



Promising Practices

in Maryland Charter Schools

2021-22

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Executive Summary

Maryland has been home to public charter schools since 2003. Charter schools are housed under district authority and are required to meet district and state performance standards. Charter schools also represent a more flexible education environment relative to traditional public schools with different governance structures, local control over curriculum, and independent budgets. These conditions are not without challenges, but also provide additional opportunities for innovation; public charter school status is associated with the implementation of new education practices, policies, and curricula given the additional flexibility in the charter setting (Berends et al., 2018).

In 2021, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) contracted with AnLar, LLC to provide a report on current and promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools. While the work was conducted in collaboration with MSDE, the findings reflect the authors' own analysis, not the views of MSDE. This report uses a mixed methods approach to accomplish three key objectives.

Report Objectives

1. Understand the context of current charter school performance based on 2019 Maryland School Report Card data.
2. Identify resources, services, and approaches in place at Maryland charter schools across five areas: academic performance, student growth, school climate, school governance, and equity.
3. Identify promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools based on the uniqueness of the practice, stage of implementation, availability of supporting data, and prior school performance.

Results for each of these objectives are briefly summarized below.



This report employs a mixed methods design to meet the three key objectives.

First, the report draws on existing data housed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

- 2021 Maryland school enrollment data
- 2019 Maryland state report card data

Second, the report builds on a qualitative approach conducted in three parts.

1. An environmental scan reviewed publicly available data on common school characteristics for a broad sense of the Maryland charter school landscape.
2. An online survey asked charter school representatives to identify and detail one or more promising practices that could be replicated at other schools.
3. Interviews with nine administrators highlighted innovative, well-designed, and replicable promising practices.

1. Charter school performance

In 2021-22, 48 charters were operating in Maryland across 6 districts. In 2021, these schools served approximately 3 percent of Maryland public school students. Maryland charter averages for school-level performance were often equal to or above the local district average performance. Maryland charter schools scored the most points above their district averages on measures of school quality. The median for Maryland charter high schools was below the district average for achievement.

2. Services and approaches

Maryland public charter schools offer a wide range of approaches, services, and curricula. The most common services and approaches in Maryland charter schools include any type of community engagement opportunity, clubs and sports, family-school associations, social-emotional supports, restorative practices, and community partners. Maryland charter schools also typically offer a focus on college and career readiness, project-based or experiential learning, a community school designation, and clear online acknowledgment of the use of differentiated instruction for students.

3. Promising practices

Promising practices refer to a program, strategy, or tool used in more than one classroom at the school based on a clear process, guidelines, or protocol that serves to effectively impact student achievement, student growth, equity, school leadership, or school climate. Based on uniqueness, scalability, and data-driven evidence, AnLar selected eight promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools for in-depth interviews. These practices demonstrate the wide range of learning opportunities available at Maryland charter schools. The practices highlight how Maryland charter schools explore diverse avenues to provide individualized student learning. All of these promising practices touch on the importance of relationship building with students and unique means to foster student engagement at the school.

PRACTICE AREA PRACTICE OVERVIEW

Social-emotional supports



FURMAN TEMPLETON PREPARATORY ACADEMY *School-wide SEL implementation*

Furman Templeton uses curricula from Second Step, and Sanford Harmony. In addition, the school offers Check In Check Out (CICO), largely administered by the School Mental Health team. The PK-5 school maintains a whole-child approach and incorporates a core value system supported monthly throughout classrooms. Finally, restorative practices also have been in place for many years, and are in some ways the beginning of SEL work at the school.

MONARCH ACADEMY-GLEN BURNIE *Small-group relationship-building*

“Crew” has been a foundational element at Monarch Academy since the school’s opening in 2009. In 2020, Monarch Academy launched a standardized, online approach to Crew, which articulated a grade-specific scope and sequence of skill development and increased access to the full breadth of internally created resources for the program. Crew aids in the creation of relationships, ensuring that students build positive connections with at least one staff member at the school. Crew is a required component of students’ experience at Monarch Academy associated with the EL (Expeditionary Learning) Education approach. Crew is a specific process and structure in which students start in a circle with a greeting, followed by a reading, activity, and a debrief. Readings may offer reflections on academics, team building, or character.

PRACTICE AREA PRACTICE OVERVIEW

College and career readiness



BALTIMORE LEADERSHIP SCHOOL FOR YOUNG WOMEN (BLS)

College and career planning and postgraduation follow-up

BLS administrators begin college conversations with students in the middle grades and continue supporting students through to their senior year application completion. BLS maintains a dedicated College and Career Counseling Office. Administrators and faculty host SAT prep sessions, and students complete their personal statements in their eleventh-grade English classes. The College and Career Counseling Office helps students make a list of colleges to apply to and prepares them to apply by the Early Decision deadline. Most students complete all of their college applications before winter break. In the spring, the Office supports scholarship and financial aid applications to ensure that their students attend college with minimal debt.

COPPIN ACADEMY

Creating a dual enrollment mindset

Coppin Academy is housed on the Coppin State University campus, and the school offers dual enrollment to all students who attend. Currently, 25 to 50 students may enroll in college courses in a given semester. Selected college courses span a wide range, and students may focus on any area of interest (English, art, theater, calculus). Administrators ensure that dual enrollment coursework will translate to college credits by guiding students to spread out course-taking across disciplines. Students purchase their own books for courses (unless there is financial hardship) and the school fully funds every dual enrollment course.

Schoolwide learning philosophies



WATERSHED PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Project-based environmental learning

Teachers and administrators apply environmental learning to every component of the English Language Arts, mathematics, science, art, and music curricula. The school's principal and Executive Director wrote and designed the curriculum for the school, providing an environmental lens to each lesson. The place-based focus is on outdoor fieldwork and incorporating experiences and activities outdoors on the school's own campus. Each grade cares for its own outdoor space.

LEGENDS CHARTER SCHOOL

Early literacy competencies and teaching fellows

Beginning in Kindergarten, students are benchmarked using DIEBELS, TRC, or iReady grouped reading assessment. Students meet with their guided reading groups four times a week, along with a weekly short cycle assessment rooted in reading foundations. The Legends approach identifies the key skills and reading behaviors at each of the guided reading levels associated with lexile levels for each grade. Legends administrators break guided reading levels into two groups (A through D and F through X), with teachers specializing in the skills for specific guided reading levels. Teachers are trained to address student learning for specific reading behaviors. Students attend mixed grade level reading groups with the teacher trained for those specific phonics. This approach maximizes teachers' tools and experience to advance the students' reading proficiency.

PRACTICE AREA PRACTICE OVERVIEW

Schoolwide learning philosophies (cont.)



CARROLL CREEK *Montessori Method*

Carroll Creek employs a holistic approach that values the freedom of choice, natural motivation for learning through self-directed interest, and development of independence through learning experiences. Parents launched the school with the intent to provide an additional Spanish language immersion component. However, this approach was modified after qualified Spanish immersion vacancies proved challenging to fill. Instead, the school focuses on an acquisition and proficiency model starting in preschool and extending through middle school, where students have opportunities to focus on literature, culture, and conversational proficiency.

CHESAPEAKE SCIENCE POINT (CSP) *Building exposure to STEM*

Consistent with the school's existing STEM curriculum, CSP provides STEM after-school activities and competitions for all students. The skills developed during out-of-school time are also supported and integrated in the school's daily curriculum. Additionally, as part of the school's founding mission, there is an expectation that students will stay after school to participate in STEM activities. Approximately 60 to 70 percent of students participate in a club at CSP, and there are a number of both formal and informal structures in place to encourage and support students' extracurricular STEM involvement.

Background and Context

Between 2009 and 2019, charter school enrollment in the United States increased by 1.8 million, and the total number of charter schools increased from 5,000 to 7,000 (NCES, 2022). In 2020-21, approximately three percent of Maryland public school students were enrolled in charter schools, which were present in six Maryland school districts. In 2021-22, there were 48 charter schools in operation serving 23,921 students.

Under Maryland state law enacted in 2003 (Education Article §§ 9-101 et seq.), charter schools are housed under district authority. Charter schools must be open to all students and a lottery system may be used if there are more applicants than seats available. They must be managed by a charter operator that is a nonprofit organization or an institute of higher education. Charter school teachers are public school employees and have collective bargaining rights. Charter schools also participate in statewide testing and must follow all rules and regulations governing traditional public schools (Levin et al., 2016; MSEA, n.d.). Finally, Maryland charter school law does not include funding for charter school



facilities but requires buildings not in use by the district to be made available for charter school use. Charter schools receive the same per-pupil funding as traditional public schools in the district and they must be non-sectarian and tuition-free. In 2014-15, one study estimated that charter school costs for student facilities occupancy were, on average, an additional \$1,500 to \$2,500 per student (Levin et al., 2016).

In September 2017, Maryland received a five-year Federal Charter School Program grant of \$17.2 million from the US Department of Education. The grant created opportunities for 21 new charter school grants in the state, and other efforts including alignment with national best practices, the provision of technical assistance, the creation of a charter advisory group, and the dissemination of best practices at Maryland charter schools (ED, 2019). In November 2019, Maryland received a supplemental \$6.1 million to support expanding successful charter schools and creating additional charter schools (MSDE, 2019).

In 2021, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) contracted with AnLar, LLC to provide a report on current and promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools. In many cases, charter schools broaden the menu of what's offered in the public school system, working to meet state standards while operating under a different governing board, often with a unique mission and vision. This report uses a mixed methods approach to accomplish three key objectives:

- 1.** Understand the context of current charter school performance based on 2019 Maryland School Report Card data.
- 2.** Identify resources, services, and approaches in place at Maryland charter schools across five areas: academic performance, student growth, school climate, school governance, and equity.
- 3.** Identify promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools based on the uniqueness of the practice, stage of implementation, availability of supporting data, and prior school performance.

Objective 1 draws on secondary data from MSDE on 2021 enrollment and 2019 state report card results for the state's charter schools and their districts. Objective 2 draws on primary data from an environmental scan and online survey of charter school operators in 2021-22. Objective 3 draws on data from in-depth interviews with a selected sample of charter school leaders. For the purposes of this report, promising practices may include a program, strategy, or tool used in more than one classroom at the school based on a clear process, guidelines, or protocol that serves to effectively impact student achievement, student growth, equity, school leadership, or school climate. Objectives will be addressed in this order in the report.



Maryland Charter School Characteristics

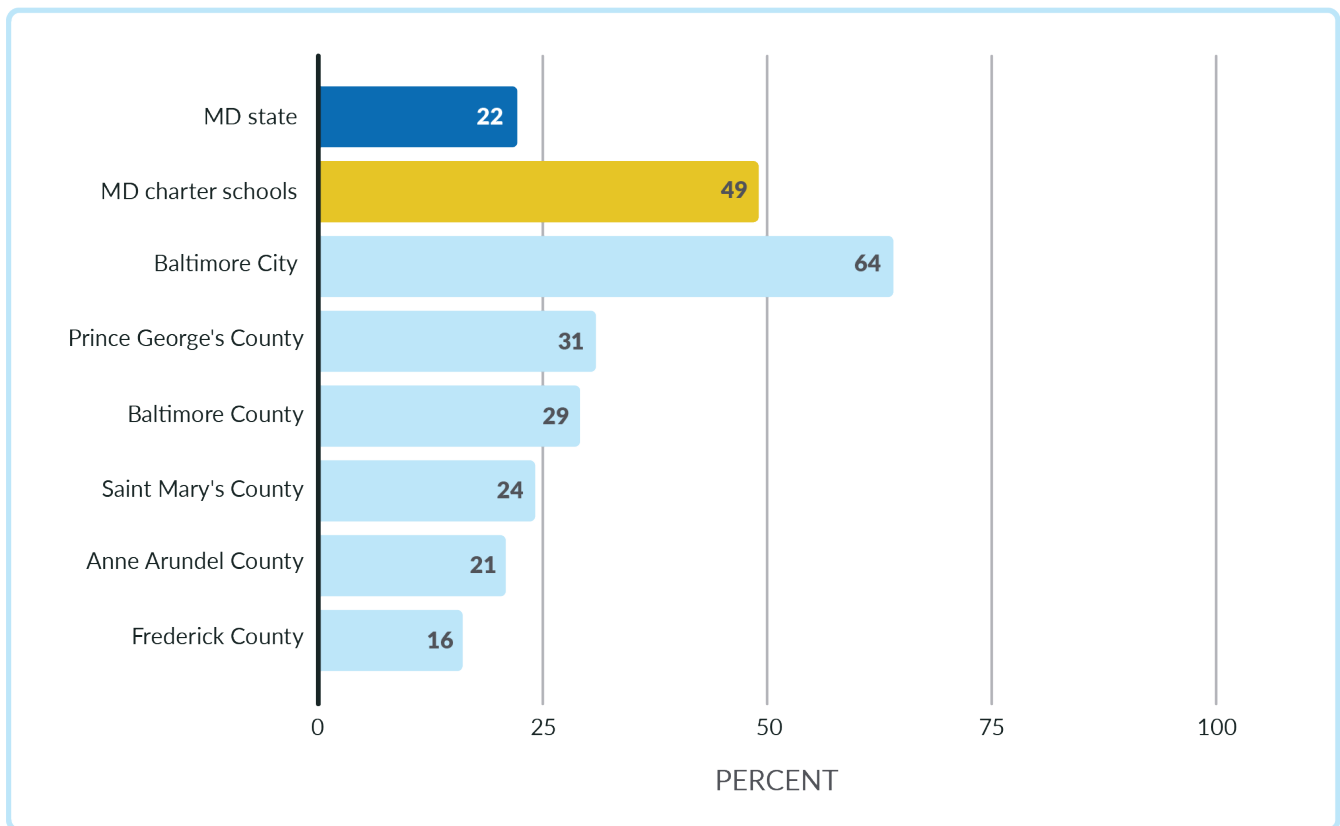
This section provides background data on current school enrollment, student characteristics, and school performance. Maryland is home to 23 county school districts and Baltimore City. Maryland charter schools are present in six of the state's 24 counties (including Baltimore City), and 32 of the 2021-22 charter schools in operation are housed in Baltimore City. The data in this section draw on previous years of Maryland State Report Card data and the number of charter schools for a given year of data varies from the 48 charter schools included in data collection for this report.

Enrollment and Demographics, 2021

The average student enrollment at a Maryland charter school in 2021 was 508 students, ranging from 150 to 1,683 at individual schools. The school-level average for the percent of students at Maryland charters facing economic disadvantage was 49 percent, higher than the student average across the state (Figure 1). Note that the charter average does not reflect differences in the number of students at each school. The lowest school-level per student expenditure by a charter school was \$11,407 and the maximum was \$19,400, with an average of \$14,861 (Maryland Public Schools Report Card, 2021).¹ Among the almost 24,000 students enrolled in Maryland charter schools in 2021, 76 percent were Black/African American and 8 and 11 percent were Latine/Hispanic or White, respectively. Table B1 in Appendix B provides a detailed list of individual Maryland charter schools by selected student populations served by Maryland charter schools. Table B2 in Appendix B provides a detailed list of student enrollment and percent distribution by student race/ethnicity for each Maryland charter school.

¹ Expenditures are based on school-level per-pupil expenditures that include local school system actual personnel and actual non-personnel operating expenditures directly attributed to schools or allocated to schools based on certain criteria and reported as a per-pupil or per-student amount. The school-level per-pupil data can vary across school systems and within school systems due to many factors, including the number of students enrolled in the school, specific school-based programs, and the experience level of staff at the school.

Figure 1. Average percentage of students facing economic disadvantage in Maryland, by district, and in charter schools



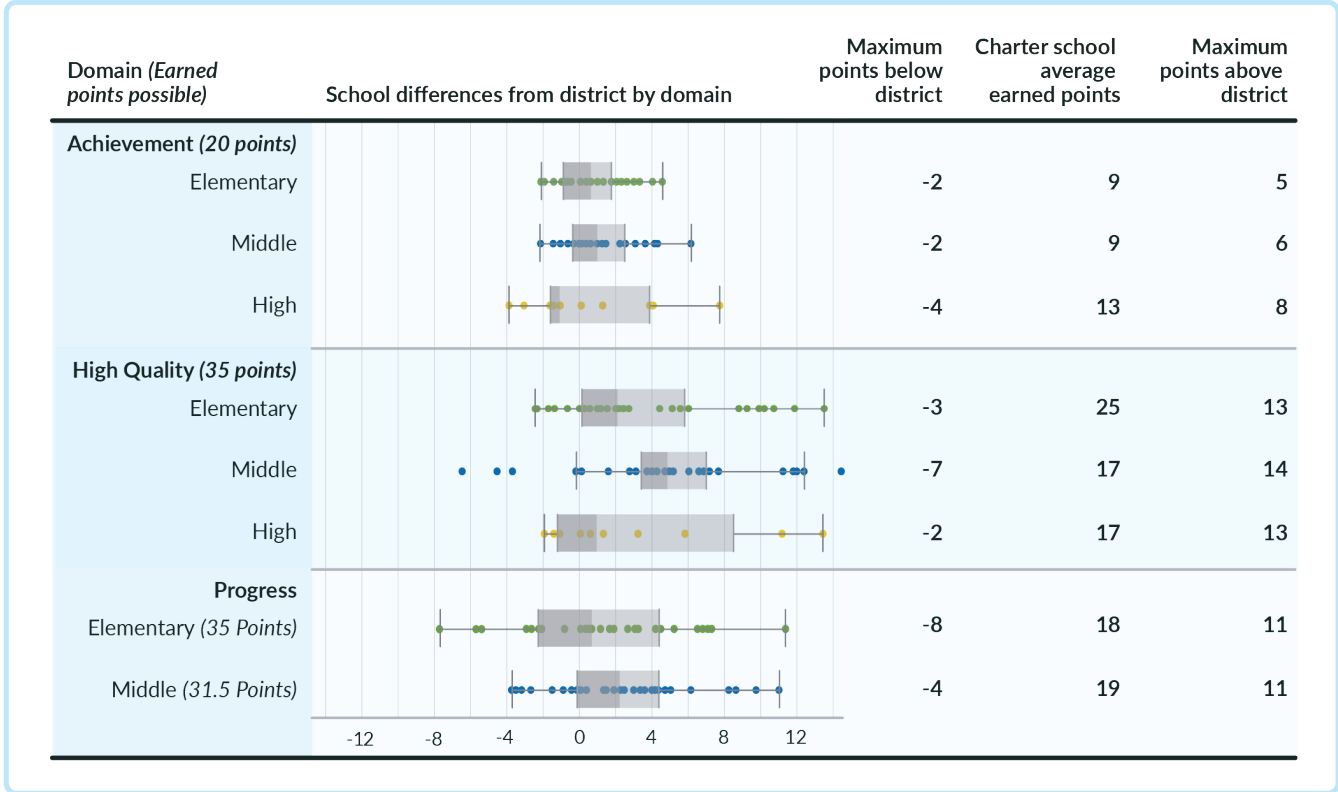
2019 Charter School Performance

This report uses 2019 Maryland state report card data to provide context on charter school performance. This was the most recent year of data available at the writing of this report. Maryland's 24 school districts represent diverse student populations, and the schools in these districts are also diverse in terms of students and available resources. These report card measures of school performance are intended to provide additional context for considering the promising practices identified below. There are many ways to explore charter school performance. Previous research using a matched sample of Maryland charter school students and traditional public schools students between 2014 and 2017 found that students in Maryland charter schools performed better than traditional public schools on 5 out of 20 reading measures and 9 out of 20 math measures. Differences were similar on the remaining measures, with the exception of students in high school charter schools who performed worse in math on average relative to traditional public school matched students (Credo, 2019).

One avenue to explore charter school performance was through a comparison of each charter school's performance to its district average. Figure 2 provides a visual display of the difference in earned points by specific domains between each Maryland charter school and its district. For example, the average earned points in the achievement domain for charter schools was 9 out of 20 possible points. School averages were relatively similar to their district averages for elementary-level achievement, with endpoints at 2 points below the district average and 5 points above the district average. The box plots depict the

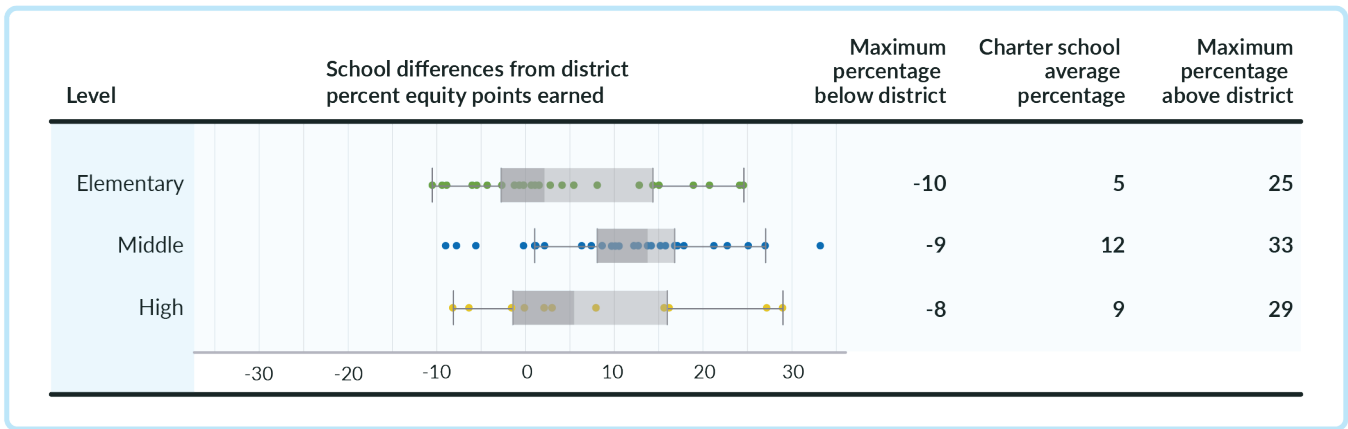
dispersion of the difference between charter schools and districts. For elementary progress, the individual blue dots are widely dispersed, indicating wide differences across charter schools and their districts. The point at which the dark gray and light gray sections meet is the median. With the exception of high school achievement, all medians are above zero, meaning charter schools, on average, outperformed their district in seven out of eight domains.

Figure 2a. Charter school average earned points and charter school differences from district averages, by domain



Note: Earned points in achievement include measures of student performance on state standardized tests in English Language Arts and mathematics. Earned points in progress reflect how student performance has grown compared to previous years on state standardized tests in English Language Arts and mathematics. Earned points in quality include the percentage of students who are not chronically absent, the results of a survey of students and educators, and the percent of students who are enrolled in a well-rounded curriculum.

Figure 2b. Charter school percentage earned equity points out of total available for all students, with differences from district average percentage earned equity points, 2019



Note: Equity at each school is measured based on the performance of students in 9 groups relative to all the other students in the school. The table reflects differences based on the percentage of earned equity points out of the total equity points possible for the school or district. Additional information on equity measures can be found at the [Maryland State Report card site](#).

The Maryland report card data also tracks equity gaps among specific student groups. The equity gap measures the difference between the percentage of total earned points used on the report card by students in a group and the percentage of total earned points by students who are not in that group. A negative equity gap indicates that students in a group did not perform as well as students who were not in that group. Figure 3 shows the average school-level percent equity gap by grade level with the average Maryland state equity gap as a reference. While Maryland charter schools show equity gaps across various student groups on average, there is wide variation across charter schools. For example, the equity gap among Black/African American students enrolled in elementary charter schools ranges from -35 to 38. Fourteen elementary-level charter schools report no equity gap for Black/African American students.

Figure 3. Average percent equity gap among Maryland charter schools, by selected populations

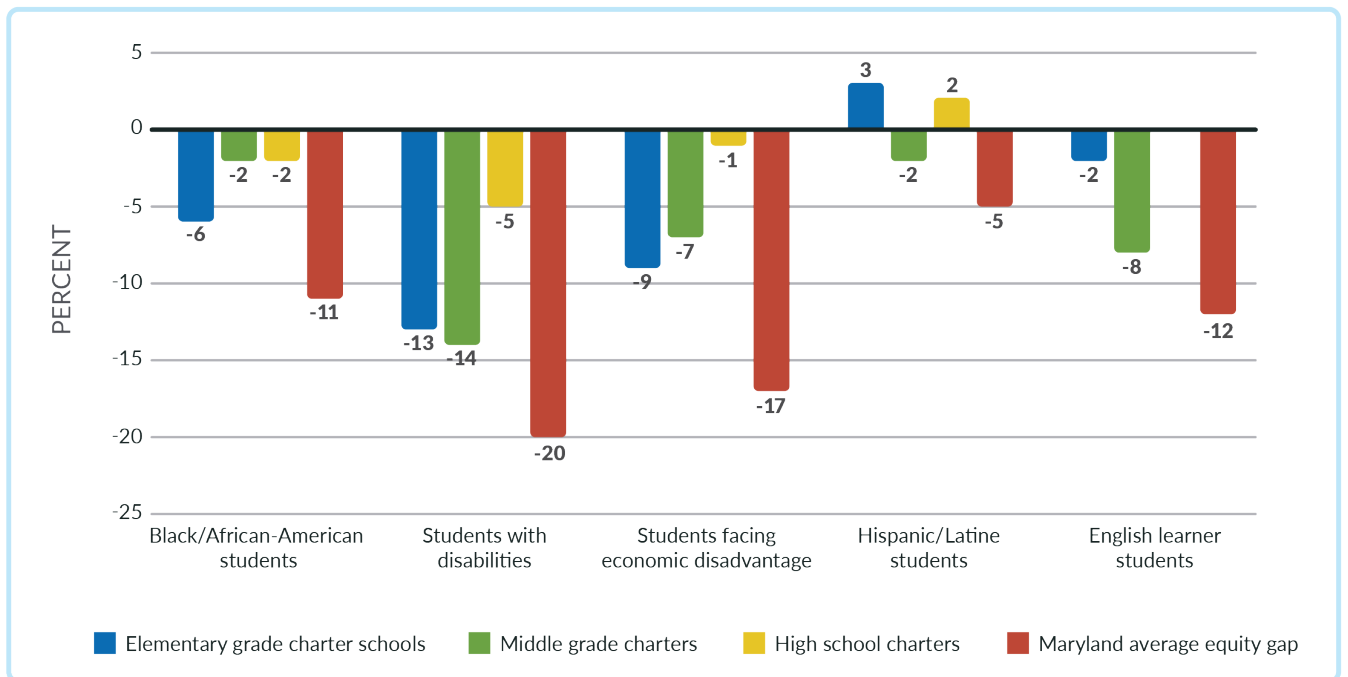


Table 1 shows top performing charter schools based on 22 indicators. Schools that performed in the top five percent of Maryland charter schools for each indicator received a flag, and schools that performed in the top five percent on the most indicators are shown below. Each measure was weighted equally. Compared to the averages across all charter schools by school level, the top performing charter schools have similar or lower expenditures per student and a lower percentage of students at the school facing economic disadvantage. Less than 20 percent of students at six of the nine charter schools below face economic disadvantage. Finally, while the majority of students at Maryland charter schools are students of color, at three of the high-performing schools, more than half of the students are white.

Table 1: Highest performing Maryland charter schools, by school level, 2019

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS	MIDDLE SCHOOLS	HIGH SCHOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City Neighbors-Hamilton ● Chesapeake Charter School ● Monocacy Valley Montessori School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hampstead Hill Academy ● Chesapeake Science Point ● Monocacy Valley Montessori School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City Neighbors High ● Chesapeake Science Point ● Chesapeake Math and IT Public Charter

Note: The indicators measured include the following: ELA, mathematics, and science proficiency for all students and for Black/African American students and students facing economic disadvantage; ELA and mathematics growth for all students and for Black/African American students and students facing economic disadvantage; student climate ratings, climate ratings for African-American students, climate ratings for students facing economic disadvantage, educator school climate ratings, equity gaps for Black/African-American students, equity gaps for students facing economic disadvantage. ELA and mathematics growth ratings are only included for elementary and middle school students.

Maryland Charter Resources, Services, and Approaches

This section highlights the widespread implementation of activities around community engagement, extracurricular activities, family-school associations, social-emotional supports, and restorative justice practices at Maryland charter schools. Similarly, school administrators report efforts to put promising practices in place around social-emotional learning, restorative justice, community partnerships, and differentiated instruction.

Current policies, practices, and services

The environmental scan provided an overview of the variation in approaches to learning, policies and practices, and services offered at Maryland’s charter schools. Based on the environmental scan, several categories were present across at least half (24) of Maryland charter schools. Just over half of Maryland charters (54 percent) are individual schools, not part of a larger nonprofit organization that houses other charter schools in the state or country. Figure 4 indicates selected categories that were present in over half of Maryland charter schools based on the environmental scan. Some categories were less common, but still present in between 13 and 23 Maryland charter schools, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 4. Services and activities offered at more than half of Maryland charter schools, by percentage of schools offering

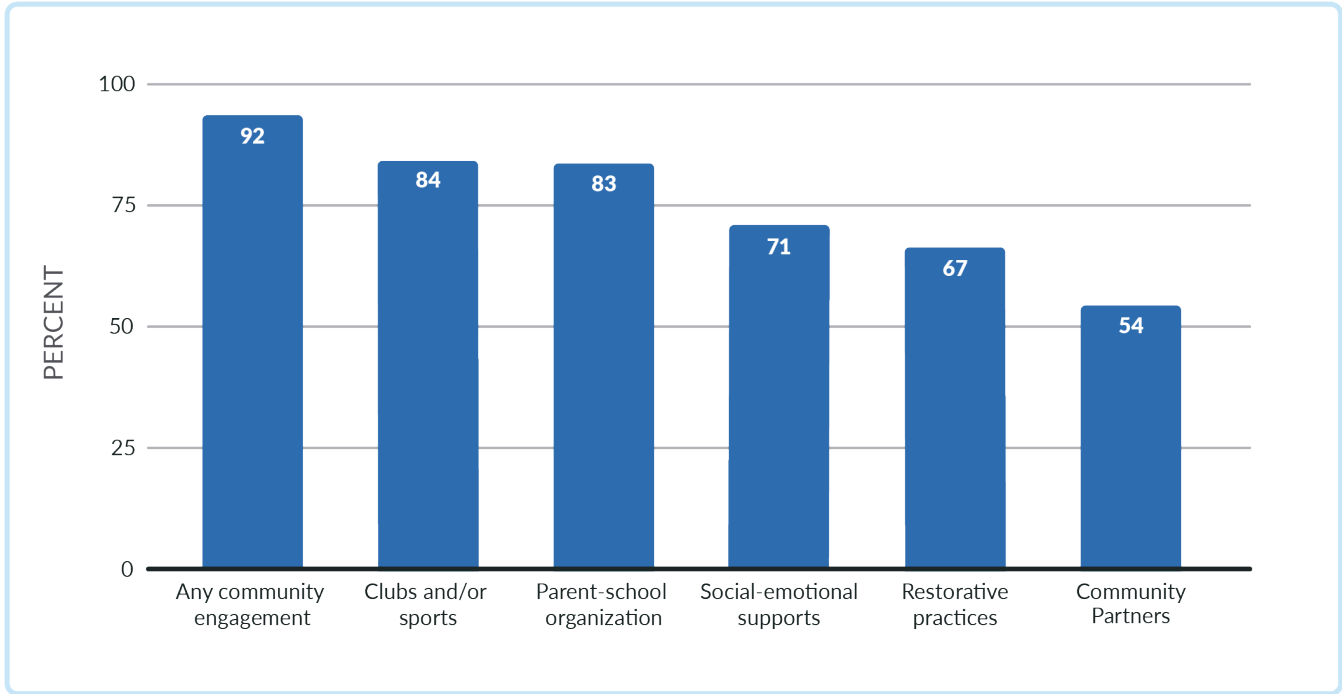
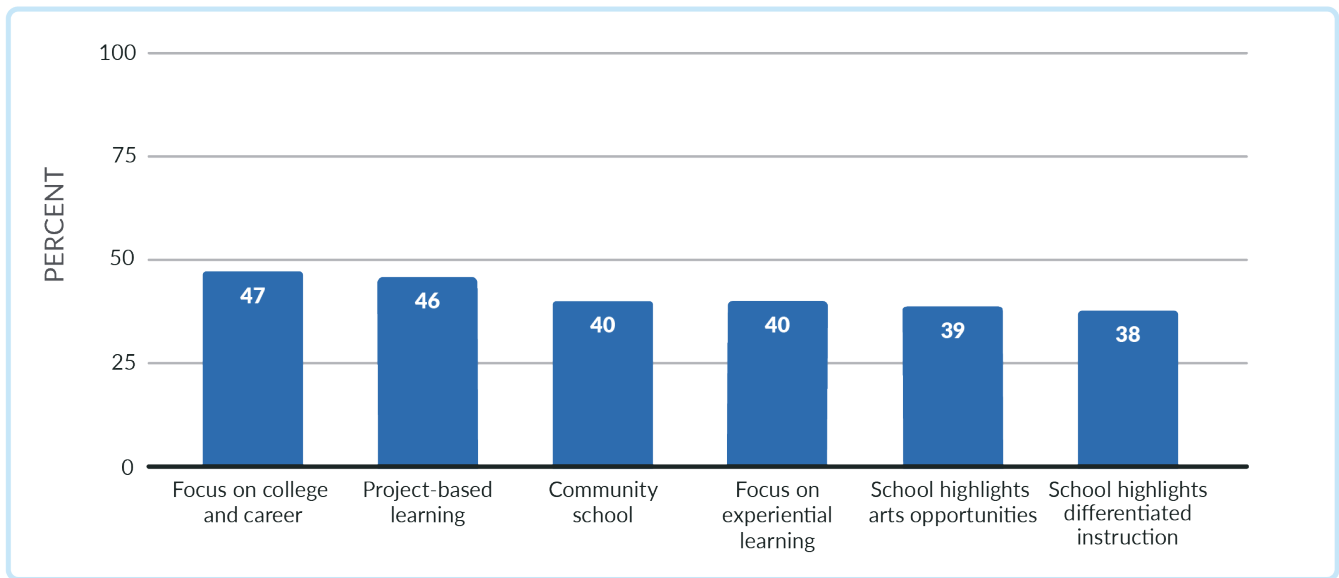


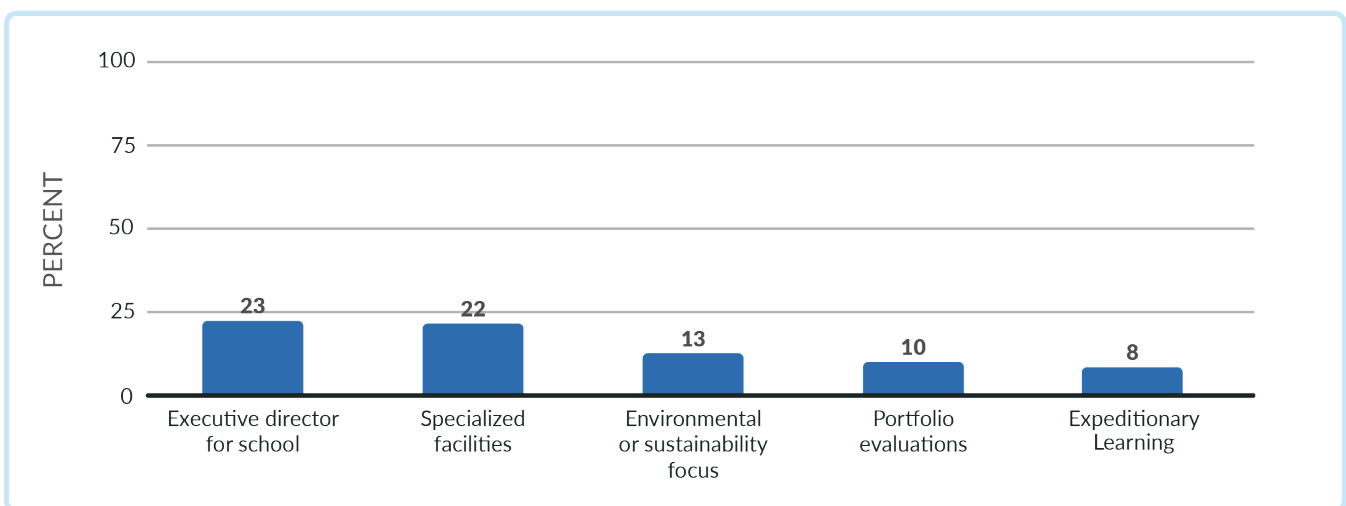
Figure 5. Services and activities offered at between 13 and 23 Maryland charter schools, by percentage of schools offering



Note: Social-emotional support included references to specific SEL curricula as well as a broad Whole Child approach at the school. Restorative practices also included schools implementing a responsive classroom approach.

There were several less common services and activities at Maryland charters, as shown in Figure 6. One structure worth noting may be an operational structure that includes an Executive Director position. This position was present at 11 schools, and such a governance structure may create additional capacity for the principal to focus more broadly on pedagogy and curriculum, while the executive director focuses on school operations (Alvoid & Black Jr., 2014).

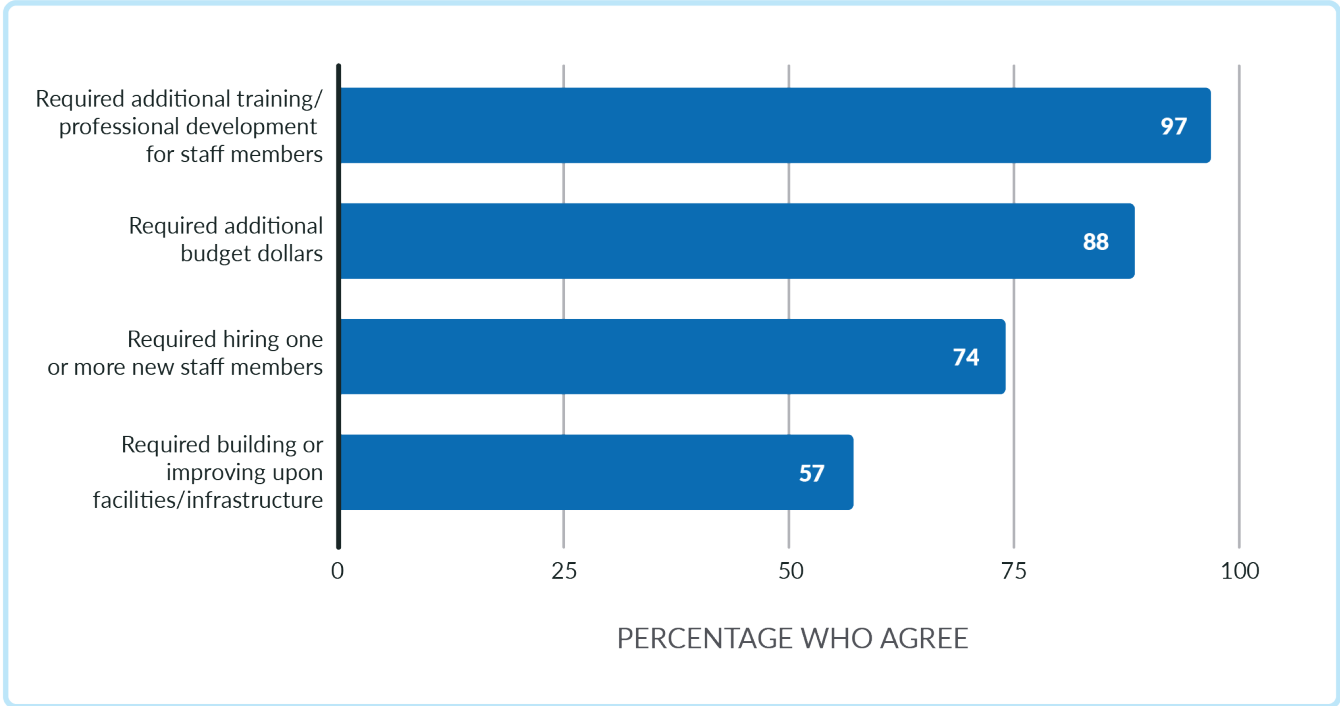
Figure 6. Services and activities offered at between 5 and 12 Maryland charter schools, by percentage of schools offering



Areas of implementation and student goals

In addition to open-ended responses on practices in place, the online survey provided information about broader categories of promising practices in place, the intended goals for the practice(s), available data to support the practice, and resources required. The most common categories selected for Maryland charter schools' promising practices included social-emotional learning (36 percent), restorative justice (34 percent), community partnerships (32 percent), and differentiated instruction (30 percent). Administrators hoped to impact multiple areas of student experiences through practice implementation, with more than 60 percent of respondents targeting school climate (82 percent), social-emotional outcomes (75 percent), and academic achievement (64 percent). The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that practice implementation required additional resources, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Percent agreement with resources needed for practice implementation



Promising Practices

Based on the approach described in Appendix A, the study team identified three broad areas that characterize the promising practices. This section provides an overview of the relevant implementation efforts in each of the areas, an example of supporting data, and recommendations for implementation.



1. Social-emotional supports through universal SEL practices and relationship building

While SEL practices have been an area of interest for many years, these efforts have received increased national attention since the pandemic (US Department of Education, 2021). Among Maryland charter schools, SEL practices were one of the most common areas of practice implementation, and student social and emotional outcomes were top of mind among 36 percent of charter school administrators. These practices and outcomes are in line with MSDE's statewide goals toward improved equity. In 2017, MSDE released [a guide to educational equity in Maryland](#) which identifies integrating social-emotional learning strategies and culturally relevant instruction for students and staff as a priority to promote positive learning environments. Indeed, evidence suggests that SEL efforts positively impact students' self-regulation, self-competence, internalizing behaviors, and pro-social behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2009; Graves Jr. et al., 2017).

School-wide SEL implementation at Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy

Administrators began implementing universal, evidence-based SEL interventions in 2018, and have used curricula from Second Step, Aperture, and Sanford Harmony. In addition, the school offers Check In Check Out (CICO), largely administered by the School Mental Health team. The PK-5 school maintains a whole-child approach and incorporates a core value system supported monthly throughout classrooms. Finally, restorative practices also have been in place for many years, and are in some ways the beginning of SEL work at the school.

Following the return from the pandemic, SEL implementation has been elevated to three tiers (core, supplemental and intensive), with an increased emphasis on mental health supports. These supports include the School Mental Health team composed of a school social worker, Wholeness specialist, and school

FURMAN TEMPLETON SEL ACTIVITIES

- School mental health team
- DESSA Mini administered 3 times annually
- Daily 30 minute SEL lessons provided by teachers
- Grades K-5-supplemental lessons in CASEL competencies
- Daily SEL check-in questions for grades 2-5
- Check and Connect implementation
- Daily morning meetings in classrooms to serve as proactive/team-building restorative circles
- Restorative circles for entire classrooms or small groups of children as needed
- Yoga classroom lessons each week
- Options for light music during SEL lessons or writing
- Classrooms incorporate brain breaks between subjects
- Classrooms offer a calming corner with sensory toys, yoga mat, and coloring pages
- Family night SEL activities

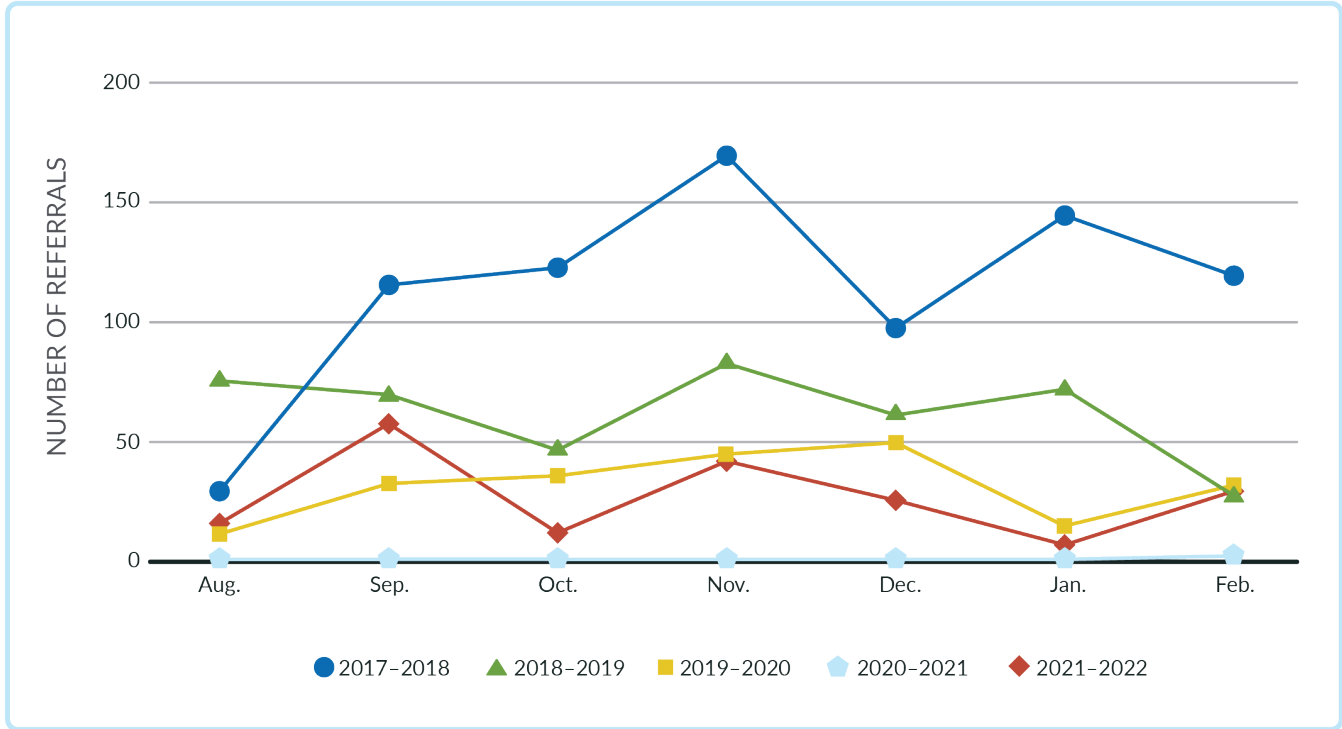
psychologist, to manage a referral system for students' behavioral supports. The referral system offers an alternative to identifying students for referral through the regular SEL assessments already conducted at the school.

Teacher wellness is also a focus at Furman Templeton. Through a partnership with a psychologist, administrators work to identify ways to support teacher well-being through exercise, mindfulness practices, and breathing techniques. Staff receive professional development (PD) on SEL curricula implementation, with additional PD and coaching as needed based on challenges teachers and administrators see in the classroom.

The school-wide focus on SEL is complemented through community partnerships and wraparound services for students as well as family engagement efforts. Furman Templeton is a Community School that receives funding through several grants, including a Promise Neighborhoods grant. This funding goes to support the Wholeness Coordinator role on the School Mental Health team as well as additional staffing and PD funds.

Administrators report a significant amount of documentation around the various SEL practices at the school. Most programs are accompanied by an online form to track student goals, check-ins, referrals, and restorative meeting summaries. Forms document attendees, contributions, goals, and how to move forward effectively. Additional documents provide steps to implementation and communication with families and students about behavior expectations and core values. This documentation ensures that the school can evaluate its processes against how it intended to progress and what is happening on a daily basis. The school maintains a Climate and Culture Plan, a Climate and Culture Handbook, an SEL Plan, and a Parent and Student Handbook.

Figure 8. Monthly office referrals at Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy



Note: March-June are not shown due to unavailable data.



“I would start with knowing your entire school community. You have to know what your school community needs to prescribe the right plan. You do that by knowing your kids and reading your data, including your attendance and parent participation data. These are stepping stones to developing a plan.”

-Furman Templeton administrator

Administrators established goals to decrease office referrals and school suspensions through supporting and monitoring teacher interventions, implementing SEL strategies, and communicating and implementing administrative interventions and responses. Based on these goals, school data shows a steady decline in office visits between 2017-18 and 2021-22.

Recommendations

Administrators at Furman Templeton emphasized the need to use data to inform an effective approach to SEL implementation at an individual school. The use of universal screening and social-emotional surveys of students also provide data on areas of need and effective practices. In addition, documentation through a plan and clear expectations for students and faculty allowed the school to measure success and make improvements over time. Administrators considered the extent to which implementation was consistent with stated policies and identified opportunities to redefine goals and approaches as necessary. Data collection, needs assessment, and planning also help to identify staffing needs and support opportunities to pursue external funding.



SPOTLIGHT ON NEW SONG ACADEMY AS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Community Schools are one avenue to supporting students through a combined focus on academics, child development, family support, and health and social services through community organization involvement (Johnston, et al. 2020). The implementation of the community school model in Maryland represents a recognized approach to connecting students to their communities and services through local assets and partnerships. New Song Academy is one of over 100 community schools in Baltimore City alone.

A school of approximately 180 students, New Song Academy was established over 30 years ago and maintains close ties in the community. School administrators partner with Safe Streets, CUTS, Towson University School of Education, Charlestown Retirement Community, and Elev8, the Community Schools Coordinator. Students from Towson University teach art at New Song. New Song has also partnered for the installation of a putting green at the school to support student wellness. Other initiatives are focused on providing additional services to the community including vaccination clinics, parent workshops, community banking (with PNC's mobile bank), and a farmers market where families can receive bags of fresh food. Administrators recommend establishing anchor documents to highlight the answers to "big questions" at the school. In addition, relationships are not replicable across communities, and it is important to maintain focus on how community relationships can be strengthened, how partnerships are beneficial to students and the school, and what measures are in place to identify success through partnerships (number of partnerships, longevity, dollar value of the partnerships, and how services are being delivered/implemented.)

Small-group relationship-building at Monarch Academy-Glen Burnie

Part of a larger nonprofit umbrella organization (The Children's Guild) and just completing its 13th year, Monarch Academy-Glen Burnie uses the EL Education approach at the K-8 school, which emphasizes long-term, in-depth explorations of topics based on student interests. EL is a provider of expeditionary learning and the EL Education approach is associated with positive impacts based on experimental design studies (Nichols-Barrer & Haimson, 2013).² At Monarch Academy-Glen Burnie, administrators have used a program, entitled Crew, to facilitate small group relationships between students and staff at the school, ensuring that students have at least one trusted adult who can offer support at the school. Present since the launch of the school, Crew aids in the creation of relationships between students, and ensures that students build positive connections with at least one staff member at the school. Crew is a required component of students' experience at Monarch Academy associated with the EL approach.

In 2020, Monarch Academy launched a standardized, digital curriculum for Crew, which increased access to the full breadth of resources for the program. At Monarch Academy, teachers may use co-planning time to further develop the scope and sequence of the Crew curriculum. There is a Crew schedule for middle grades each day. EL also contributes 25 hours a year of technical assistance to Monarch Academy to help with implementation and assessment. While EL and Crew programs are in place at hundreds of schools across the country, Monarch Academy's new, digital curriculum for Crew, data-driven decision-making, and years of experience make them unique among Maryland charter schools.

² EL relies on a set of guiding principles that emphasize connections to the natural world and each other. Monarch Academy's implementation of crew occurs within the EL context and is reliant on EL principles. However, the implementation of EL is beyond the scope of this case study.

The Crew Practice: "Crew, not passengers"

Crew is a specific process and structure in which students start in a circle with a greeting, followed by a reading, an activity, and a debrief. Readings may offer reflections on academics, team building, or character. Crew varies across grade levels, and reading aloud followed by discussion may take longer in elementary classrooms. In the middle grades, students stay with the same teacher and peers for Crew from 6th to 8th grades. In the elementary years, Crew is structured around the classroom. In this most recent year, Crew focused on equity and inclusion, ensuring that students felt they belonged and could succeed. Crew supports the use of restorative practices and models a restorative justice circle. Crew also supports students in reflecting on their own goals and growth. Crew implementation focuses on goals to create a community of learning, develop character-building habits, and foster a sense of belonging.



Measuring impact with data

Administrators survey students on school climate, culture, and relationships in the fall and spring. Items address whether students feel they have a trusted adult at the school, whether they feel valued and their voice is heard, and student identity and demographics. Questions are aligned with the Maryland School Climate Survey, but the school is able to consider the results more quickly and look at change over time by fielding the survey internally. Students' relationship-building, safety, and emotional development are the central goals for Crew, and survey results are not connected to attendance, grades, or standardized tests.

Professional development and staffing

Professional development for teachers is a significant time investment at Monarch Academy. Monarch provides an onboarding process and PD for new teachers as well as weekly PD for all teachers. Teachers participate in their own Crew and break into differentiated PD groups, combining teachers across grade levels. PD in the beginning of the year is also an opportunity for restorative and community circle training. At Monarch Academy, teachers may also participate in camping trips and conferences related to relationship-building efforts. Crew requires regular daily or weekly preparation time from teachers given its highly structured nature.

In middle school, Crew group sizes are 12 to 14 students. Because of this small group size creating a large number of groups, Monarch Academy encourages all instructional and some administrative staff to participate in Crew training and implementation as a Crew Leader. The copious number of groups also creates additional challenges around providing enough physical space for every Crew meeting group.

Recommendations

At Monarch Academy, careful attention is paid to changes across grade levels in the scope and sequence of goals. By naming a measure of success for each activity and identifying specific skills students are expected to gain, school administrators can trace the implementation process and steps for relationship-building. For example, one of the goals is for students to become comfortable sharing their thoughts, ideas, and feelings during a Crew meeting and then using these conversations to help solve problems. Teachers can review students' progress in sharing during sessions and provide supplemental supports to students who may not be building skills as quickly as expected. Furthermore, starting Crew in early grades supports growth throughout their time at school. It is also important to hire educators who are invested in developing students' social-emotional skills and can dedicate time and planning resources to implement selected practices with fidelity. Ideally, teachers will personalize the lessons and have ownership and a deep belief in what they are doing, as well as agency to propose new ideas and adapt the program over time to reflect the changing needs of students.



2. Practices toward ensuring college and career readiness, and beyond

While establishing college and career readiness is a state and national education standard, almost half of Maryland charter schools (23 schools) also highlighted an explicit, mission-driven focus on college readiness, graduation, and career placement, suggesting an alignment of their practices to these goals. For many, college and career readiness is a mindset that structures practices toward a specific, measurable, and achievable goal. Practices in this section highlight the benefits of maintaining extended connections with students and wraparound services beyond high school graduation and creating a sustainable structure in the school for the completion of dual enrollment credits (Hill, 2020; An, 2013).

College and career planning and postgraduation follow-up at Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women

Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women (BLS) is an all-girls school located in Baltimore City, serving grades 6 through 12. A school with about 500 students, BLS holds a 100 percent college acceptance rate and a 97.8 percent 4-year graduation rate. The school's College and Career Counseling program is remarkable for its dedication to longitudinal support for students and alumnae. Administrators use resources and data tools from **To&Through**, which provides workshops on college and career success, a college visit for students, and pre-college summer programs, in which girls stay on a college campus for a few days to gain college experience before enrolling. The College and Career Counseling program scaffolds students as they progress through school so that by senior year, they can begin the process of applying to colleges with confidence. If students decide not to enroll in college, administrators help them with resume writing and career preparation.

Supporting students through the college application process

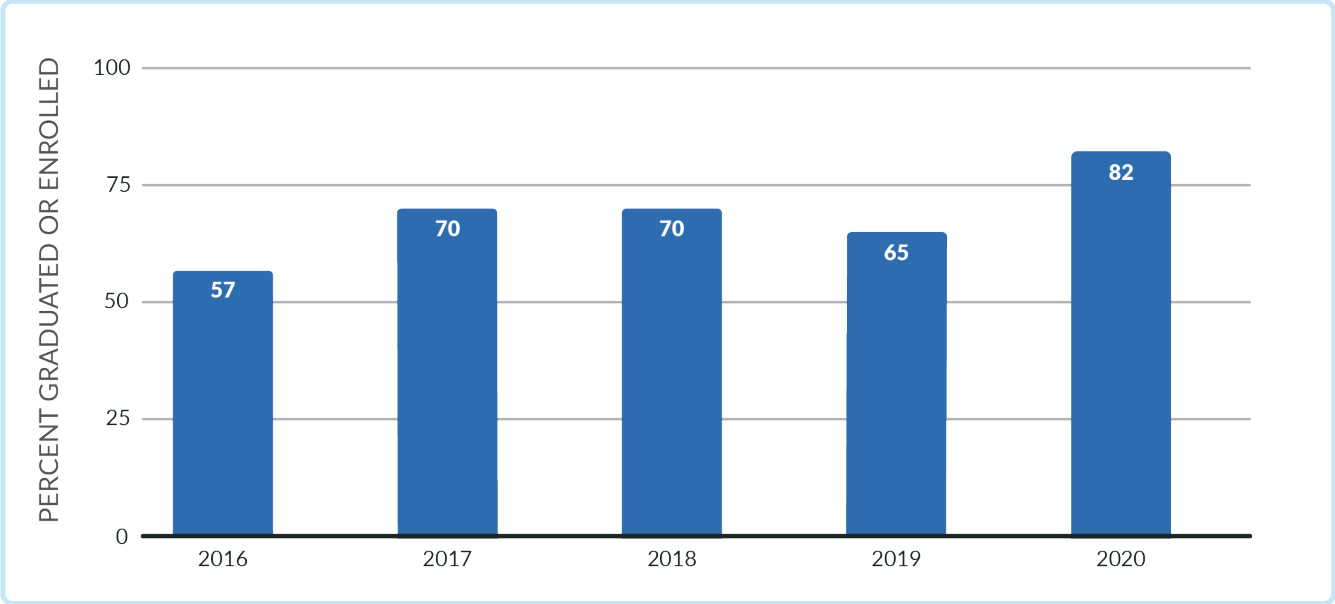
BLS administrators begin college conversations with students in the middle grades and continue to support students through to application completion in their senior year. Administrators and faculty host SAT prep and work on college essays in their English classes. The College and Career Counseling Office helps students make a list of colleges to apply to and prepares them to apply by the Early Decision deadline. Most students complete all of their college applications before winter break. In the spring, the Office supports scholarship and financial aid applications to ensure that their students are going to college with minimal debt.

WHOLE GIRL WELLNESS INITIATIVES AT BLS

- Student-driven Big Sister Little Sister program
- Locker rooms converted into weight training rooms
- *Food for Life* course on creating nutritious versions of fast food favorites
- *Elevating the Whole Girl* conference to create educational spaces that empower girls and facilitate connections with other school practitioners
- *Cool Women with Hot Jobs* is a mandatory, graded, career conference for all students
- *She Speaks* sessions invite women leaders of the Baltimore community to speak about their career path
 - » *Power Hour* provides an optional opportunity for speakers with nuanced skillset to speak to students on a specific topic

BLS maintains a dedicated College and Career Counseling office. BLS supports its College and Career Counseling Office through fundraising conducted by its foundation, at about \$1.5 million a year to support all the programming at the school. They also apply for and receive grants to supplement their curriculum. Based on National Clearinghouse data, more students have enrolled or completed college since 2016 (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Percentage of Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women students enrolled at or graduated from college by class year



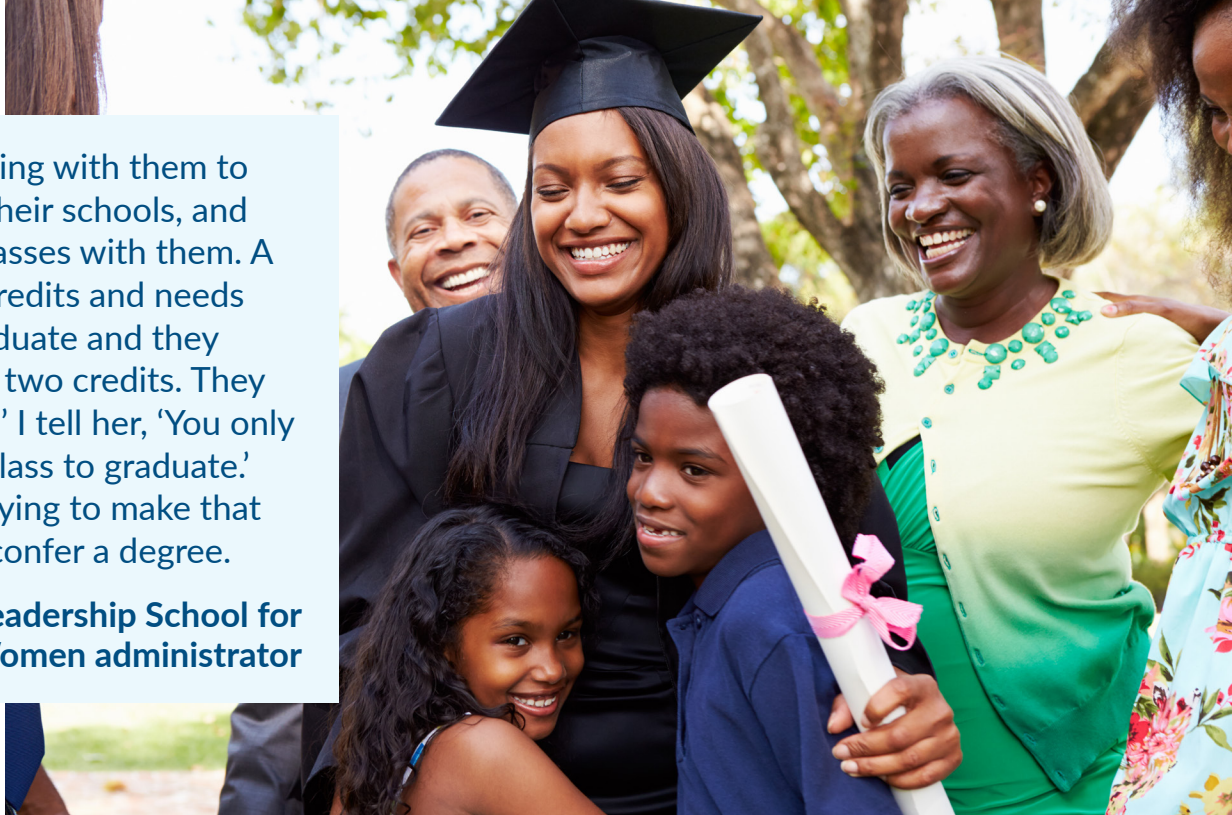
Post-graduation follow-up

BLS follows their alumnae into college to support them in persistence and completion of their degree. Administrators ensure that the logistics of enrollment, such as transcripts, are signed and sent on time. BLS also offers ongoing workshops for former students that cover logistical challenges such as navigating their new learning management system. As part of ongoing supports, BLS hosts a re-enrollment campaign for their alumnae who have not completed their college degree. They make phone calls and visit homes to check in with them and help students get re-enrolled, registered for classes, and/or complete minor administrative steps to confer their degree. BLS Board members also volunteer their time to help alumnae with practice interviews and career prep advice. While most colleges also provide career services programs, BLS alumnae choose to maintain connections with BLS and receive their support as they continue through college and beyond.

In addition, data on students' institution, choice of major, and degree completion provides important information to the College and Career Planning office for future applications. BLS collects data from students on which colleges and majors provide better retention rates for their alumnae so they can advise current BLS students on making statistically sound decisions about choosing schools and majors that give them a good chance at graduating on time with minimal debt.

We're literally going with them to their homes, to their schools, and registering for classes with them. A student has 58 credits and needs 60 credits to graduate and they don't have those two credits. They say, 'Oh, I forgot!' I tell her, 'You only need one more class to graduate.' So we're really trying to make that connection and confer a degree.

-Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women administrator



Recommendations

BLS recommends focusing on fundraising to have a dedicated college and career department with the resources to support students through each stage of the college preparation process. BLS accomplishes its own fundraising through a mix of individual solicitations, grants with private funders and foundations, and big fundraising events each year with individuals and corporations. BLS also keeps careful data records, combining follow-up with students with data available through the National Student Clearinghouse.

Creating a dual enrollment mindset: College partnership at Coppin Academy

Launched in 2005, Coppin Academy is housed on the Coppin State University campus, and the school currently enrolls 350 students in grades 9 through 12. Coppin Academy offers dual enrollment to all students who attend, and students can graduate with up to 21 credits (eligible at any college in Maryland) towards their bachelor's degree. Currently, 25 to 50 students may enroll in college courses in a given semester. Selected college courses span a wide range, and students may focus on any area of interest (English, art, theater, calculus), while they build their academic skills in other areas through high school coursework. Administrators ensure that dual enrollment coursework will translate to college credits by guiding students to spread out course-taking across disciplines. Students purchase their own books for courses (unless there is financial hardship), and the school fully funds every dual enrollment course. In addition to the college credits students earn on campus, Coppin offers dual credit courses available to students. Teacher professors, high school teachers who qualify as adjunct faculty, teach courses that count for high school graduation credit and college credit. These courses include ENG 101, HIS 202 & 204; MATH 131 & 132; THEA 100. These courses satisfy graduation requirements. The goal of Coppin State University & Coppin Academy is to have students graduate high school with 60 credits, then attend college for two years to earn the bachelor's degree.



We have to expose students to rich college experiences while in high school. College seems like a mystical “Wizard of Oz” adventure that is daunting and unattainable. Every academic pathway has an opportunity for students to take a college course. We have an “opt-out” policy. We prepare every student to be college-ready no matter how long it takes during their 4-year high school career. It’s a mindset. If leaders of a school believe that they can create supports for students to take college courses, then students will be successful.

-Coppin Academy administrator

Making dual enrollment work for all students

Coppin Academy takes a holistic approach to dual enrollment. The school requires a minimum GPA of 2.0 for dual enrollment and also takes into account teacher recommendations and student essays, recognizing that quantitative data alone may not provide the full picture. Implementation efforts focus on minimizing barriers to college coursework, while also emphasizing the necessary steps to college enrollment for students. In addition, through the school’s presence on campus, logistical barriers to attending class and enrolling are reduced.

The school also offers several models for dual enrollment. The traditional model reflects cases where students take classes on the Coppin State University campus. As another option, Coppin Academy employs “teacher professors,” dually certified as secondary education teachers and adjunct faculty for Coppin State. While the syllabus includes the same content, this option provides additional benefits relative to what students might experience in a class on campus. Typically, these courses are offered to

students new to dual enrollment. For instance, the students know the teachers and the class includes only Coppin Academy students. Therefore, the student may feel more comfortable asking questions and participating. Such coursework builds networks prior to entering a college campus. More broadly, Coppin Academy administrators support students by building their networking ability, improving their confidence around interactions with professors, and expanding their cultural capital to include the “language and values of a university.” Most recently, administrators are focused on increasing collaboration with specific departments. For example, Coppin Academy students can tour the criminal justice department, meet professors, become familiar with the building, and see the available resources.

In addition, Coppin Academy offers a computer science and career readiness academic pathways. While Coppin offers career readiness electives, coursework on soft skills, and internships or job shadowing opportunities for seniors, the emphasis at the school is that all students can take a college course.

Student outcomes at Coppin Academy

Administrators do not track students through to college completion but estimate that the majority of students who enroll are completing college degrees. Coppin Academy students maintained or increased their GPA following the pandemic. Around 20 percent of students take a college-level course each semester, and approximately 98 percent of students pass their dual enrollment courses.

Recommendations

Coppin recommends fostering a strong relationship with college partners; Coppin is situated on the Coppin State campus with strong support from the President of the college. However, it is not necessary to be housed in a college to begin a partnership with a college for a dual enrollment program. An established relationship with a local college can foster a college-going mindset for students and also ease logistical concerns. Using Title I funds, Coppin Academy hired a College and Readiness Coordinator, who will liaise with the university for student enrollment and college advising. In addition, this coordinator develops workshops and seminars with university faculty and staff for students to interface with various college resources like library services or college advising. In addition, the increase in hybrid and online opportunities may assist students in the pursuit of dual enrollment opportunities. Monitoring student dual enrollment courses to help strategize course credits is a key component of Coppin Academy’s approach. If left unchecked, some students may take too many courses in one preferred area, which may not all transfer into credits when they enroll in college. It is essential that dual enrollment opportunities maximize credits while balancing financial strain and students’ time. Administrators should guide students on the most appropriate coursework for their topical interests and post-graduation plans. In addition, funding could be a concern for students and administrators. Through Coppin Academy’s operational funds and funds from CSU’s Foundation, Coppin Academy offers a scholarship to students who attended Coppin Academy and enrolled in CSU upon graduation. The funds are meant to support additional fees students experience, such as purchasing books or a laptop that financial aid may not cover.



3. Applying schoolwide learning philosophies

Charter schools are often created with distinctive learning philosophies and approaches to education. Indeed, school administrators may have an opportunity to employ a philosophy that they feel passionate about or have developed through their own learning process. These promising practices explore very different ways that charter schools have applied a philosophy toward learning at their school. The following approaches to learning are unique, often informing the entire philosophy of the school, and may be challenging to replicate in other settings.

Embracing environmental learning at Watershed Public Charter School

Watershed Public Charter School opened in the 2019-20 school year, and currently serves almost 290 students in grades K through 5, with plans for annual expansion to 8th grade. Watershed has an 11-acre campus for outdoor, environmental- and arts-integrated, project-based learning. Developed to address an equity gap in access to nature, Watershed administrators provide students with access to a stream, rain garden, fields, and a micro farm with chickens to ensure there is an environmental component to the curriculum for every student.

In-house, project-based environmental curriculum

Teachers and administrators apply environmental learning to every component of the ELA, mathematics, science, art, and music curricula. The school's principal and Executive Director wrote and designed the curriculum for the school, providing an environmental lens to each lesson. The place-based focus is on outdoor fieldwork and incorporating experiences and activities outdoors on the school's own campus. Each grade cares for its own outdoor space.

In order to do this, Watershed provides ongoing teacher professional development opportunities. Teachers receive professional development the week before school starts and during an annual overnight retreat. Early dismissals on Wednesdays offer additional professional development time. In general, administrators aim to provide a monthly rotation of professional development about outdoor activities and how to improve classroom projects. In addition, administrators encourage teachers to use the existing lessons already created at the school, and, as teachers gain experience, administrators allow for the implementation of new lesson plans.

Administrators are intentional with school supplies to support teachers in fully adopting an environmental emphasis. For example, everyone has clipboards to provide a hard surface to write on outside. Teachers have access to portable whiteboards, "go bags" with supplies for outdoor activities, and tables placed outdoors in multiple locations. More than one class can be outdoors at once. One year, teachers received rain jackets as a gift.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT WATERSHED

Project showcases: Students present their learning to families or community members at three project showcases each year.

Hibernation and Earth Weeks: In the week prior to breaks, students work through environmental topics paired with themed activities, projects, and snacks. During these weeks, whole school and classroom activities are offered, and teachers have autonomy to decide to what extent each day (part or whole) their classroom engages in related projects and activities.

Student portfolios: By the end of their eighth grade year, students will be able to present and talk about their learning.



Photo courtesy of Watershed Public Charter School

Student growth and development

To understand students' higher-order thinking, Watershed teachers use a rubric normed across grade levels to ensure that students receive consistent feedback toward the same objectives. The school intends for students to understand a lesson or objective, apply it to another concept or experience, and eventually be able to teach someone else about it. For example, administrators wanted to ensure that fifth graders understand the importance of the water cycle, address social studies components around equal access to water, and then also speak about the water cycle in conjunction with another issue, such as civil rights. While administrators do not yet have MCAP data due to the pandemic, Watershed students are on track to meet the Baltimore County Public Schools average in mathematics.

Recommendations

Watershed recommends conducting tours and offering professional development opportunities to teachers outside of their school. They also found success with creating mini lessons and projects to integrate environmental components. While other schools may not be able to change their entire curriculum to incorporate environmental education, setting aside a week or a unit for a project-based approach to the environment may be more feasible. Another recommendation they shared is to find a mentor charter school with experience in at least one of the aspects of a new promising practice, whether it be environmental curriculum, arts integration, or project-based learning. Watershed has forged a connection with City Neighbors in which executive directors, principals, and other teachers can partner together and work on instructional leadership and curriculum development.



Photo courtesy of Watershed Public Charter School

Early literacy competencies and teaching fellows at Legends Charter School

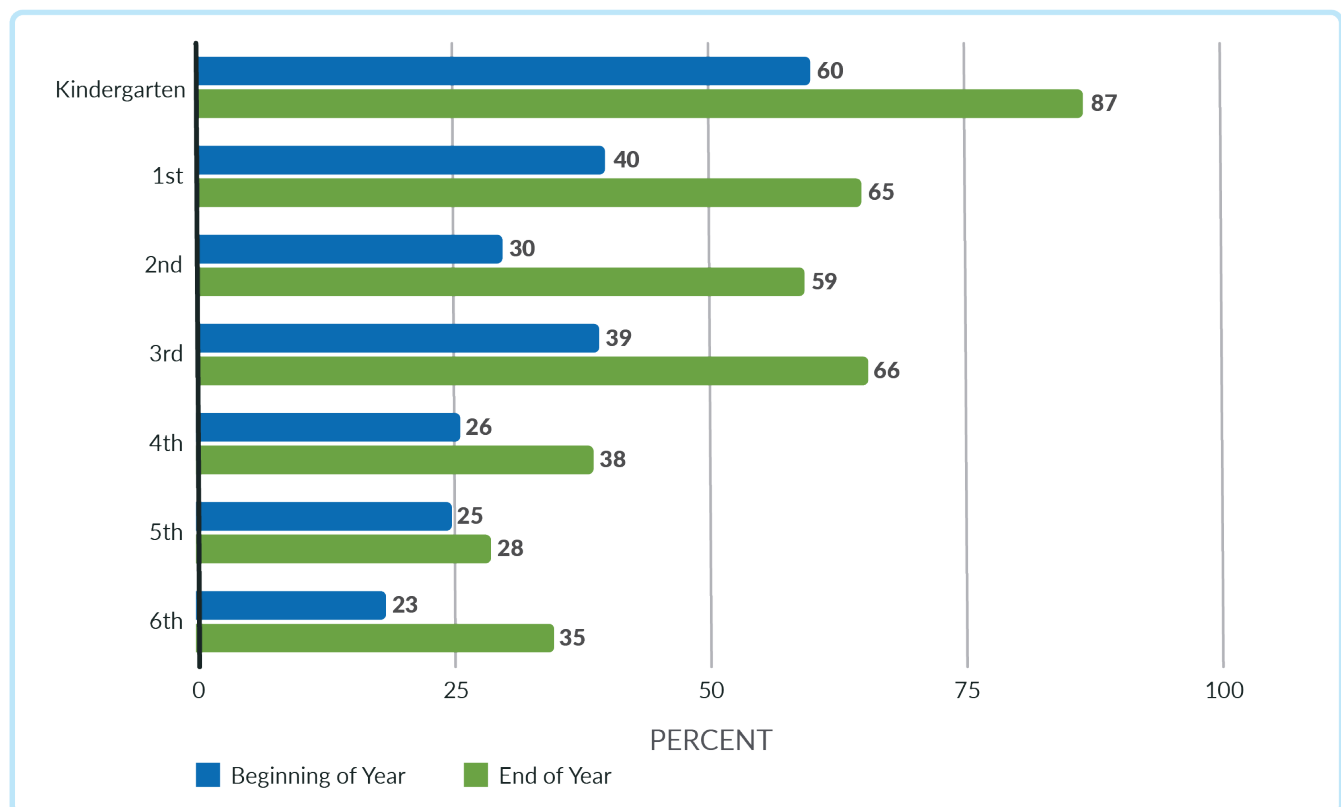
Legends Charter School is a K through 7 school of about 800 students in Prince George's County that opened in 2020-21. In the last year, administrators have found academic success through their approach to early literacy competency. The Legends approach allows teachers to plan for students reading behaviors to accelerate the cementing of foundational reading skills. Teachers are well-trained to address student learning specifically for these reading behaviors. During Guided Reading class, students regardless of grade level attend their reading level group with the teacher trained for those specific phonics. This approach maximizes teachers' tools and experience to advance the students' reading proficiency. Administrators found positive results in reading remediation for students who were below grade level in reading using this approach.



Differentiated reading groups

At Legends, beginning in Kindergarten, students are homogeneously grouped with a pre-reading assessment using the Amplified DIBELS Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC) tool. Students meet with their guided reading groups four times a week, along with a weekly short-cycle assessment rooted in reading foundations. As a result of this practice, about 90 percent of students reached a reading proficiency at or above grade level. In addition, students show growth based on their iReady beginning of year and end of year formative assessments for 2021-22 (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Percentage of students at grade level or above on 2021-22 iReady reading scores, comparison between beginning of year and end of year



With a reading system rooted in small groups, Legends ensures that all of their first grade teachers receive students reading at or above grade level. This allows teachers to focus on content and, by third grade, teachers shift their attention to communicating and writing. At Legends, students in grades K-2 receive differentiated instruction based on reading ability. Starting in third grade, staff take math ability into account in placement, with the goal for all students to pass Algebra no later than seventh grade. To ensure continued success, Legends offers academic intervention services for students 1.5-2 years below grade level. Legends works to normalize interventions and assistance, in an effort to shift the narrative toward requesting and receiving help, making it a common practice.

Personnel and infrastructure support

The Legends AmeriCorp Fellows program provides additional personnel support to implement small, differentiated reading groups. The extra staffing from Legends Fellows allows for the creation of smaller groups and frequent regrouping after analyzing student reading skill data. The larger workforce also allows for strategic staffing so that teachers can focus on teaching and counselors can focus on emotional and behavioral health, while other duties such as recess supervision are delegated to Legends Fellows.

Another crucial element is the infrastructure to allow students of all grades to switch classes for their differentiated reading groups, which Legends currently considers a challenge. While high schools are designed with wide hallways and lockers to facilitate quick classroom changes, the building Legends is housed in has narrow hallways not conducive to Kindergarteners switching classes. Further, the practice of switching classes required additional funds and valuable hallway real estate for open cubbies for student belongings.

Recommendations

Legends recommends hiring teachers who have a background in literacy but do not expect to be pull-out reading specialists. They also recommend additional training for these teachers on how to teach literacy at different reading levels so that they are best equipped with various teaching roles and literacy skills to close reading gaps in early grades.

ABOUT LEGENDS FELLOWS

- Modeled directly after the City Year AmericCorps gap year service program
- Full-time volunteers with living stipends
- Fellows are between ages 18-30
- Perform non-teaching adult work at the school, allowing for smaller differentiated reading groups
- Provide student greetings, civic event hosting, recess supervision, and student mentorship
- Act as role models at the school, creating a culture of “It’s cool to be smart”
- After a year of service, Legends Fellows receive a scholarship they can use at any educational institution

Self-directed Learning through the Montessori Method at Carroll Creek³

Located in Frederick County, Carroll Creek Montessori is a PK through grade 8 school of just over 300 students. It is typical for students to stay at Carroll Creek for the full 11 years. As a Montessori school, Carroll Creek uses the curriculum for children ages two to adolescence originally developed in Italy by Maria Montessori between 1907 and 1951 and has since expanded and adapted (Marshall, 2017).

The Montessori method is known for its holistic approach that values the freedom of choice, natural motivation for learning through self-directed interest, development of independence and self-agency through affirming learning experiences, and social development and empathy (Marshall, 2017). While Maria Montessori originally designed the curriculum for low-income families' children, the Montessori method has become less accessible today due to the high cost of implementing the curriculum with fidelity. Therefore, in the US, only 10% of Montessori schools are public, whether they are district, magnet, or charter schools. (American Montessori Society, 2022).

Resources for Montessori implementation

The Montessori method for preschool-age children requires specially designed manipulatives that focus on developing a skill or understanding of a concept. However, these manipulatives can cost upwards of \$20,000-\$25,000 per classroom for primary school. There are other Montessori classroom recommendations, such as having a large classroom size of about 1200 square feet for 30 students to simultaneously do workstations across the floor, sinks in every classroom for cooking, and outdoor space as a natural extension of the classroom. In upper elementary grades and middle school, students continue to self-direct their project-based learning, but they do not require the same types of hands-on materials. Their developmental plane includes some concrete experiences coupled with learning of abstract concepts.

Teacher certification in the Montessori method is a required, time-intensive resource. Carroll Creek requires all of their general education classroom teachers to be certified or in the process of getting

certified in the Montessori method. Certification takes two years to complete at the primary level, including a summer “residency.” For all other levels, certification usually takes three years to complete, including two summer residencies and commitments on weekends throughout the year.

³ Monocacy Valley Montessori School also utilizes the Montessori Method to achieve strong academic results. In this report, we contacted Carroll Creek since they also incorporated Spanish immersion.

COMMON FEATURES OF A MONTESSORI SCHOOL

- Mixed age or grade classrooms
- Hands-on Montessori materials
- Child-led, self-paced structured activity stations done individually, in pairs, or in small groups
- 3-hour uninterrupted “work” cycles
- Teachers move from group to group and guide students toward their next activity
- Whole child approach



Photo courtesy of Carroll Creek Montessori

Carroll Creek parents launched the school with the intent to provide an additional Spanish language immersion component. However, administrators found that hiring enough teachers that could instruct using Montessori methods in Spanish was challenging. The current Spanish curriculum focuses on an acquisition/proficiency model that includes two half hour sessions of Spanish instruction weekly for preschool students, four half hour sessions for students in kindergarten through 6th grade, high school Spanish I and II for middle school students in addition to an expanded Spanish class for eighth grade students who took Spanish I in sixth grade and Spanish II in seventh grade. This “Montessori Spanish Experience” class focuses on literature and culture with an emphasis on conversational proficiency. While one proficiency level of students are learning Spanish, the students of other proficiency levels take computer classes or work directly with the teacher. This model does create scheduling challenges for a Montessori school, as the high school classes are 45 minutes long and often interrupt the three-hour work cycle that is a tenet of the Montessori method. The progress of their student’s acquisition/proficiency levels in Spanish are continually reviewed through a nationally normed assessment that is given to students in the fall and spring of their third, sixth and eighth grade years.



Photo courtesy of Carroll Creek Montessori

Outcomes

Carroll Creek highlights students’ growth in independence, confidence, and self-advocacy as measures of success. For example, some of the projects that Carroll Creek students have worked on include visiting a factory to learn more about how factories work and planning a field day for the entire school, including managing all of the stations for the younger students. The planning, organizational, and leadership skills developed through these opportunities are supplemented with real-life skills such as cleaning their classrooms and planning and preparing meals for class camping trips. Current Carroll Creek students and alumni in high school also show strong academic performance, as illustrated in Figures 11 and 12.

Figure 11. Percentage of Carroll Creek students meeting or exceeding expectations in MCAP and MISA in 2020-21 in comparison to Maryland average

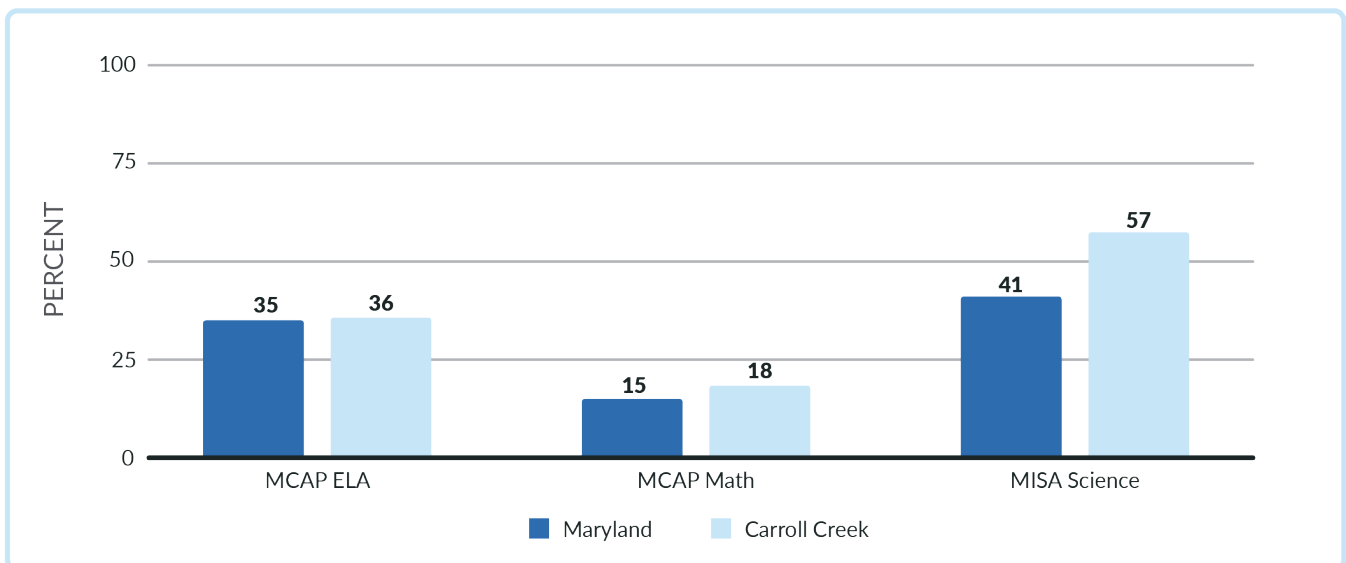
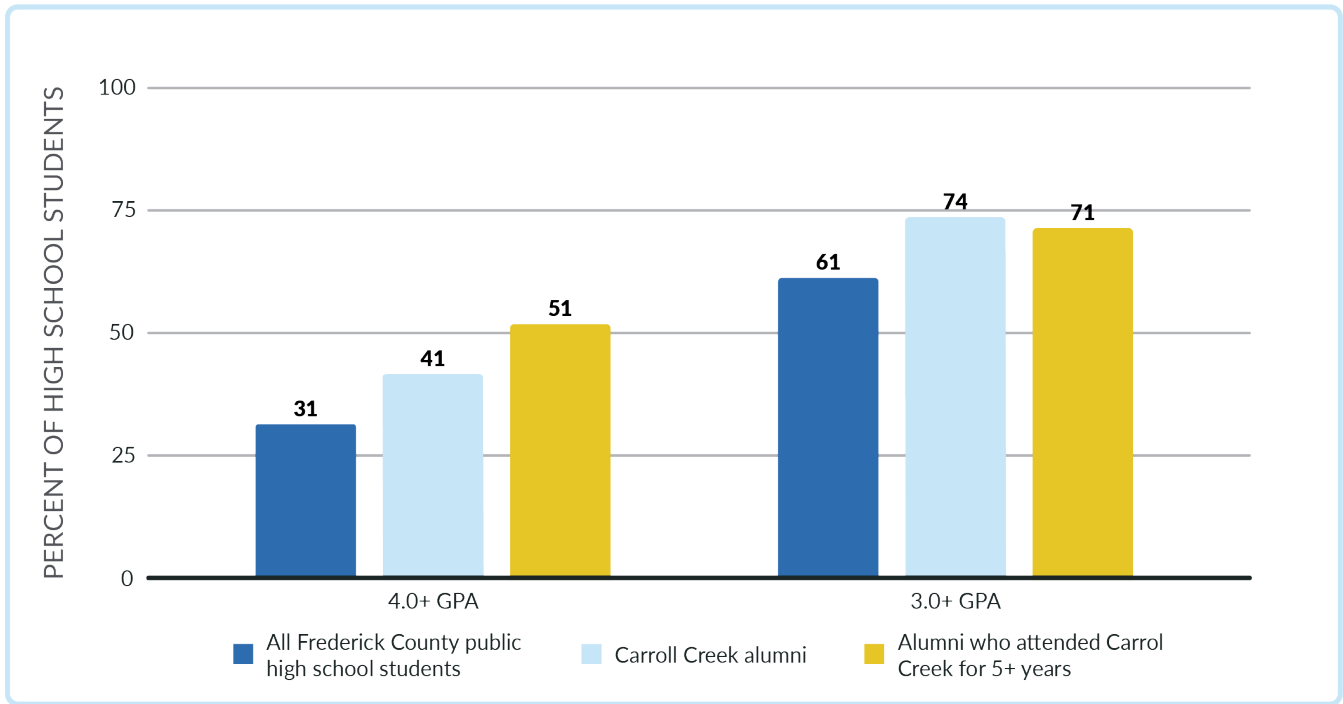


Figure 12. Percentage of Frederick County high school students earning high GPAs by Carroll Creek alumni status



Recommendations

Carroll Creek recommends adopting the Montessori method in full to implement the curriculum with fidelity. However, one practice that could possibly be adapted as a silo is having lunch in classrooms instead of going to a larger cafeteria. The quiet environment of the classroom allows for natural conversation between students to take place, fostering strong peer relationships.

Building exposure to STEM at Chesapeake Science Point

Chesapeake Science Point Public Charter School (CSP) serves 6 through 12th grades with approximately 500 students. STEM after-school activities and competitions are a part of CSP’s founding mission. There is an expectation that students will stay after school to participate in STEM activities and that families will be able to accommodate a later pick-up and support students in their weekend competitions. Research has shown the effectiveness of after-school programs on narrowing the achievement gap, promoting physical and mental fitness, and offering refuge for children (Moss, 2018).

STEM Clubs and Activities		
Science Olympiad	Virtual Reality	Pi Day
Science Bowl	3D Design Printing	STEM Fair
Chess Team	Engineering Club	Makers Fair
VEX Robotics	Saturday Academy	Earth Fest
Lego Robotics Team	Study Hall	Career Day
Robotics	Fitness Club	



CSP STEM COMPETITION AWARDS/ACCOLADES

- CSP Underwater Robotics Team qualifies for International SeaPerch Competition (2019)
- CSP MS/HS wins 22.5% of the awards at County Science Fair (2019)
- CSP HS qualifies for National AASHTO TRAC Bridge Building Competition (2019)
- 2 CSP Students earn Capital Gazette Outstanding Student Achiever Award (2019)
- HS Math Team gold for the AACC season CSP's 11th year in a row at the top (2008-2019)
- MS MathCounts 10 years in a row winning gold (2008-2018)
- CSP Student ACT Score in top 2% for Hispanic Students
- CSP competes in the Blacks in Government Oratorical and STEM Competition, students win gold & 2 bronze (2018)
- CSP HS Seaperch Robotics Team: Only school in MD with two teams in the top 8 Both qualified for international competition at Dartmouth College (2018)
- CSP HS SeaPerch Team wins silver at Delaware Robotics competition (2018)
- CSP MS Robotics wins silver at Monkton Competition (2018)
- 2 CSP Students earn STEM Student of Excellence Award (2018)
- 3 CSP Students earn Capital Gazette Outstanding Student Achiever Award

Approximately 60 to 70 percent of students participate in a club at CSP. Administrators employ several strategies to encourage this level of involvement, as follows:

- Open Houses at the start of the year tailored to the after-school activity opportunities to increase family awareness
- “Saturday Academies” of math or robotics in which teachers rotate responsibilities overseeing between 50 and 100 students on a Saturday morning so students can catch up or further explore interests
- Clubs provided by teachers, and occasionally families at the school, but not through external providers. CSP does not have external groups that come in and run clubs. The school is always looking to partner with local experts and businesses to co sponsor these clubs as this will increase community involvement and bolster the programs as a whole.

In addition to these formal structures to support involvement, teachers engage students who are excelling in certain areas in class and regularly expose students to fun materials during class so they can pursue further interests after school. Administrators ensure there is overlap between what is offered in the clubs and classroom curriculum to provide exposure for all students and to capture student interest. Students are also encouraged to take an active role in the logistics and management of clubs. Clubs are inclusive of students at different skill levels and mixed age groups. Younger students have opportunities to learn from older students through club activities.

Resources and implementation

Staffing is often a factor in the creation of after-school activities. At CSP, STEM commitments after school are addressed in the onboarding of new teachers. During the hiring and interview process, the school makes clear that teachers are expected to be involved in clubs after school and on the weekend. In addition, CSP created a half-time position for a STEM coordinator. This individual helps with scheduling and planning club meetings, locations, and times as well as managing documentation for student participation and planning.

Funding is a major component of implementing high-quality after-school STEM programming. CSP compensates teachers for their time coaching students, and funding supports new technologies such as virtual reality tools at the school. In 2021-22, CSP used ESSR grants to support teachers and after-school activities. ESSR funding also supported an after-school bus to help students with transportation to and from STEM after-school activities. In previous years, the school funded STEM clubs through instructional funds.

Creating partnerships is a final component of implementation. CSP regularly reaches out to new and/or unusual local organizations to seek funding for STEM competitions. Currently, the school partners with the Department of Transportation in the [TRAC program](#), which prepares students for a bridge-designing competition. Aside from TRAC, usually, parents or teachers are the club coaches. Some local community industries have provided funding also by sponsoring a robot.

Outcomes

Current data does not connect STEM participation to achievement or report card data; however, the school is planning to complete research to showcase such a link. Administrators support STEM participation as an opportunity for relationship building with teachers and peers, developing interests in STEM careers (Ozis, 2018) and extending learning and STEM knowledge. In the future, administrators are considering additional data collection in the 2022-23 school year to assess the impacts of club participation on STEM engagement and interest as well as knowledge of STEM careers.

Recommendations

Chesapeake suggested conducting surveys with families to identify STEM activities and interests of families, which would also encourage family involvement in the activities. From the classroom side, teachers can identify topics that have already been taught in class that could be explored further in an after-school environment. After-school opportunities do not need to be limited to competition-driven clubs; they can also start with a teacher who is passionate about a topic or activity.

Summary & Implications

This report provides an overview of the current context of Maryland charter school demographics, performance, activities and approaches to learning and several examples of promising practices underway at Maryland charter schools. The data suggest wide variation in charter school performance across the state, though at least half of the Maryland charter schools included in these data perform better than the district average on seven out of 8 measures. Maryland public charter high schools showed the largest distance below their district average on achievement. In addition, a majority of Maryland charter schools are implementing evidence-based supports for students related to out-of-school time activities, SEL practices, restorative justice, and the integration of community partners.

Most of the promising practices highlighted in this report were in the planning stages or in place prior to the start of the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020. However, all school administrators recognized the value of wraparound practices given student needs following the pandemic. While the pandemic brought implementation challenges, it also highlighted the potential for schools to provide more and different kinds of student support. In many ways, all of the promising practices highlighted strive to provide additional wraparound support for students through different avenues. For some schools it may be a focus on SEL implementation and mental health referrals, while for others it could be community building through free farmers markets or enriching student activities. Indeed, while the report highlights a selected number of charter schools for case studies, it is likely that other traditional and charter public schools are implementing their own related promising practices to support students in the building. Recent research highlights nationwide examples of innovative learning environments to promote more equitable student experiences (Canopy Project, 2022).

While many of the promising practices highlighted are unproven, the practices may be opportunities for investment in additional time and implementation as school administrators explore the replicability and scaling of their efforts. Some of the promising practices, particularly those that emphasize a mission-driven approach to learning, may require infrastructure that cannot be replicated in a traditional public school. However, additional research or implementation strategies could explore ways to bring promising components or strategies to more schools.

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Appendix A: Methodological Approach

MSDE commissioned this report to gain a more detailed picture of current activities and promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools. Though quantitative data from years prior to 2021-22 provides detail on school context for Maryland charters, this report is largely qualitative in approach. The study team conducted three types of data collection among Maryland charter schools between October 2021 and July 2022: an environmental scan, an online survey with both closed and open-ended questions, and a purposive sample of case study interviews. These qualitative components highlighted the current charter school landscape while also diving deeply into specific factors that shape the structure of each school. Details on each of these components are below.

Environmental scan

The environmental scan provided an overview of the curricula in place, school missions, approaches to learning, services and activities offered, community engagement, and application practices at each Maryland charter in 2021-22.⁴ Based on five key categories of interest (academics, school climate, governance, equity, and student growth), a review of Maryland School Report Card data, charter school websites, and MSDE school profiles, the study team developed a data collection tool to track information on each school. The final data collection tool included 66 items over 17 categories, including gender, charter operator brand, arts practices, college and career initiatives, community engagement, curriculum, environmental practices, global focus, STEM practices, whole child approaches, out-of-school time activities, school policy/culture, facilities, organizational structure, grants, enrollment criteria, and enrollment priority characteristics. Two raters reviewed each [MSDE school profile](#) and school official website (if available) marking the presence or absence of the identified school characteristics. In November 2022, the team tested for inter-rater reliability and adjusted the data collection tool and definitions for additional clarity prior to completing the data collection. The environmental scan is intended to give a broad sense of the Maryland charter school landscape. Results only reflect publicly available data shared on the school profile and website. They may not reflect the full breadth of services at each school.

Online survey

Survey design

Based on the results of the review of school performance data and the environmental scan, the study team designed an online survey to identify promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools. MSDE notified charter school operators of the study and upcoming online survey. Then, the study team sent a link to the survey hosted on [surveymonkey.com](#) and a copy of the survey to school operators. Operators were encouraged to share the survey with colleagues best suited to respond to the survey. The survey was open between February 24, 2022 and April 8, 2022. The study team followed up with survey respondents up to five times. In some cases, the study team reached out to a second contact, usually a principal, assistant principal, or charter school operator.

⁴ City Neighbors Hamilton is not included in the environmental scan, as the school website was under construction during our review period.

The survey asked respondents to identify one or more promising practices at their charter school that could potentially be replicated at other schools. The full text read:

“We would like to learn about promising practices currently being implemented at Maryland charter schools that have compelling supporting data. A promising practice could include a program, strategy, or tool used in more than one classroom at your school based on a clear process, guidelines, or protocol that serves to effectively impact student achievement, growth, equity, leadership, or climate. We are particularly interested in practices that can be replicated with fidelity at other schools.”

The survey asked about the type of practice (clubs, college-preparatory, project-based learning, social-emotional learning, etc.), the type of change expected (student academic achievement, equity, and school climate), a written narrative of the practice, resources required for the practice, and evidence of success of the practice.

Response analysis

The study team received responses from 44 out of 48 schools for a response rate of 92 percent. Due to a few instances of multiple responses from each school, there were a total of 52 responses.⁵

The online survey offered an overview of key practice areas identified at the 44 schools, as well as targeted areas for growth and the resources required for implementation. In preparation for the next phase of data collection, the team rated responses from each school on three factors: practice implementation (breadth and detail), scalability of the practice, and uniqueness of the practice.

- Implementation focused on the level of detail included about the practice, indicators of clear guidance on implementation, and a sense that the practice had already been implemented in the school
- Scalability was based on how feasible it was to envision the practice being implemented at other schools
- Uniqueness was determined by how innovative the charter school practices were compared to common, well-established practices

Considering these three factors as well as the evidence for the practices identified by respondents and prior school performance, the research team selected the top ten schools with the highest ranked promising practices.

Interviews

To interview school representatives from each of the ten schools, the team emailed the survey respondent first, then reached out to a secondary contact if there was no response. The team interviewed representatives from nine of the ten schools identified, using a semi-structured interview protocol. The hour-long interviews included topics around the goals for the practice, resources necessary for the practice, main steps of implementation, challenges in implementation, and outcome data from the practice. The interviews were recorded and the notes were edited and distilled after the interview.

⁵ When there was more than one response per school, the study team selected the response that was fully completed, and dropped incomplete responses. If there were two or more fully completed responses, the team combined the responses.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this study. First, while the 2019 school report card data provides context for understanding Maryland charter schools, these data are not indicative of the success of individual charter school practices in place in 2021-22. Second, the environmental scan represents efforts to be exhaustive in tracking the services and practices in place at Maryland charter schools. However, schools may not indicate all relevant practices and services on the school profile or website, which limits the accuracy of the environmental scan findings. Some practices may be in place at additional schools or no longer in place at other schools. Third, the case studies for promising practices are not based on ESSA tiers of evidence for practice implementation. Given the nature of charter school innovation, the study team focused on a broader definition of success and measurement. When possible, relevant outcome data at the school are noted in the case study. Finally, some practices highlighted in the report may require a specific context for implementation and be difficult to replicate at other schools. It is the goal of this report to highlight innovative and promising practices in place at Maryland charter schools so that school administrators can use and apply components of the practices that are helpful or inspiring for their own school context.

Appendix B: Detailed Tables

Table B1. Charter School Characteristics

School name	Students facing economic disadvantage (%)	English language learners (%)	Students with disabilities (%)	Per-Pupil Expenditure ⁶
Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys	68	0	16	\$17,987
Baltimore International Academy	61	5	5	\$13,140
Baltimore International Academy West	67	0	9	\$14,385
Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women	72	0	8	\$14,333
Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School	53	0	16	\$12,953
Belair-Edison School	77	0	16	\$17,510
Carroll Creek Montessori Public Charter School	13	0	12	\$11,407
Chesapeake Charter School	10	0	11	\$13,561
Chesapeake Math and IT Public Charter	18	5	6	\$15,841
Chesapeake Math and IT South Public Charter	15	5	7	\$15,880
Chesapeake Science Point	10	0	5	\$14,098
City Neighbors Charter School	44	0	18	\$16,599
City Neighbors Hamilton	34	0	26	\$16,979
City Neighbors High	60	0	33	\$19,400
City Springs Elementary/Middle	88	5	15	\$16,964
College Park Academy	16	5	7	\$16,168
ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School	78	0	29	\$18,983
Coppin Academy	69	0	12	\$14,609
Creative City Public Charter School	72	0	12	\$15,431
Empowerment Academy	67	0	11	\$15,570
Excel Academy Public Charter	37	5	6	\$17,830
Frederick Classical Charter School	8	0	8	\$13,093
Frederick Elementary	90	5	12	\$19,206
Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy	89	0	16	\$17,402
Govans Elementary	74	5	14	\$17,766
Green Street Academy	74	0	18	\$15,322
Hampstead Hill Academy	28	17	5	\$14,297
Imagine Andrews Public Charter	14	0	6	\$16,609
Imagine Foundations at Leeland PCS	19	0	9	\$16,754
Imagine Foundations at Morningside PCS	36	0	5	\$16,656

⁶ Expenditures are based on school-level per-pupil expenditures that include local school system actual personnel and actual non-personnel operating expenditures directly attributed to schools or allocated to schools based on certain criteria and reported as a per-pupil or per-student amount. The school-level per-pupil data can vary across school systems and within school systems due to many factors, including the number of students enrolled in the school, specific school-based programs, and the experience level of staff at the school.

School name	Students facing economic disadvantage (%)	English language learners (%)	Students with disabilities (%)	Per-Pupil Expenditure ⁶
Imagine Lincoln Public Charter	43	0	8	\$16,785
Independence School Local I	66	0	38	\$17,854
KIPP Harmony Academy	74	0	10	\$15,044
Legends Charter School	24	0	6	\$15,439
Lillie May Carroll Jackson School	75	0	14	\$14,899
Midtown Academy	61	0	16	\$15,006
Monarch Academy	19	5	10	\$14,296
Monocacy Valley Montessori School	13	0	10	\$12,380
New Song Academy	78	0	12	\$18,367
Patterson Park Public Charter School	44	22	13	\$16,430
Pimlico Elementary/Middle School	80	5	19	\$16,395
Southwest Baltimore Charter School	83	0	19	\$17,552
The Crossroads School	57	9	16	\$18,102
The Green School of Baltimore	34	0	11	\$14,878
Tunbridge Public Charter School	35	0	12	\$14,439
Watershed Public Charter School	29	0	7	\$12,786
Wolfe Street Academy	45	67	8	\$18,078

Note: Clay Hill Public Charter School is not included in this list as data were not available for 2021.

Source: Report Card, Maryland State Department of Education, 2019, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/>

Table B2. School Composition for Maryland Public Charter Schools, 2021

School name	All students	Asian (%)	Black/African American (%)	Hispanic (%)	Multi-racial (%)	White (%)
Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys	466	0	98	0	0	0
Baltimore International Academy	752	0	86	6	3	5
Baltimore International Academy West	150	0	95	0	0	0
Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women	531	0	97	0	0	0
Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School	479	0	67	3	4	25
Belair-Edison School	927	0	95	1	2	2
Carroll Creek Montessori Public Charter School	318	4	14	17	3	62
Chesapeake Math and IT North Public Charter	1,683	4	81	10	1	3
Chesapeake Math and IT South Public Charter	1,393	1	95	2	1	1
Chesapeake Public Charter School	477	4	8	4	12	73
Chesapeake Science Point	500	16	41	8	7	28
City Neighbors Charter School	233	0	64	0	0	32
City Neighbors Hamilton	234	0	54	5	6	33
City Neighbors High	424	0	86	0	0	7

School name	All students	Asian (%)	Black/African American (%)	Hispanic (%)	Multi-racial (%)	White (%)
City Springs Elementary/Middle	633	0	94	4	0	2
College Park Academy	677	2	54	30	5	8
ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School	526	0	96	2	0	0
Coppin Academy	359	0	98	0	0	0
Creative City Public Charter School	358	0	86	0	5	8
Empowerment Academy	287	0	99	0	0	0
Excel Academy Public Charter	430	0	91	7	0	0
Frederick Classical Charter School	376	8	31	13	6	41
Frederick Elementary	349	0	84	5	3	6
Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy	450	0	98	0	0	0
Govans Elementary	357	0	95	4	0	0
Green Street Academy	876	0	96	2	0	2
Hampstead Hill Academy	855	1	17	38	5	39
Imagine Andrews Public Charter	433	4	69	8	5	14
Imagine Foundations at Leeland PCS	467	0	95	0	0	0
Imagine Foundations at Morningside PCS	405	0	95	3	0	0
Imagine Lincoln Public Charter	393	0	96	3	0	0
Independence School Local I	155	0	89	0	0	10
KIPP Harmony Academy	1,575	0	98	1	0	0
Legends Charter School	592	0	92	4	2	0
Lillie May Carroll Jackson School	309	0	99	0	0	0
Midtown Academy	198	0	86	0	0	6
Monarch Academy	681	4	36	10	10	40
Monocacy Valley Montessori School	303	8	12	12	8	60
New Song Academy	174	0	99	0	0	0
Patterson Park Public Charter School	742	0	41	41	3	16
Pimlico Elementary/Middle School	667	0	93	6	0	0
Southwest Baltimore Charter School	431	0	86	3	3	6
The Crossroads School	163	0	73	25	0	0
The Green School of Baltimore	162	0	42	0	15	38
Tunbridge Public Charter School	475	0	78	3	3	14
Watershed Public Charter School	231	0	55	6	13	23
Wolfe Street Academy	265	0	11	81	0	6

Note: Clay Hill Public Charter School is not included in this list as data were not available for 2021. This table does not include American Indian, Native Alaskan, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students due to the small sample size.

Source: Report Card, Maryland State Department of Education, 2019, <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/>

