



Maryland School Review Expert Review Team ELA Report

West Towson Elementary School

Maryland State Department of Education

Office of Teaching and Learning

October 9-10, 2024

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Overview of Maryland School Site Reviews

PURPOSE

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

SCHOOL REVIEW PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

All school reviews are facilitated by an Expert Review Team (ERT) led by MSDE. ERT members consist of trained teachers, school leaders, and education experts with experience in improving student outcomes. Members participate in extensive training led by MSDE to calibrate the review process to ensure a consistent approach to school reviews. To identify effective practices and opportunities for growth in a school, the ERT analyzes school data, reviews documents submitted by the school and conducts a 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 WEST TOWSON ELEMENTARY

West Towson Elementary, located in Baltimore County, serves a total of 407 students in grades PreK-5. The student population is 8.6% Asian, 12.3% African American, 8.1% Hispanic, 8.6% two or more races, and 62.2% white. The school's population includes 6.8% of economically disadvantaged, 4.1% multilingual learners, and 11% 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.

- Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to support increasing student reading fluency for every student. Assist teachers with establishing intentional structures for fluency instruction and practice by establishing school wide fluency protocols and designating time in the instructional block for reading fluency.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to support increasing student-driven learning. Assist teachers with creating more opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning by allowing for more student discourse and more opportunities for students to have choices for how they will demonstrate their learning.
- Leverage the current administrative informal learning-walk structure to include job-embedded learning for teachers and other instructional staff. This can be used to develop and expand practices for newly acquired instructional strategies and target professional learning needs.

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>
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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHS

The school class visits highlighted evidence of a master scheduled with a consistent daily instructional program that was aligned with the science of reading tenants. The school climate was a positive and supportive learning environment structured for the students to thrive in the literacy program and parents resoundingly shared the same sentiments for the overall experience of the school.

- During classroom visits, four out of seven classrooms provided evidence of students that have internalized routines and performed them successfully. As an example, in one classroom, the students successfully used the Elkonin boxes and chips to segment the sounds to words.
- In the same classes, teachers utilized explicit and systematic instructional practices with intervention methods that included using clear language, modeling and routines, and a 3-part drill to practice sounds and spelling patterns.
- In seven out of eleven classes, there was consistent evidence that vocabulary instruction occurred through incidental experiences. For example, during a lesson after showing a picture of a chalkboard, the teacher had to explain what a chalkboard was because the student was unfamiliar. In another class, during a reading, the teacher explained what a "skipping rope" was when students encountered the word in the text.
- During the focus group discussion, parents agreed that the school provides excellent and regular communication regarding the reading units and a clear explanation of MCAP assessment score.
- All six of the teachers in the focus group discussed how the curriculum provides several multicultural and diverse representations within the literature for different races & abilities and multilingual learners. One example was "Out of My Mind" book.
- Additionally, all six school leaders confirmed that each focus on a different content specific to supporting diverse students' needs. Further sharing that the school is addressing the needs of students and emphasizing accepting others, focusing on connections rather than differences, and learning to be accepting of others.
- Five of the six teachers agreed that the co-teaching in the reading block is designed using a split instructor system (i.e., teachers have a teammate) which helps meet individual students' needs. For example, one teacher is designated for reading/comprehension/word study and the other teaches writing/grammar.

- The principal explained that there is a consistent plan that is protected by the master schedule to ensure that teachers have the necessary time to collaboratively plan lessons and analyze data to support instruction. He further shared during the interview, that he provides feedback to teachers during informal class visits when he is conducting walkthroughs in the building.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

While most of the classrooms visited demonstrated evidence of structures that are supportive of students learning with the literacy instructional program within classes. However, there are classes within the school that can benefit from improving the focus on implementing the literacy components with consistency and implementing structures that support building student agency with models designed for student-led learning structures rather than total teacher-led models.

- Six of the eleven classrooms reviewed utilize instructional materials that include authentic and diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and cultural backgrounds.
- During the classroom visits, one out of eleven classrooms created space that demonstrated students were comfortable sharing and discussing how they engage with specific literacy practices in their home and/or community.
- One parent shared that their child was “gnashed up” in the teeth of DIBELS assessment results. Sharing that the child had positive experiences with reading, but the DIBELS assessment results were discouraging. From this experience the child has been turned away from reading and the situation was disheartening for the child and changed their confidence in reading.
- Another parent shared that their student continues to receive support with the speech and language pathologist. The parents would also like to see more robust examples for how the student would be able to use word prediction services and augmentative communication devices.
- Five of the six teachers agreed that the current curriculum doesn't focus on students with special education needs. This means the teacher spends a lot of time in-house modifying the curriculum to meet student needs.

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

Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to support increasing student reading fluency for every student. Assist teachers with establishing intentional structures for fluency instruction and practice by establishing school wide fluency protocols and designating time in the instructional block for reading fluency.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Leverage the school leaders who support each content to develop clearly stated modeled strategies for teachers to use to support learners’ varying needs. Provide professional learning focused on hands-on activities and model lessons showcasing impact for learners’ acquisition of the science of reading (SOR) tenants and strategies for decoding and encoding to build fluency and comprehension.
- Provide teachers and all instructional staff opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer learning walks and provide /receive feedback on differentiating instructional techniques from newly learned strategies.
- Provide regular opportunities for students to give feedback on their learning experiences and express their preferences. Facilitate workshops or collaborative planning sessions focused on integrating these practices effectively.

Focus Area 2

Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to support increasing student driven learning. Assist teachers with creating more opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning by allowing for more student discourse and more opportunities for students to have choices for how they will demonstrate their learning.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Provide strategies to increase student discourse and student-driven techniques. Review existing instructional practices to identify areas where choice and voice can be integrated.
- Gather feedback from students and teachers through surveys or discussions to understand their perspectives. Develop a framework that outlines areas where students can have choices (e.g., assignments, topics, group work). 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. Facilitate workshops or collaborative planning sessions focused on integrating these practices effectively.

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 compelling evidence of continuous professional learning from all professional stakeholder groups. Both educators and school leaders repeatedly cited their willingness to work with the materials as well as a desire to utilize them authentically.

- All six of the teachers in the focus group shared that there is regular administration presence in classroom, and they regularly talk with teachers about student progress and focus skill areas/standards.
- All school leaders agreed that the schedule for the leadership team meeting for data analysis twice/monthly is effective as a monitoring system. There is collaboration schoolwide for professional development and the ELA specialist also helps to meet individual teacher needs.
- All participants in the school leaders focus group agreed teachers meet for professional learning effectively half day once a month to support Tier 1 instruction.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

There is evidence that school-based professional learning and structures are aligned with the LEA and are designed to support teacher growth. However, there is a need for job-embedded coaching to support areas that can benefit from targeted support.

- Two out of the six teachers in the focus group represented special services. The consensus among these teachers was a lack of district-wide training and resources for specialized services.
- Special education is having discussions with teachers and seeing students having results in 1:1 situation but not always in the classroom.
- Parents in the focus group expressed a need for English learners to have longer learning periods and increased support. The current English teacher supports three other schools and if this teacher could stay at this school, there would be greater improvement with their students.

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

Leverage the current administrative informal learning walk structure to include job embedded learning for teachers and other instructional staff. This can be used to develop and expand practices for newly acquired instructional strategies and target professional learning needs.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Consider the current structures for informal learning walks and include school content leaders to design a framework for building job-embedded coaching models.
- Intentionally leverage the current classrooms that successfully implement the instructional model of focus and include peer-to-peer visits with instructional staff.
- Follow-up learning visits with co-planning and co-delivery to support teachers with acquiring the new strategy.
- Conduct a survey to collect data on the process to inform improvement points that confirm or illuminate the continuation of the process targets.

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF EXPERT REVIEW TEAM ACTIVITIES

Expert Review Team Members

1. John Ridenour, Elementary Principal, Frederick County Public Schools
2. Natalie Gay, Coordinator, Data Analysis & Research, Frederick County Public Schools
3. Megan Stein, Elementary Principal, Frederick County Public Schools
4. Rachel Thompson, Pupil Personnel Worker, Prince George's County Public Schools
5. Toi Davis, Elementary Principal, Prince George's County Public Schools
6. Jazmine Rhone, School Success Liaison-Literacy, Baltimore City Public Schools

Site Visit Day 1

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Site Visit Day 2

Thursday, October 10, 2024

Number of Classroom Reviewed

Eleven

Description of Classrooms Visited

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

- Grade K Whole Group
- Grade 1 ELA Whole Group
- Grade 1 ELA Small Group
- Grade 1 ELA Phonics (2 classes)
- Grade 2 ELA Phonics
- Grade 3 ELA Phonics
- Grade 3 ELA
- Grade 4 ELA
- Grade 5 ELA
- ELA Advanced Academics

Number of Interviews

One

- Principal

Number of Focus Groups

Four

- 12 students
- 6 school leaders
- 6 teachers
- 11 parents

Documents Analyzed

- Site visit documentation submitted by the school.