten	**247**

Initiatives to address challenge:
GCPS has identified the following strategies to support the implementation of a mixed delivery system:
- Increase private provider outreach as documented in a cohesive Provider Communication Outreach Log
- Provide professional development to private providers
- Provide funding to support requirements for Maryland EXCELS and accreditation for Judy Center partners and provide support for the MSDE accreditation scholarship
- Ensure expansion grant and eligibility support as well as technical assistance within the next two years for two private daycares, in addition to three Head Start sites
- Partner with MSDE specific to private provider qualifications and the process towards private provider eligibility FY25 and beyond
- Refer providers to supportive child care agencies like APPLES for Children and Child Care Choices as well as provide SEL assistance to support EXCELS ratings of a 5.
- Build on our strong collaboration with Head Start with the goal of having all three year old Head Start classes qualify as eligible providers within the next three years
- Continue to build on the partnership with the Early Childhood Advisory Council to support private provider eligibility
- Expand the universal enrollment process to reflect a unified approach for parents as private providers become eligible

Two-way communication strategies
- Provide one on one support to private providers
- Facilitate parent focus groups to identify areas of need for expansion opportunities and address mitigating barriers negatively impacting enrollment
- Provide support and educational opportunities to private providers to assist in the process of becoming an eligible provider
- Engage with private providers to support pursuit of accreditation
- Inform families about eligibility criteria and public/private options as private providers become available

Transformations needed
- Structures and systems that further support private providers to become eligible
- Increase awareness of parents specific to high quality staffing in private providers

### 2. Incentivizing Teachers to Opt into the Career Ladder

Rationale:
Focus groups have indicated that many teachers do not see themselves on the career ladder and that many instructional leaders are unaware of how their roles will be impacted. Current data suggests that teachers are unsure if the career ladder suits them. Only a small percentage of teachers in GCPS (3%) have obtained National Board Certification (NBC) status and (21%) of teachers are in pursuit of an NBC. Moreover, the funding and budget implications related to staffing, resource allocation, and use of time are significant and many times are impacted by negotiations. The quantitative and qualitative data indicate that additional focus

4) How likely are you to opt into the Career Ladder during the 24-25 school year? ☐ Copy

138 responses

is needed for teachers to opt into the Career Ladder. The data results have shown that teachers have concerns about the sustainability of the career ladder and the ability to maintain the new compensation structure long term. This fear will have to be addressed in order to resolve this identified challenge.
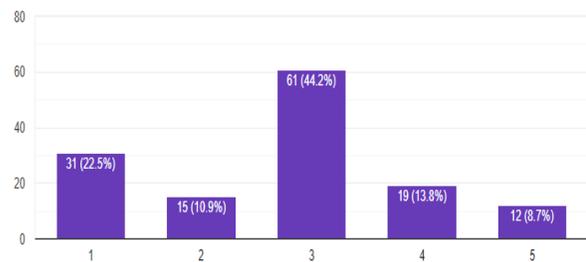
Initiatives to Address Challenge:
- Develop and clearly communicate the salary scale for all levels of the career ladder so staff can see the financial incentives for opting in
- Launch a Career Ladder Work Group in addition to the Advisory Committee in order to broaden stakeholder engagement
- Launch NBC recruitment and information events during the spring semester in addition to the fall per stakeholder feedback
- Leverage existing NBC candidates to recruit colleagues and encourage their participation
- Launch FSU micro-credential on NBC and encourage enrollment specifically for Frostburg M.A.T. candidates
- Continue ongoing communication efforts to educate and inform staff about the incentives offered to teachers across the four levels in the career ladder throughout the development process to provide clarity to staff on all aspects of the career ladder

Examples to date include:
- Focus groups with teachers who have NBC and those who elected not to pursue NBC
- Engagement of school leaders through A&S to spread key messages about the career ladder throughout the county and to capture feedback from staff
- Development of Blueprint Bulletin to help reinforce messages about the career ladder
- The Career Ladder Working Group is developing a professional development plan and specific job descriptions to help illustrate for teachers concretely what the role of a teacher will look like at various levels on the ladder

Transformations Needed:
There are four categories of transformations that are needed as evidenced below.

Develop needed systems and structures:
- Define salary scale to reflect the mandated salary enhancements that also signal GCPS context and values
- Continue to research and explore requirements, duties, responsibilities, and model position descriptions for Lead Teacher, Distinguished Teacher, and Professor Distinguished Teacher. Also, explore the administrative track for job duties.

Outline the pace of change needed:
- Continue to research and explore the percentage of time for classroom requirements (60/40 models)
- Redefine the use of time for teachers using a phased-in approach
- Support a shift in mindset around how teachers spend their time to support student learning

Recruitment:
- Support a shift in mindset specific to teacher buy-in relative to NBC over pursuing additional Masters or a Ph.D
- Explore strategies that increase the number of male teachers and specifically target male teachers to pursue their NBC to support a more representative teaching staff
- Explore strategies to encourage NBC at the secondary level

Re-envision professional learning:
- Research and explore evaluation and Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) requirements, models, etc.
- Develop and build the teacher evaluation to ensure alignment with Blueprint requirements ensuring a PAR model for the local career ladder
- Continue to explore professional learning and peer collaboration requirements and models

3. Meaningfully Engaging Stakeholders
GCPS recognizes the importance of ensuring all stakeholders are informed about the Blueprint and system initiatives. It is equally important for stakeholders to have opportunities to shape Blueprint implementation in Garrett County. Leveraging existing structures and creating new ones that allow for increased balance of informing/educating and collaborating/soliciting feedback is essential to forward progress.

Rationale:
GCPS engaged with stakeholders utilizing a variety of strategies to develop the 2023 Blueprint Implementation Plan with varying results. Consequently, GCPS continues to be committed to strengthening efforts around two-way communication while increasing stakeholder involvement

and understanding of Blueprint Implementation. The Accountability and Implementation Board encouraged this as an area of continued focus as well.

Initiatives to Address Challenge:
- Development of a communication plan (prioritizing two-way communication) for each pillar that includes cross-cutting structures
- Use of feedback protocol by Pillar Leaders to capture/synthesize feedback
- Steering committee structures that bring key stakeholders and partners into conversations about the Blueprint (expanded and or redesigned several groups)
- Prioritization of focus groups with key stakeholders around a problems of practice
- Increased use of subcommittee work groups to broaden stakeholder involvement and understanding
- Increase opportunities to strategically use monthly A & S structure to capture feedback and also re-deliver important content to all staff across the county
- Provide monthly public updates to the Elected Board on Blueprint Implementation
- Develop the GCPS Blueprint Bulletin to share information with the broader community
- Hold community nights for families at both high schools focused on Post CCR pathways

Transformations Needed:
The development of work structures that support the inclusion of two-way communication strategies and the integration of feedback into the plan while also enhancing opportunities to share information with broader groups of stakeholders.

Monitoring Progress
How the district will monitor progress towards addressing its three greatest challenges to reaching the Blueprint's expected outcome

1. Establishing a Mixed Delivery System for Early Childhood
- Increase the number of eligible private providers and private provider student slots
- Increase the number of public and private early childhood programs that demonstrate increased quality through the accreditation process
- Increase the number of private and public early childhood programs that demonstrate progress towards Level 5 Excel Rating

2. Incentivizing Teachers to Opt into the Career Ladder
- Measure the #/% of teachers who opt into the Career Ladder
- Measure #/% of teachers pursuing National Board Certification
  - Including specifically increasing # of male NBC candidates and # of secondary candidates
- Measure #/% of Level 1,2 and 3 staff with schedules that support a 60/40 split in responsibilities
- Develop 5 new higher education partnerships to expand and diversify teacher pipeline

3. Meaningfully Engaging Stakeholders
- Evidence that Pillar Leaders are using the feedback protocol to synthesize feedback from stakeholders
- Evidence of bulletins, presentations, committee work, surveys, focus groups etc.
- Evidence that feedback has been integrated into plan development