Maryland School Review

Expert Review Team Report

Hillcrest Heights Elementary School

Maryland State Department of Education

Office of Teaching and Learning

Wednesday, December 13, 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 the 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 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 HILLCREST HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Hillcrest Heights Elementary School, located in Prince George's County, serves a total of 406 students in grades Pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. The enrolled population is made up 72% African American and 25% Hispanic. The school's population includes approximately 71% of students who receive free or reduced meals and 7% 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.

Schools identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Low Performing and/or CSI Not Exiting in the 2022-2023 school year and selected for an ERT visit, received a differentiated visit to avoid duplication of data requests and integrate into the school improvement process in collaboration with the Office of School Improvement and Transformation at MSDE.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following table summarizes the school's ratings on each domain. The school scored its highest rating of Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement in Observation and Feedback and its lowest rating of Accomplishing in Professional Learning. 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	86%	Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement
Classroom Instruction	71%	Accomplishing
Assessment and Timing	75%	Accomplishing

Domain 2: Student Support		
Indicator	Percentage	Rating
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	77%	Accomplishing
Community Schools	75%	Accomplishing
Opportunities and Access	75%	Accomplishing

Domain 3: Educator Support		
Indicator	Percentage	Rating
Observation and Feedback	88%	Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement
Professional Learning	69%	Accomplishing
Career Growth	82%	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.

- Provide teachers with comprehensive professional learning opportunities on differentiation and student-centered instruction, including implementing varied options for time, pace, path, and place and training on differentiating instruction based on student proficiency levels.

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

- Provide teachers with professional learning opportunities focusing on collaborative learning best practices, rationale, benefits, tools, implementation strategies, and classroom management techniques. Facilitate peer observation, feedback, and coaching, enabling teachers to learn from experienced colleagues.

- Develop a comprehensive professional learning plan centered on data analysis techniques, integrating sessions that make the connection between data gathered from various sources and lesson development to enrich targeted instruction.

Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and Instruction	High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices, and assessment 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.

The school demonstrates commitment and execution in aligning curriculum and instructional materials to standards, integrating culturally responsive strategies, and utilizing research-based approaches to support student learning.

- During focus groups, teachers reported multiple instructional supports including Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), iReady, Lexia, DreamBox, and benchmark assessments that are used to assess and plan lessons to meet student academic needs.

- The LEA provided documentation that shows that curriculum materials "meet expectations" according to EdReports. The school provided clear and ongoing checkpoints to consistently monitor math and reading through regularly scheduled formative assessments.

- Teachers and leaders are actively engaged in ongoing professional development opportunities, spanning in special education, English Language Development (ELD), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and content areas facilitated both by the LEA and through the Professional Development (PD) catalog.

- During teacher and leader focus groups, it was mentioned that collaborative practices like peer classroom visits, critical friend groups, and instructional walkthroughs highlight the commitment to continuous improvement.

By aligning assessments with the LEA calendar, the school emphasizes continuous instructional enhancement. Teachers employ various assessments while adjusting instruction to align with LEA and school schedules to meet individual student needs.

- Evidence from the LEA documentation shows the accessibility of assessment data across schools. Data provided by the school shows how the school has used this calendar to align and monitor school-level assessments.

- The school provided a framework for assessments aligned to standards, promoting a culture of data-driven instruction to support student learning and growth.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

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

- Three out of seven classes demonstrated multiple strategies for engaging students. However, the instruction was whole class instruction and not differentiated to individual student's needs.

- In four out of seven classrooms reviewed, students were participating in the same whole group lesson.

During classroom visits, it was noted that students were asked closed-ended questions with missed opportunities to pose higher-level questions. Additionally, teachers directly provided the correct answer when students did not answer questions or provided incorrect responses.

- One out of seven classes effectively demonstrated various questioning techniques to elicit a deeper understanding of the lesson.

- In four out of seven classrooms, teachers utilized some questioning techniques that required probing, inquiring, and hypothesizing. Additionally, in six out of the seven classrooms, teachers asked lower-level questions.

During all seven classroom reviews, there was evidence of a need for a shift toward additional differentiation, student-driven learning, and collaborative learning.

- In four of the seven classes, there was no evidence of classroom differentiation in instructional materials, strategies, scaffolding, or pace.

- In four out of seven classes, students were engaged in the same whole group activity that did not provide students with opportunities to share their learning or the ability to extend their learning.

- Three of the seven classrooms reviewed showed clear examples of collaborative practices, fostering active and novel student participation in learning. However, in four out of the seven classrooms reviewed, collaborative instruction was not evident, and activities were conducted in whole groups limiting students' interaction with content, the teacher, and peers.

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

Provide teachers with comprehensive professional learning opportunities on differentiation and student-centered instruction, including implementing varied options for time, pace, path, and place and training on differentiating instruction based on student proficiency levels.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Identify areas for improvement in differentiation and student-centered instruction through surveys or classroom visits.

- Develop professional learning opportunities covering:

  - Differentiation Strategies: Variations in time, place, pace, or path.

  - Student-Centered Instruction: Adapting teaching methods to student proficiency levels.

- Conduct professional learning focused on hands-on activities and model lessons showcasing effective differentiation and/or student-centered techniques.

- Provide teachers opportunities to observe peers and provide/receive feedback on differentiation and student-centered instruction.

- Implement regular assessments and feedback mechanisms to measure training impact.

- Provide ongoing support, follow-up sessions, and access to resources as needed.

RESOURCES:

1. Divergent Questions
2. Differentiating up

FOCUS AREA 2

Create a professional learning opportunities centered on higher-order questioning techniques, integrating different frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge Questioning, 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 professional learning opportunities 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
7. Critical Thinking and other Higher-Order Thinking Skills

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 commitment to providing a comprehensive support system across all tiers—universal, targeted, and intensive.

- During focus group discussions, all focus group participants reported that students have direct access to social-emotional support.

- During students focus groups, students expressed that they could go to their teachers or the guidance counselor if they had any academic or social emotional challenges.

- Teachers in focus groups stated that the addition of the Judy Center significantly enhances on campus tier three support by offering mental health and other health services.

Continuous improvement efforts are evident through the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and academic assessments at the start of each academic year.

- The LEA provided documentation of various Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) trainings provided directly to various stakeholders, including principals, teachers, counselors, and support staff, on a regular basis.

- School documentation provides additional support both "optionally when delivered as a professional learning session" and "required when part of a scheduled professional learning session via a staff meeting".

The school provides both supplemental tutoring and mental health supports to supports students' academic success and mental well-being of students.

- During the teacher, parent and students focus groups, it was stated that there were various times throughout the day (before, during, and after school) for students to receive supplemental tutoring.

- The parent focus group reported that supplemental tutoring was not available to all students and that the switch to in-person impacted attendance to supplemental tutoring due to transportation challenges.

- The school provided documentation for the intervention schedule for the year and the data support tools through an online platform.

- Teacher and parent focus groups directly mentioned the school counselor, the Judy Center, and community school resources providing timely and essential support for students and families.

- School data and documentation show various data disaggregation methods, such as collaborative data meetings and various referral systems showing the continuous monitoring of student SEL and providing necessary interventions.

- The school has developed a structured mental health support system that allows various members of the school community to request specific mental health support.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

All students have access to advanced, rigorous coursework, and access to a well-rounded curriculum.

- During the focus groups, it was reported that access to rigorous material and advanced coursework is needed.

- All focus groups reported access to art, world language, health, physical education as well as other classes beyond content areas (Math, ELA, Science, or Social Studies). During student focus groups, students mentioned the desire for the addition of a computer class.

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 LEA and school provided evidence of regular formal and informal observations, ensuring consistent involvement of teachers and leaders. The structured on-cycle observation process, detailed in documentation, outlines clear guidelines for non-tenure and tenure teachers to be provided with continuous observations and feedback throughout the year.

- During focus groups, teachers and leaders stated that they follow clear guidelines for observations: non-tenure teachers observed annually, tenure teachers observed every three years.

- The school provided evidence that instructional leaders provide timely and actionable feedback in conference settings.

- The school provided evidence of the utilization of "6 Steps of Effective Feedback" for mentor teachers to provide support for novice teachers at Hillcrest Heights.

- The LEA provided a detailed structure involving on-cycle formal and informal observations throughout the school year.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

The LEA and school provide ongoing professional learning support that is job-embedded, aligned to research-based practices, and grounded in data, as well as, how to use data to improve student outcomes. However, there is a lack of specific professional learning and inconsistent support for teachers on how to access and use data.

- While teachers in the focus group spoke about professional learning opportunities, examining student work, conducting learning walks, and additional resources such as critical friends' groups, there was no specific professional learning focus for the year.

- The school is inconsistently providing time and training during the school day. During the teacher focus group, it was reported there is inconsistent access to data and that all teachers don't have access to reading, IReady, etc.

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 a comprehensive professional learning plan centered on data analysis techniques, integrating sessions that make the connection between data gathered from various sources and lesson development to enrich targeted instruction.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Conduct a proficiency survey among teachers to evaluate their data analysis and instructional planning skills.

- Design focused training modules emphasizing data analysis techniques applicable to instructional planning.

- Include hands-on exercises during sessions for teachers to practically apply acquired techniques.

- Pair teachers with mentors or instructional coaches to offer personalized guidance aligned with individual needs.

- Develop a follow-up system to allow additional support for teachers to give and receive feedback on the implementation of using data to adjust lesson development.

RESOURCES:

1. Using Data to Guide Instruction and Improve Student Learning
2. Collecting and Analyzing Data
3. District and School Data Team Toolkit

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF EXPERT REVIEW TEAM ACTIVITIES

Expert Review Team Members

1. Dr. Mark M. Rust, McDaniel College Emeritus

2. Sara Nathan, ELD Teacher, Montgomery County Public Schools

3. Kelly Cleland, Instructional Specialist, Calvert County Public Schools

4. Nicholas Gardiner, 5th Grade Teacher, Charles County

5. Julie Cares, Director of Leadership Development, Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Site Visit Day 1

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

Number of Classroom Reviews

Seven

Description of Classroom Visited

Wednesday, December 13, 2023
• 4th Grade Science • 3rd Grade Math • Kindergarten Reading • Special Education Pullout • Pre-K Art • 2nd Grade ELD (English Language Development) • 2nd Grade Math

Number of Interviews

One

- Principal

Number of Focus Groups

Five

- 12 students

- 3 school leaders

- 12 teachers

- 10 parents

Documents Analyzed

- Site visit documentation submitted by the school and LEA.

Appendix B

MARYLAND SCHOOL REVIEW RUBRIC

Ratings for Hillcrest Heights

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.