



Maryland School Review Expert Review Team ELA Report

Belmont Elementary School

Maryland State Department of Education

Office of Teaching and Learning

September 25-26, 2025

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.

State Superintendent of Schools

Tenette Y. Smith, Ed.D.

Deputy State Superintendent
Office of Teaching and Learning

Wes Moore

Governor

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Joshua L. Michael, Ph.D.

President, Maryland State Board of Education

Monica Goldson, Ed.D. (Vice President)

Chuen-Chin Bianca Chang, MSN, PNP, RN-BC

Kenny Clash

Clarence C. Crawford (President Emeritus)

Abhiram Gaddam (Student Member)

Susan J. Getty, Ed.D.

Nick Greer

Dr. Irma E. Johnson

Dr. Kim Lewis

Dr. Joan Mele-McCarthy, D.A., CCC-SLP

Rachel L. McCusker

Xiomara V. Medina, M.Ed.

Samir Paul, Esq

Table of Contents

Overview of Maryland School Site Reviews 3

Executive Summary 4

Domain 1: Instruction and Student Support 6

Domain 2: Professional Learning and Educator Support 9

Appendix A 11

Overview of Maryland School Site Reviews

PURPOSE

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

SCHOOL REVIEW PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

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

The Expert Review Team forms a consensus based on student data, documents, observations, focus groups, and a principal interview. The rubric consists of two domains:

- **Domain 1: Instruction and Student Support** - High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices, and assessments are implemented to support student learning. Schools use multiple sources of data (qualitative, quantitative, and perceptual) to identify students and implement a multi-tiered approach to support all student groups. Progress monitoring systems are clearly defined and integrated into daily practice.
- **Domain 2: Professional Learning and Educator Support** - Educators at all levels are provided with support to improve results and shift instructional practice. Professional learning goals for educators are clearly aligned with school and LEA overarching student achievement goals.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The following report is organized into three different sections.

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

- Information about the school, with more detailed information, is available online in the [Maryland School Report Card](#).

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

Appendix: The appendix expands on information provided in the body of this report. They provide detailed information on the specific methods used by the ERT during the site visit.

Executive Summary

ABOUT BELMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Belmont Elementary, located in Baltimore City, serves a total of 171 students in grades PreK-5. The student population is, 96.5% African American, and 2.9% two or more races. The school's population includes 90.3% of economically disadvantaged students, 0% multilingual learners, and 14.9% of students with disabilities. More detailed information, including enrollment, attendance, demographics, and student outcome data, can be found in the [Maryland School Report Card](#).

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Continuing to provide opportunities for staff to continue to increase learning related to the various Science of Reading tenets - with an emphasis on writing. This will strengthen and support students' transfer skills that are explicitly taught.
- Develop practices for students to have more autonomy in the lessons so that students learn to have a more authentic learning experience based on their context or schema of reasoning. This would provide the teacher with the opportunity to differentiate the classroom based on truly what the learning environment needs.
- Align school-based professional development by the coach with district professional development to focus on using phonological awareness during instruction time before all other science of reading (SoR) aspects are implemented. Incorporate learning walks to support peer-to-peer learning opportunities focused on implementation of phonological awareness and all professional development to support building schoolwide practices.

Domain 1: Instruction and Student Support

<p>Instruction and Student Support</p>	<p>High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices and assessments are implemented to support student learning. Schools use multiple sources of data (qualitative, quantitative, and perceptual) to identify students and implement a multi-tiered approach to support all student groups. Progress monitoring systems are clearly defined and integrated into daily practice.</p>
---	---

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHS

The school has developed a data-informed learning culture, inclusive of a positive culture for teaching and learning that is structured to support student growth through feedback. Teachers provide students with feedback and students apply the feedback to the work in progress.

- In all eight classrooms visited, students received and applied feedback on an assignment or task. This was evident in positive classroom cultures and teacher-to-student interactions. Students were asked to recall the words and to "check their meaning." "Can you give me another word that is similar to that?" Individual coaching was provided for students during intervention times. The teacher used hand-over-hand strategies to provide feedback and redirection.
- In six of the eight classrooms visited, members of the classroom worked together to create and foster a welcoming and inclusive community. Supportive teacher-language was used like "focus on speaker" and "whole body listening" to redirect students and maximize learning opportunities.
- Carpet time was used frequently in primary classrooms to conduct whole-group instruction. Students were encouraged to share family experiences to cultivate an inclusive environment. Frequent use of brain breaks provided opportunities to create a welcoming community.
- Student engagement was encouraged through explicit teacher language like "focus on speaker" and "whole body listening" to support and redirect students.
- During the teacher discussions, all four participants in the group shared that they were gaining more comfort with the Science of Reading (SOR) tenets.
- Small group instruction is provided daily. We target skills and use this to work with students, informed by data. During small group instruction, I can provide students with what they need. The whole group focused on grade-level standards (i.e. diagraphs) and small group instruction where the focus was on individualized needs (i.e. vowel sounds) and 30 minutes were dedicated to intervention.
- During the parent focus group, one parent shared that they knew students had to read 80 words at a certain speed in grade 4. By the end of the year, they had to read up to 100 words at a certain speed. Stating, "The way they have children reading now is a lot different from when I

learned to read. I do not know how they can keep up with it, but I am impressed. My daughter has improved in a lot of ways.”

- During the principal interview, she shared that teachers are provided weekly feedback to support instruction informally by the coach.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

In all classrooms visited, students demonstrated the use of supplemental materials and resources to support the text. However, there was a visible gap in resources to support explicit writing instruction.

- During the teacher focus group, one of the four teachers expressed that the curriculum does not have the language that students know. For example, when you ask students where they get stamps, they would say the corner store, which is not the answer provided in the curriculum – post office.
- Additionally, another teacher offered students are expected to write multiple paragraphs with evidence and supporting details. Further sharing that there are not enough scaffolds and supports to prepare students enough for the expectations.
- In three of the eight classrooms visited, there was evidence that the teacher encouraged students to "jot, pair, and share" While students took time to think independently and then discussed thoughts in partnership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under “Areas for Growth,” and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements.

Focus Area 1

Continue to leverage the current learning structures in place, which provide opportunities for staff to increase learning related to the various tenets of the science of reading - with an emphasis on writing. Build opportunities for collegial partnerships and identify model classrooms to serve as learning labs that can support teachers in strengthening practices that assist students' transfer of explicitly taught skills.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Consider providing a series of professional development cycles designed to specifically focus on building academic and content-specific vocabulary.
- Provide professional development directed toward supporting students to build spoken and written vocabulary using high-frequency words.

- Incorporate grade-level writing models like the Writing Process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, publishing).
- Leverage the current weekly walkthrough system to include a peer-to-peer learning system that collects best practices for teaching students high-frequency & tiered words, engaging students in discourse to use high-frequency words, and writing with high-frequency & tiered words. Expand the examples of school-based best practices and strategies that currently support writing (i.e. “jot, pair, and share” and “speak, listen well, focus on the task, and stick to the topic”) when comparing/contrasting characters in a text.

Focus Area 2

Develop practices for students to have more autonomy in the lessons so that students learn to have a more authentic learning experience based on their context or schema of reasoning. This would provide the teacher with the opportunity to differentiate the classroom based on truly what the learning environment needs.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Review existing instructional practices to identify areas where choice and voice can be integrated. Present options clearly to students, ensuring they understand the choices available.
- Provide regular opportunities for students to give feedback on their learning experiences and express their preferences.
- Leverage the walkthrough system to monitor and share promising practices that are currently being implemented with fidelity.

Domain 2: Professional Learning and Educator Support

Professional Learning and Educator Support

Educators at all levels are provided with support to improve results and shift instructional practice. Professional learning goals for educators are clearly aligned with school and LEA overarching student achievement goals.

FINDING and RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHS

There was consistent evidence of teacher use of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM), both in classroom visits and focus group discussion.

- During the school leader’s focus group, all five participants shared that extra planning is offered once a week with both the reading and mathematics coaches to plan and collaborate. This is where teachers identify opportunities for modeling lessons, advocate for their professional learning needs, and request feedback in specific areas, as well as provide suggestions to inform professional learning opportunities schoolwide.
- The school leaders shared that the "Coaches' meetings occur district-wide at least once a month. Previously it used to be every Friday. This is where the coaches receive training to support staff. (Leadership Focus Group)
- The district offers year-long training. The literacy coach at this school has supported the district-wide training initiatives as a facilitator. "
- During the teacher focus group, all participants agreed, “Our principal is obsessed with data.” There is much emphasis put on the growth made and this is used to drive decision making. Targeted Action Plans (TAP – Plans) are used by staff to identify appropriate groupings for student’s target needs and look at data to identify implications.
- During the principal interview, she shared one of her successes was the strength of the literacy focus and her literacy coach. The literacy coach supported the teachers with unpacking the curriculum to help build productive struggle and higher-ordered thinking skills for students.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

The school and the district provide training for implementing HQIM. Most teachers interviewed in the focus groups shared there is a need for job-embedded time and structures to support ongoing growth in the use of materials and other resources.

- One participant in the teacher focus group shared that although the district offers one week of curricula training during the summer for Science of Reading, EUREKA, and STEM, and it is still confusing.
- One of the four teachers in the focus group shared, “The students are not “seen” in the curriculum. They have to learn new words. They are raised with certain verbiages and dialect.” She expressed that there is not enough time for background building with the curriculum pacing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under “Areas for Growth,” and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements.

Focus Area 1

Align school-based professional development by the coach with district professional development to focus on using phonological awareness during instruction time before all other science of reading (SoR) aspects are implemented. Incorporate learning walks to support peer-to-peer learning opportunities focused on implementation of phonological awareness and all professional development to support building schoolwide practices.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Create professional learning communities to address the need for developing job-embedded practical classroom structures and systems that support teachers with implementing structured vocabulary development practices and strategies.
- Leverage the walkthrough system to monitor and support building professional learning communities across grade levels and content.
- Provide ongoing support, follow-up sessions, and access to resources as needed.

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF EXPERT REVIEW TEAM ACTIVITIES

Expert Review Team Members

1. Linda Brown, Consultant, Private Organization
2. Jessica Zentz, Grants Coordinator, Frederick County Public Schools
3. John Ridenour, Elementary School Principal, Frederick County Public Schools
4. Shawn Mitchell, Teacher, Prince George's County Public Schools
5. Devorah Danielson, Educational Consultant, Private Organization
6. Made Rima Garg, Mentor, Prince George's County Public Schools

Site Visit Day 1

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

Site Visit Day 2

Thursday, September 26, 2024

Number of Classroom Reviewed

Eight

Description of Classrooms Visited

Tuesday, March 20, 2024	Wednesday, March 21, 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5th Grade ELA • Kindergarten ELA • 2nd Grade ELA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Grade ELA • PreK ELA • Special Education ELA Services (K, 1, & 3rd Grade) • 3rd Grade ELA5

Number of Interviews

One

- Principal

Number of Focus Groups

Four

- 11 students
- 5 school leaders

- 4 teachers
- 10 parents

Documents Analyzed

- Site visit documentation submitted by the school.