

STRONG SCHOOLS WORCESTER COUNTY NEWS

February 10, 2023

Report on Tuesday's School Board Meeting with Commissioners attending (Mr. Fiori was absent).

After the lunch recess, the WCPS administration presented their progress on implementing The Blueprint and discussed possible budget increases. They made clear that everything is in flux, both as their planning continues, as they negotiate union contracts, and as certain aspects still need clarification.

Superintendent Taylor presented our high test scores and noted WCPS is the highest performing system in MD! He complimented the Commissioners on their excellent working relationship and that they have fully funded his entire budget request for the last 6 years. He then explained how they organized their workgroups under the 5 pillars and what the timelines are for the next 3 years.

Each pillar was presented separately, with a brief explanation of what it is meant to cover and then more specific information on how it can be implemented. We can only hope that the Commissioners and the newest Board member had already done some homework on the full breadth of The Blueprint, because the explanations were brief.

Pillar 1, Early Childhood Education, Ms. Shorts

The goal is to provide assistance to private Childcare Programs who apply for The Blueprint so that these programs will mirror the ones offered in WCPS facilities. The goal being that all children entering Kindergarten will be equally prepared. Future elementary school construction/renovations will need to have space for Pre-Ks. As more private Childcare Programs come on board, more resource positions might be required. **Mr. Bertino** immediately asked if those positions would be "taxpayer funded" and the response was that they will be paid through Blueprint funding. **Mr. Elder** asked how this will affect homeschooling and the response was that the Blueprint has NO effect on homeschooling.

Pillar 2, High Quality & Diverse Teachers and School Leaders, Dr. Abt

By 2025 higher education programs will have to adjust so that student teaching will be for 1 yr. and state certification will be part of college graduation requirements. WCPS currently has 6 teachers with NBC and 20 more working on it. As of July 2022, teachers with NBC receive a \$10,000 salary increase and by July 2026 teachers' salaries must be \$60,000 and WCPS would be on track to meet that goal with 5% COLAs over next 4 yrs. Starting salary is currently \$49,000 which is the 7th highest out of 9 counties on the Eastern Shore. By 2024 there will be a 4 rung career ladder for teachers: 1) New teacher 2) teacher working on Master's 3) Teacher with Masters and National Board Certification 4) Administration or Teacher Leader. This changes the salary system from years worked and step based to performance and ladder level based. Principals will be spending 10% of their workday teaching and Assistant Principals 40% of their workday teaching. Teachers are also to be allowed additional non-teaching time. What activities will be considered "teaching" needs clarification. **School Board Member Bill Gordy** asked if new staff will be needed with these teaching requirements and the response was that they need that clarification first. Superintendent Taylor added that HS teachers probably already have that non teaching time built in, but ES teachers do not.

Pillar 3, New College & Career Readiness Pathways, Dr. Wallace

All these pillars are interconnected with the goal of making sure all students are always on grade level. **Mr. Bertino** interjected asking if all students are not already meeting 3rd grade reading and writing requirements and aren't all HS graduates meeting their competency requirements and the response was that not all students are. The Blueprint requires AP, Career & Technical Education (CTE-which includes ROTC), and Dual Enrollment (in Wor Wic) already exist. WCPS already meets the required 40% of students enrolled in industry recognized credentials--Career and Technical Education. Under the Blueprint, every student will have an individualized plan.

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Pillar 4, More Resources for All Students to Succeed, Ms. Williams

More resources for non-English speakers, low-income and special needs students. A new source of funding is the Concentration of Poverty Grants for schools with 70% of students falling under poverty level. They are identified as Community Schools which through the grant program will have additional access to outside behavioral, physical and mental health resources. These schools will develop wraparound services to support what they are already doing. **New School Board member Katie Addis** said she has a problem with anything other than education being the responsibility of WCPS. **Ms. Williams, Dr. Wallace and Mr. Taylor** all took time to explain that making sure students don't come to school hungry, and ensuring that health and mental issues are addressed is how they make sure each student is successful, despite whatever challenges they may have personally, or at home. Costs are related to making sure there is 1 Social Worker per school (5 more needed) and 1 Counselor per elementary school (4 more needed)

Pillar 5, Governance & Accountability, Mr. Tolbert

Main issue here is that The Blueprint is asking for accounting that will track that 75% of each student's formula is going to their school and right now they do not have the capability to do this. They also need clarification in that each special education student requires very different levels of assistance/resources.

Mr. Taylor's closing comments included the reminder that they are still in the process of negotiation with the unions, and the healthcare provider for WCPS employees as well as finishing up their plans and timelines for implementation.

Mr. Bertino's closing comment was to ask for a copy of the presentation for all the Commissioners and three additional points: 1) the cost to Taxpayers is unknown, 2) this plan means Taxpayers would be paying for college tuition under dual enrollments, and 3) he is concerned about "the loss of local control."

February 9, Coastal Dispatch

Article about last Tuesday's meeting just "hit the stands"

<https://mdcoastdispatch.com/2023/02/08/education-officials-county-commissioners-talk-blueprint/>

Before we saw this article, Joan sent an Op-Ed to the Bayside Gazette and Gail sent one to the Coastal Dispatch. Let's see if they get printed and then we need more of you to write follow up letters correcting misinformation and/or encouraging the Board and the Commissioners to support the Blueprint!! Please contact Joan if you are willing—we can help you write! beachyogi@me.com

ALSO REMEMBER!

PLEASE EMAIL JOAN ROACHE IF YOU HEAR OR SEE ANYTHING THAT CONCERNS YOU! We can then

schedule a zoom meeting, coordinate letter writing or plan any other any appropriate response.