# Maryland School Review

## Expert Review Team Report

### Bennett Middle School

Maryland State Department of Education

Office of Teaching and Learning

November 29-30, 2023

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

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# Overview of Maryland School Site Reviews

## PURPOSE

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is committed to supporting school systems in improving student outcomes. MSDE conducts comprehensive school reviews to identify promising practices and opportunities for growth in curriculum, instruction, interventions, socio-emotional and mental health services, educator support, and school management. School reviews are a collaborative process among local education agencies (LEAs), schools, and MSDE aimed at accelerating student learning, supporting the whole child, and enhancing educator practice.

## SCHOOL REVIEW PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

All school reviews are facilitated by an Expert Review Team (ERT) led by MSDE. ERT members consist of trained teachers, school leaders, and education experts with experience in improving student outcomes. Members participate in extensive training led by MSDE to calibrate the review process to ensure a consistent approach to school reviews. To identify effective practices and opportunities for growth in a school, the ERT analyzes school data, reviews documents submitted by the school, and conducts a one or two-day site visit that includes classroom observations, focus groups, and a principal interview.

The Expert Review Team uses a rubric (see Appendix B) to form a consensus rating for each measure based on student data, documents, observations, focus groups, and a principal interview. The rubric consists of three domains:

- **Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction** - High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices, and assessments are implemented to support student learning.

- **Domain 2: Student Support** - Schools use data to identify students and implement a multi-tiered approach to support all student groups.

- **Domain 3: Educator Support** - Educators at all levels are provided with support to improve results and shift instructional practice.

Each domain contains indicators and measures. Indicators specify criteria within the domain that will be reviewed. Measures identify the component that will be rated within the indicator. Each measure can earn one of four ratings:

- **Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement** - evidence reviewed demonstrates that a school fully addressed action(s) while implementing measures and attaining outcomes and demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement.

- **Accomplishing** - evidence reviewed demonstrates that a school fully addressed action(s) while implementing measures and attaining outcomes.

- **Developing** - a plan and/or process is observed; however, actions towards attaining measures and outcomes have not yet been implemented.

- **Not Evident** – a plan and/or process towards implementing measures or obtaining outcomes was not observed.

In cases where the measure and/or component does not apply, it will be marked as not applicable.

MSDE will collaborate with LEAs for any school that earns a rating of Developing or Not Evident for any measure to develop recommendations, a support plan, and a timeline for the school to make progress toward the Accomplishing or Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement rating.

## STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The following report is organized into three different sections.

**Executive Summary:** In this section, you will find a summary of the school's review. This includes:

- Information about the school, with more detailed information, can be found online in the Maryland School Report Card.

- The summary of findings is a snapshot of the ratings the school received by each domain, with more detailed ratings of each measure embedded in the complete school rubric in Appendix B.

- Overall recommendations for the school to focus their school improvement work.

**Findings and Recommendations by Domain:** Each domain contains a section that outlines ERT findings, including strengths and areas for growth. For each domain, targeted recommendations are provided with evidence, action steps, and resources to address the recommendation. Resources are currently being reviewed for accessibility.

**Appendices:** Two appendices expand on information provided in the body of this report. They provide detailed information on the specific methods used by the ERT during the site visit and a deeper dive into the ratings the school received on the School Review Rubric.

# Executive Summary

**ABOUT BENNETT MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Bennett Middle School, located in Wicomico County, serves a total of 906 students in grades 6th-8th. The enrolled population is made up of 38% White, 36% African American, 17% Hispanic, 6% students of 2+ races, and 3% Asian. The school's population includes approximately 49% of students that receive free or reduced meals and 20% or less of the population includes either students with disabilities or students with 504 plans. More detailed information, including enrollment, attendance, demographics, and student outcome data, can be found in the Maryland School Report Card.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following table summarizes the school's ratings on each domain. The school scored its highest rating of Accomplishing in Curriculum and Instructional Materials and its lowest rating of Developing in Opportunities and Access. A comprehensive list of measures, indicators, and ratings can be found in the full School Review Rubric in Appendix B.

| Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction | | |
|---|---|---|
| Indicator | Percentage | Rating |
| Curriculum and Instructional Materials | 67% | Accomplishing |
| Classroom Instruction | 83% | Accomplishing |
| Assessment and Timing | 75% | Accomplishing |

| Domain 2: Student Support | | |
|---|---|---|
| Indicator | Percentage | Rating |
| Multi-Tiered Systems of Support | 75% | Accomplishing |
| Opportunities and Access | 58% | Developing |

| Domain 3: Educator Support | | |
|---|---|---|
| Indicator | Percentage | Rating |
| Observation and Feedback | 75% | Accomplishing |
| Professional Learning | 75% | Accomplishing |
| Career Growth | 64% | Accomplishing |

## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions are recommended to support improvement in the areas identified as needing improvement through the School Review process. More detailed information about these recommendations, linking them to specific findings in each domain and providing action steps and resources to implement them, can be found in the following sections.

- Implement professional learning opportunities that equip teachers to design student-centered lessons that includes student-friendly objectives, clearly stated criteria for success, and a structured collaborative model with defined student roles.

- Create a professional learning series centered on higher-order questioning. Integrate different frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, Costa's Levels of Questioning, or Paul-Elder's Critical Thinking to assist teachers in fostering higher-order thinking skills for students.

- Develop structures and systems to ensure equitable access to advanced coursework for underserved student groups. Implement proactive strategies that identify and remove barriers that prevent underrepresented student groups from being included in advanced coursework.

- Provide teachers with direct training in social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices. Incorporate resources from organizations such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), or Teaching Tolerance to create and support a positive school climate.

- Establish clear communication protocols to ensure that all teacher groups are fully aware of county resources regarding the teacher career ladder and related professional learning opportunities.

# Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction

| Curriculum and Instruction | High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices, and assessments are implemented to support student learning. |
|---|---|

## Findings and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

The Local Education Agency (LEA) provided documentation supporting the high-quality curricula aligned with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards (MCCRS). The school documentation provided is aligned with the LEA documents provided to MSDE.

During classroom reviews, it was evident that the learning environment consistently promoted academic growth by implementing tailored interventions based on the "Science of Reading" in all English Language Arts (ELA) classes.

- In thirteen out of fifteen classrooms reviewed, a nurturing and inclusive environment was visible, creating a strong sense of belonging among students and teachers.

- In the five ELA classes visited, students were actively engaged in comprehensive ELA lessons encompassing explicit vocabulary instruction and there was a clear and focused emphasis on enhancing reading comprehension skills.

- Tailored interventions were implemented in five out of five ELA classes to support students not reading at grade level. Additionally, students were further supported by the teacher implementing the Read 180 program, addressing student's individual needs.

Professional development sessions tailored to the curriculum, subject-specific coaches, a well-structured assessment framework, and regular team meetings have significantly contributed to fostering collaborative growth and development among the staff.

- During school leader focus groups, it was noted that teachers receive ongoing curriculum-specific professional learning opportunities, to ensure alignment with instructional materials.

- Literacy and math coaches actively support teachers through embedded professional development.

- The school has established a clear routine for assessments which includes conducting benchmarks three times a year. The benchmark data is used to inform teaching practices throughout the academic year.

- The school provided documentation on weekly team meetings that provide timely and effective professional development sessions and foster collaborative growth among staff members.

## AREAS FOR GROWTH

Begin the shift of transferring the learning from the teacher to the students. While there is evidence of high-quality curriculum within the classrooms, there was a lack of student-directed learning within classrooms. Student-led activities, group discussions, and opportunities for students to guide their learning were not present during classroom visits.

- During classroom visits, student-driven learning was visible in four out of fifteen classrooms. In two out of fifteen classes, the learning objectives were visible and written in student-friendly language.

- In the majority of classrooms reviewed, students were given few opportunities to expand their thinking.

- Student collaboration between each other primarily occurred through casual turn-and-talk methods, lacking structured roles within group work.

Teacher-led questioning and teacher-led activities are prevalent throughout most classrooms, restricting student participation in inquiry-based learning and reducing students' capacity to participate and fully engage in lessons.

- In twelve out of fifteen classrooms, questioning remained at the basic level and there were missed opportunities for higher-order questioning that would develop a student's critical thinking.

- Only in three out of fifteen classes were students prompted to justify their answers using textual evidence or mathematical analysis.

- Throughout the school review, it was noted that most questions posed were mainly centered on recall ("how" and "what"). Additionally, students often received prompt answers without adequate time for individual or group processing ("wait time").

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under "Areas for Growth," and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements. Domain-specific ratings can be found in Appendix B.

### FOCUS AREA 1

Implement professional learning opportunities that equip teachers to design student-centered lessons that includes student-friendly objectives, clearly stated criteria for success, and a structured collaborative model with defined student roles.

### ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review, provide:

- Professional learning opportunities that incorporate additional strategies for project-based learning, inquiry-based assignments, student-driven learning, higher-order questioning, and collaboration.

- Incorporate strategies that increase student-led activities, discussions, decisions on how they will learn, and the development of strategies that allow students to monitor their thinking/learning.

- Model or provide opportunities for teachers to observe model classrooms on how to incorporate student-centered activities.

- Provide teachers with opportunities to observe and provide feedback on each other's instruction.

- Review and provide feedback to teachers on incorporating learning-centered lessons.

### RESOURCES:

1. Writing Student-Friendly Learning/Assessments Objectives

2. Student-Centered Classroom

3. Student-Centered Environments

## FOCUS AREA  2

Create a professional learning series centered on higher-order questioning. Integrate different frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, Costa's Levels of Questioning, or Paul-Elder's Critical Thinking to assist teachers in fostering higher-order thinking skills for students.

### ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Conduct a needs assessment or survey among teachers to gauge their familiarity and comfort level with higher-ordered questioning techniques.

- Organize targeted workshops or sessions focusing on demonstrating and practicing higher-order questioning techniques, emphasizing probing, inquiry, and hypothesis-building.

- Implement a feedback mechanism for teachers to receive constructive feedback on their application of higher-ordered questioning techniques.

- Encourage teacher peer observation and feedback sessions where teachers can observe and learn from each other's questioning approaches.

- Develop assessment tools or checklists to measure the implementation and effectiveness of higher-order questioning techniques.

### RESOURCES:

1. Developing Higher-Order Questions
2. Questioning Strategies
3. Depth of Knowledge Questions (DOK)
4. Blooms Taxonomy of Measurable Verbs
5. Costa's Levels of Questioning
6. Paul-Elder's Critical Thinking

# Domain 2: Student Support

| Student Support | Schools use data to identify students and implement a multi-tiered approach to support all student groups. |
|---|---|

## Findings and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

The school demonstrates a comprehensive approach to support student mental well-being, providing targeted staff training, access to diverse counseling services, and efficacy in mental health support.

- School based documents show that school staff receive training aimed at supporting students' mental well-being and that the school actively monitors which students are receiving mental health support.

- Focus group discussions along with school-based documents, provide evidence that the school has grade-specific counselors, a dedicated counselor for 504 students, and access to a school psychologist.

- The school has a dedicated Student Service Team (SST) that directly supports tiered mental health support for students.

- Pre-service training includes district-level meetings with the school psychologist, ensuring staff readiness in mental health support.

The school has developed after-school tutoring, support programs, and has additional staff within classrooms to offer enhanced learning opportunities for students.

- In discussions across three focus groups, the topics of tutoring and specific student support were highlighted as being available to students after school.

- In the teacher, student, and parent focus group it was mentioned how the presence of extra staff members in classrooms provides enhanced support to students during learning.

The school has established a Student Support Team (SST) to support students and a data monitoring system that keeps parents informed of student progress.

- During the teacher and student focus groups, it was mentioned that teachers being able to refer students to the SST has made a positive impact on school culture.

- The school has a data monitoring system that supports well-informed decision-making and keeps all parents informed about student progress.

## AREAS FOR GROWTH

Based on survey responses from focus groups, the school has a clear system in place for providing students with access to advanced coursework. However, school leaders and teacher focus groups identified the need to improve equitable access to advanced courses for underrepresented student groups.

- Twenty-one out of twenty-five participants that participated in the focus group survey confirmed the availability of advanced courses at the school.

- Data from the school leaders and teachers focus group survey documents a need for better processes to ensure equitable access to advanced coursework for underrepresented groups.

Stakeholders highlighted the need for enhanced training and resources to effectively implement trauma-informed teaching practices and acknowledged student safety concerns expressed by teachers such as feeling unsafe during regular school hours.

- During teacher focus groups, teachers mentioned the need for additional training and resources to effectively implement trauma-informed education practices.

- According to the student focus group survey, six out of seven students feel safe at the school; however, six out of nine teachers expressed feeling unsafe within the school during regular school hours.

During focus groups, it was shared that there are significant gaps in crisis response and safety protocols within the school. Staff shared:

- While safety drills are conducted, there's uncertainty among staff regarding the procedures for post-crisis support after an incident occurs.

- Insufficient resources and support systems are available to assist teachers in responding to and managing traumatic incidents within the school environment.

- There is a recognized lack of comprehensive knowledge and understanding about trauma informed instruction among the staff.

There is a need for improved visibility and rapport-building between the resource officer, students, and staff and additional support for teachers in identifying student triggers.

- Feedback from focus groups indicated room for improvement in enhancing the visibility and rapport of the resource officer among students and staff.

- Teacher focus groups stated there was a lack of awareness in identifying potential socio-emotional triggers in students, signaling a need for training or guidance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under "Areas for Growth," and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements. Domain-specific ratings can be found in Appendix B.

## FOCUS AREA 1

Develop structures and systems to ensure equitable access to advanced coursework for underserved student groups. Implement proactive strategies that identify and remove barriers that prevent underrepresented student groups from being identified, enrolled, and persisting in advanced course work.

### ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Analyze enrollment data to identify groups with lower representation enrolled in advanced classes.
- Develop tailored outreach programs targeting underrepresented groups to increase awareness of availability of advanced coursework.
- Organize informational sessions and workshops for students and parents, emphasizing the benefits and pathways to advanced courses.
- Provide ongoing support, guidance, and encouragement to ensure student success in these programs.
- Offer additional academic support such as tutoring, study groups, or specialized coursework preparation sessions for underrepresented students aiming to enroll in advanced classes.
- Provide teachers with strategies to create an inclusive classroom environment that supports the success of all students.

### RESOURCES:

1. Williams's Taxonomy
2. Improving Student's Access to Advanced Coursework
3. Creating an Equity Framework That Supports Underserved Students

## FOCUS AREA  2

Provide teachers with direct training in social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices. Incorporating resources from such organizations as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), or Teaching Tolerance, teachers will be able to support their students in creating a positive school climate.

### ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Assess the current understanding of all staff members regarding trauma informed teaching practices.

- Provide training to teachers regarding trauma informed teaching practices and ensure these processes are communicated to all stakeholders.

- Provide students with direct instruction around social-emotional learning, access to support, and clarity around crisis procedures.

- Create professional learning on trauma-informed practices and de-escalation techniques.

- Provide teachers with ongoing support and resources and provide mentoring on how to implement practices in classrooms.

- Support the implementation and monitoring of Social Emotional Learning & Trauma Informed Practices within classroom and monitor.

### RESOURCES:

1. Helping Teachers Manage Trauma

2. Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices

3. Best Practices for Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices

# Domain 3: Educator Support

| Educators Support | Educators at all levels are provided with support to improve results and shift instructional practice. |
|---|---|

## Findings and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

The school promotes a continuous coaching and feedback culture, ensuring teachers and leaders receive consistent, job-embedded feedback aimed at professional growth and student success.

- During focus groups, teachers stated that they receive consistent and actionable feedback from coaches aimed at fostering professional growth and enhancing student outcomes.

- Annual formal evaluations occur once a year; however, teachers sate that feedback is given on an as needed basis. Additionally, teachers are provided opportunities to participate in peer observations.

The school leadership team cultivates a community-oriented and supportive atmosphere for staff and students with a workplace culture promoting ongoing feedback.

- The school leadership team fosters a strong sense of community among staff, emphasizing a supportive workplace culture where feedback is ongoing, and actionable.

- During the school leaders focus groups, leaders stated that they feel adequately supported and that decisions are made based on the best interests of students.

The school prioritizes professional learning and support systems by implementing formal teacher observations multiple times a year and facilitating tailored professional growth for teachers.

- Administrators formally and informally observe teachers multiple times a year, providing professional development driven by the specific needs of teachers.

- Coaches in literacy, math, science, and history engage in regular support practices, ensuring subject-specific growth through weekly learning sessions and ongoing coaching.

The school utilizes a comprehensive approach to measure student success, drawing from surveys and growth data from platforms such as iReady and MAP assessments.

- County-wide assessment scores are accessible to teachers and shared three times a year with parents.

The school implemented various support programs for teachers, specialized support for SPED teachers, and the availability of Math & ELA coaches within the school.

- The new teacher program includes mentorship at the county level, support for Special Education (SPED) teachers, and Math & ELA coaches within the school.

## AREAS FOR GROWTH

Based on teacher focus groups, teacher union members are informed about the Career Ladder and National Board Certificated Teachers (NBCT) and the Career Ladder in advance, while other teacher groups received varied communication.

- Teachers in focus groups highlighted the absence of a comprehensive system for accessing information on different career paths within the Career Ladder.

- Awareness and involvement in programs such as the Career Ladder and NBCT differ among teacher groups, contributing to uneven understanding of information and awareness levels.

- Teachers in Focus Groups stated that union members receive NBCT information earlier than non-union staff, causing varying levels of awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under "Areas for Growth," and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements. Domain-specific ratings can be found in Appendix B.

## FOCUS AREA  1

Establish clear communication protocols to ensure that all teacher groups are fully aware of county resources regarding the teacher career ladder and related professional learning opportunities, as there is currently a gap among some teacher groups.

### ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Establish a communication system that provides detailed information about the Career Ladder to all teacher groups and establish a mechanism to gather ongoing feedback.

- Implement a standardized communication strategy for disseminating information about the Career Ladder program to all teacher groups.

- Conduct training or informational sessions for all teacher groups, highlighting the benefits and opportunities associated with the Career Ladder program.

- Foster collaboration with union representatives to streamline and synchronize the distribution of information regarding the Career Ladder and related certification programs.

### RESOURCES:

1. High Quality and Diverse Teachers
2. Teacher Pathways
3. National Board Certification

# Appendix A

## SUMMARY OF EXPERT REVIEW TEAM ACTIVITIES

### Expert Review Team Members

1. Dr. Dorothy Bell Jackson, Concentration of Poverty Coordinator, Somerset County Public Schools
2. Marie Wells-Suznavick, Teacher, Worcester County Public Schools
3. Dr. Joshua Fine, Principal, Montgomery Public Schools
4. Daniel Russell, Co-Founder, Bridge the Gap
5. Dana Peake, 504 Coordinator K-12, Washington County Public Schools
6. Patrick Johnson, Lead Math Teacher, Prince George's County School

### Site Visit Day 1

Wednesday November 29, 2023

### Site Visit Day 2

Thursday November 30, 2023

### Number of Classroom Reviews

Fifteen

### Description of Classroom Visited

| Wednesday, November 29, 2023 | Thursday, November 30, 2023 |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Core ELA 6</li><li>Math 6</li><li>Transitional Algebra</li><li>US History 8</li><li>Math 8</li><li>Integrated Science 6</li><li>Core ELA 8</li><li>Health 6</li><li>Choral Music 8</li><li>Spanish 1</li></ul> | <ul><li>SPED Self-Contained SPED ELA</li><li>CORE ELA 7</li><li>CORE ELA 6</li><li>World History 7</li><li>Music 7</li></ul> |

## Number of Interviews

One (1)

- Principal

## Number of Focus Groups

Four (4)

- 5 School Leaders
- 8 Teachers
- 10 Students
- 4 Parents

## Documents Analyzed

- Site visit documentation submitted by the school and LEA.

# Appendix B

## MARYLAND SCHOOL REVIEW RUBRIC

### Ratings for Bennett Middle School

The Expert Review Team Rubric is used by the review team to form a consensus on a rating for each measure based on all collected evidence. Collected evidence includes documents submitted by the school prior to the on-site review; outcomes of classroom observations; answers to focus group questions from teachers, administrators, students, and parents; and student data. Items checked were observed through data documentation or during the on-site school review.