

## Maryland EdCast Episode 1 Transcript

*Episode Title: Kindergarten Readiness: A Conversation with Snow Hill Elementary*

You are listening to the Maryland EdCast. On Maryland EdCast, State Superintendent of Schools, Mohammed Choudhury, discusses education practices, priorities, and policies with a wide range of Marylanders. Superintendent Choudhury is laser focused on transformational education, research, and best practices to ensure all Maryland students realize their full potential.

Superintendent Choudhury: I am Mohammed Choudhury, State Superintendent of Maryland schools. On our second episode of Maryland EdCast, I am talking with school staff from Snow Hill Elementary about how they outperformed the state average in kindergarten readiness, as well as in other measures.

Seventy-seven percent of Snow Hill's kindergarteners demonstrated readiness, the highest level to succeed in school on the 2022 Administration of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, also referred to as KRA. That's compared to the state average of 42%. With me today is principal Matthew Record and his team. I'll have them introduce themselves before we jump into a very intense discussion, as I like to say, about practice.

This conversation is really focused on what is happening on the ground and what is working well, so policymakers and decision makers can actually get it right when we make high stakes decisions that ultimately translate into results for our students, support our staff, and are able to do their work each and every day. With that, I'll have principal Record introduce himself, then we'll have his staff introduce them, and we'll jump right in.

Matthew: Thank you, Mr. Choudhury. What a definite joy and pleasure it is to be here, especially on the Maryland EdCast. Greetings from Snow Hill Elementary School in Worcester County, Maryland. We're very happy to be here.

My name is Matthew Record, and I am the principal at Snow Hill Elementary School. I'm the very proud principal at Snow Hill Elementary school. I am in my 21st year as an educator, and I started in 2002. I taught fifth grade, sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade, and then I was hired at Snow Elementary School in 2004 as a teacher.

If you're thinking that I came back from being a teacher to be principal, I did. I got one of those lucky gems as an educator, where you get to go back and be the principal of the school where you started at. I'm very lucky to do that.

I left in 2012, and I went ahead and accepted a position as an assistant principal in our county but at another school, Pocomoke High School, and was then named principal at Pocomoke Middle School. I have a wide range of experience from middle school, high school, and elementary school. I can't be more happy to be here at Snow Hill Elementary school with our wonderful team. Both Mrs. Matlock and Ms. Tariq are here with me. Mrs. Matlock.

Erica: Hi, everybody. My name is Erica Matlock. I have been an administrator for six years and an educator for over 20 years. I have really just enjoyed working in elementary schools my whole entire career.

This is my fourth year as assistant principal at the wonderful Snow Hill Elementary School. We know that Snow Hill Elementary School is the crown jewel of Worcester County and thus the state of Maryland. We are thrilled to be here with you, our superintendent, to share with you our practice and our passion for our students here at Snow Hill Elementary.

Superintendent Choudhury: Thank you, Mrs. Matlock. And last but not least...

Aisha: Hi, I'm Aisha Tariq. I am the early childhood special education teacher here at Snow Hill Elementary School. I am the Special Ed teacher for our Pre-K4 and kindergarten program. I have been at Snow Elementary School for six years. I truly do work at the best school in the world.

Superintendent Choudhury: Thank you, guys, for being here today. I think you guys are doing extraordinary things, given the challenges that our students bring everyday to school. But once they're with you, they're with you. You have the power to influence what happens in those four walls every day.

On my multiple visits to Snow Hill, the very last being able to shadow principal Record, he tired me out, but I realized there's a lot of amazing things happening there. They're translating into student outcomes. People often say, hey, we're doing great things. Okay, but then you don't see it show up on the stat sheet. That matters. At the end of the day, what you're doing has to have a measurable impact on our kids, given that we know the power that education can have.

Speaking of stat sheets, I want to show off a little bit about what Snow Hill has been able to do so far. More than half of Maryland's kindergarteners today entered the school year without having the necessary foundational skills to succeed. They did not demonstrate kindergarten readiness more than half, and then we have wide achievement gaps between our English learners, their English speaking peers, proficient English speaking peers, students with disabilities, and students with economic disadvantage. Not only do we have half of Maryland students who are not kindergarten ready, we also have gaps that we must narrow each and every day.

Snow Hill Elementary is a title one school, where more than half of their students qualify for economically disadvantaged. I'll take that further, the depth of poverty is even higher. Snow Hill Elementary sits in a neighborhood where there are students living in deep poverty, and those students come to your school and are zoned to your school. It is not just a title one school, it's a title one school when you relatively speak the depth of poverty is really high.

On top of that, Snow Hill is kicking the states. But truly, Maryland is an affluent state. Although we are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of our 900,000 student population, our concentration of poverty has increased, where we are pretty much approaching 50% or more. Snow Hill is reflective of what the state needs to be able to do well, and you guys are kicking our butts.

For me as the state superintendent, I need to know what you're doing. Seriously, what are the policy implications of that? Not only are you outperforming us in KRA again, 77%, it's not even close. It's like you're lapping us, as I like to say, if there was a race. But your students are also doing amazing when it comes to English language, arts, and math performance.

There's still a lot more room to grow, as you know, and just gaps within your school. But when it comes to performing well, for example, black students in Snow Hill Elementary are performing higher than the state average. It is possible to achieve. It is possible to support our students living in trench poverty. We know poverty matters when it comes to educational outcomes. But we also know for that reason, education is that much more important.

I really appreciate you guys being here. We need to learn from you. We want to hear the narrative behind these numbers that will help the state board and I to identify best practices, prioritize them by impact level, and then scale them at the policy level.

One of the benefits I have is being able to work with the state board to pass regulations, or go out to Annapolis and be like, hey, you need to do this, this is what works, and here's how we know. The only way I'm going to know that is by capturing best practices and bottling them up.

With that, I really appreciate you guys being here today. We're going to start with practice. Tell me the story behind Snow Hill's program. I will start with principal Record and whoever else wants to jump in, and then we'll shift to another question.

Matthew: Thank you. I would echo exactly what you said, Mr. Choudhury. Our poverty is apparent. Our title one status is well earned and deserved, but it does not define us. Our students' achievement, our love of literacy, and our ability to grow math problem solvers, scientists, future HVAC technicians, and four-year degree college graduates, that's our goal. So thank you.

It's nice when I say it, but it's also nice to hear someone else say it too. That's very helpful. I will say that Snow Hill Elementary School is at 77%. You are absolutely correct. Do note that on the previous year, we're at 54%. I think in years past, we were below 50%.

What we look at is we believe very strongly in the correlation between the kindergarten readiness assessment and how students do well on their third grade Maryland comprehensive assessments. The State Department did a wealth of research, that if you don't see it every day, you can believe it. We happen to see it and believe it.

Our goal really is to make those improvements at an early childhood experience during those educational years, so that the work that can be done in not learning how to read but reading to learn, can grow. Reading is a process. I know that KRA looks at both literacy and math and our physical wellness and social foundation.

One thing I will say, and I'll get Mrs. Matlock because I've been here at Snow Hill Elementary school for two years, Mrs. Matlock and Ms. Tariq actually outpaced me. They got more feathers in the hat than the principal.

I will say that one thing that I'm not only proud about, but I want to really emphasize to any of our listeners, is not only is our overall score 77%, but our social foundation and our physical wellness are very close to our literacy and our math. All four of those are within 77%. That really speaks to the truth and validity behind our data.

We're not scoring our kids well because they can hop on one foot, and they can share, but they don't know the difference between an A and a G. That is not the case. Not only am I proud of that, but I think, sometimes success, especially in our modern age, also has doubters. I think that that very fact proves that we're headed in the right direction with our students.

Superintendent Choudhury: Absolutely, thank you for sharing that. This is a story of growth. At the end of the day, they are growing their students, and that's what you want to see. The biggest indicator of school quality is a school that grows its students from where they are.

We often don't talk about school quality in that way, and it drives me crazy. Our real estate agents don't rate neighborhoods and schools in that way. They should be. They use it on proficiency, which is often a measure of how wealthy a school is.

This is a school that is on the move. I'd love to hear from your team, who has been here longer than you at Snow Hill. What did you put in four years ago or six years ago, and what are you doing to make that better? And then what are some adjustments you've made also along the way?

Erica: Superintend, if I could just jump in here real quick. One of the big changes that has happened since I've been at Snow Hill Elementary school is that we went from a half day program in pre-K to a full day program in pre-K. That is really going to make the big difference for us. This is our first year of implementing full day pre-K.

Our half day students were coming to us from Head Start programs and early childcare centers, and some of them were even coming from home. But now, they're all here with us for the full day, and it's our first year of a full day implementation of pre-K. We're really excited to see where our kids are going to land next year on the KRA, because we know that our teachers are doing amazing, amazing work.

A part of our practices that make us so successful is that we foster in our students a love of reading. That's the centerpiece of our literacy instruction, having kids even at an early age, see themselves as readers. Our pre-K teachers log about 1000 read-alouds in school for the entire year. They partner with our wonderful literacy coaches and consultants that we have for our program.

A big part of our success is also the Judy Center. We tap into that Judy Center to help recruit, get out there, find those kids, bring them in, and start engaging our kids at an early age and their families. Another thing is that we really work with our special area teachers. They jump on board and intentionally help us teach within the four domains that Mr. Record just talked about with our KRA so that we know that they're developing those fine and gross motor skills, as well as those academic skills.

They're experiencing read-alouds in music, in art, and in physical education everywhere they are with their print rich environment and all the things that our special area teachers do to support our kids. I know I've said a lot.

Superintendent Choudhury: For our listeners, can you define what a special area teacher is. Assume that the general public doesn't know the secret code that we throw out in education often in the acronyms, help them understand what that is.

Erica: Thanks for that. Our special area teachers are our music, our fine art teacher, which is our art teacher, our physical education teacher, they teach gym and PE. Those are the three that we have. We have a teacher who teaches technology also to our students. All of those people work together to really help us create this environment for our young learners to really excel.

Superintendent Choudhury: Now, we got to talk to the most important adults in the classroom each and every day, Ms. Tariq. Do you want to share with us what is happening in the classroom around all of those things that we've just shared, and what you think is the secret

sauce? As you guys told us at the state board meeting, there is a secret sauce. You've got to share some of the ingredients.

Aisha: Thank you. I have the wonderful opportunity of looping with my students. I create that relationship in Pre-K. We know each other, I know their learning styles, and I also know the expectation that they need to achieve in kindergarten, because I'm also the kindergarten Special Ed teacher.

I'm also able to collaborate with the classroom teachers in Pre-K to say, these are the things that we need to work on, because I know that in KRA, there are the four domains and what the domains require, as simple as the social domain that the students need to be able to problem solve and communicate their needs. We also use the ELA in Pre-K, which are the SKVs or the standards of the ELA assessment that go hand in hand with the KRA as well.

We are very data-driven. When we see that some students are not making as much progress as we would like, we intervene. In Pre-K, that looks like they may spend more time with me having that one-on-one conversation, teaching those social skills, or things like that. At an academic standpoint, it may look like myself collaborating with the classroom teacher and then asking for various strategies to help those learners that are struggling to get those concepts of letter identification, counting one to one, and those foundational skills that they'll need to be assessed on for the KRA.

Superintendent Choudhury: Got it. Have you gone through any, over the last six years of your time at Snow Hill, specialized training that you think has been golden, that just really changed the game in how you teach literacy or anything else? We know all professional learning isn't amazing, but we know some are, especially the ones that are relevant.

I'm doing an audit of all the professional learning that the department offers since I've started here in '21. I'm like, why are we doing this? We need to be doing more of that one. Stop doing this one. I'm curious as a teacher, is there something that has really helped you as a pre kindergarten teacher that has just changed the game for you?

Aisha: Yes. We are very fortunate in Worcester County that after we received the KRA scores, we as a Pre-K team, look at that data and we see what areas our students from the previous year lacked in. Then we will go back to our curriculum that we use and see, how can we better teach our students so that they can meet those goals or expectations that they need to meet for the KRA? Our county does a wonderful job of allowing us to have professional learning time to better our skills and the curriculum that we use.

We're fortunate. We teach foundations, the phonics program in Pre-K but also in kindergarten. A lot of professional learning within the school, but also within the county to make sure that

we're using the same things as easy as our language, the language that we're using in Pre-K, so that our students here in kindergarten know exactly what their teachers are asking them for.

Superintendent Choudhury: Got it. Would anyone else like to add anything else on this topic?

Matthew: Yeah. I just think Mr. Choudhury, there's a reason that the Maryland blueprint chose early childhood as a pillar. It matters so much. I think the more emphasis and the more attention, just like what Ms. Tariq said, looking at those skills, knowledge, behaviors, and working them into your instruction, they matter when you look at the kindergarten readiness assessment. That has to start as soon as our kids walk in through our doors.

I think we are very fortunate to be an age three to grade three school. Mrs. Matlock was spot on. We did receive an expansion grant. We have one class of Pre-K3, and then we have four classes of Pre-K4. I commend everyone involved in the blueprint. I know that implementation is different, but there's a reason that it's a pillar by itself. While we're at 77%, I can't wait to see what we're going to be in four years or five years.

Superintendent Choudhury: Absolutely. You serve the students you have across all your grades, but the future cohort that comes in gets another better version of you. The goal is right. At a certain point, all students are getting that, and you figured out every aspect of being able to execute. It's a process. The thing that I love about Snow Hill's story is just constantly getting better and adjusting along the way.

Mrs. Matlock, when I ran into you that day, in the hallway, you had shared with me that when I was trying to catch up with your principal, you had stopped and said, oh, we're doing this work around implementation science and working with Johns Hopkins. I just found that fascinating. Normally, people do professional learning. Let's do another math professional learning or literacy. Those things are very important, especially around literacy and the science of reading.

Thank God, phonics have made a comeback, even though it should have never had to make a comeback, but it made a comeback. I am curious about that. If you don't mind me asking you that. I think so many things go to die in implementation. People have well intentions and they get excited. Executing well is an art and a science. I'd like to know a little bit more about what that has done for you guys, if you don't mind sharing.

Erica: Yeah, sure. Thanks for asking. This is such a great question because school improvement is a big driver in our school. We're changing our school, and we're making a dynamic impact on our students through three protocols, our united protocol, our route protocol, and our change protocol.

We work as hard on our academic goals and what the goals that we have for our students, as we do with creating dynamic teams, where every person on our staff is buying into the process. We change roles. It's not like in the olden days, where it's the school improvement meeting, and everybody's coming to the meeting. Everybody has their purse and their keys in their hand, and two people are doing all the work. That doesn't change a school.

What changes the school is when everybody is involved in the process. We use protocols to evaluate the way that we work as a team, as well as the work that the team is doing. We have three teams. We have a team for math, reading, safety, discipline, and behavior.

We just asked those big questions. We look at our data. Data really tells our story, but it drives our action. We look at our data, and we're strategic about the type of data that we're looking at and what we're looking for. We drill down. We keep asking ourselves those questions, why, why, why is this happening?

We come down to those root causes, which helps us to identify the areas of need that we need to address. The teams take that, and then they do their work. They do roles. Every person has a role, but then we switch the role so that one person isn't the holder of all the information. That's been very, very, very powerful.

We meet with Johns Hopkins. They coach us through this process. Unlike school improvement processes before, where you would make a goal at the beginning of the year, and then at the end of the year, you try to see if you met those goals, we actually look at our school improvement plan in three cycles. Every 90 days, we're turning this over.

We say, okay, did we meet this goal? What do we need to keep? What do we need to do? If we didn't meet the goal, how can we break that goal down so that we can meet our outcomes? We do this in each and every one of our teams.

By doing that, oh my goodness, we have experienced an amazing amount of change. We targeted our economically disadvantaged student group, because we knew that within that group, we have African-Americans, we have students with disabilities, and we have boys. We have all of these student groups, our English learners. All those student groups are encased within that economically disadvantaged group. That's a very large subgroup.

We knew that if we could lift that group, we could improve learning outcomes for our whole entire school. Guess what, that's exactly what happened. We're very proud of that work. But even within that, now, our data is telling us that there are still some kids that we still need to target even more intensely.



While we're glad that we lifted up our student group that was economically disadvantaged, that's a big group, they're making our scores great. We still have some work to do with our African-American students. We're always looking at SPED kids. Our dynamic impact, school and improvement process, is really driving this. It's one of the things for our success.

Superintendent Choudhury: Thank you so much. It's music to my ears to hear how you adjust and make pivots every 90 days. I'm trying to shift that approach to just how we support grant making and monitoring work here at the department because you set a grant, you set goals, and I'll see you later at the final report. You realize, man, this doesn't really lead to anything. There's a whole nerdy workstream around it called developmental evaluation. That's what this reminds me of where you are making smart pivots along the way. I appreciate you sharing that.

Let's go on to my next question. You guys hit upon some things already, so I'm going to just summarize. The blueprint for Maryland's future is our really amazing education reform law that looks at the entire Pre-K through 12 and beyond spectrum for our kids goes all in on Pre-K, especially full day Pre-K for three and four-year-olds, goes all in on Judy Centers, goes all in on that funding, really trying to get to as close as possible to the notion of universal Pre-K and such. But we also know, it's not just Pre-K, it's about holding those gains through the Pre-K, through the spectrum, and beyond.

What are some strategies that you hold near and dear and you're able to do now, or you haven't been able to do at full scale because of some policy that I have within my control with the state board, that we really need to reconsider? I'll go ahead and start with you again, principal Record.

Matthew: Can I just commend you and your administration for even asking this question? It's refreshing. What I would say is, when you look at both communities in pockets or communities as a county, when you look at equitable access, it can be defined through multiple definitions.

In Snow Hill, while our poverty rate is high and we saw that, it is a dynamic of rural poverty versus urban poverty. The access and equitable practices that I would look at would be additional programming and support in Pre-K3 and also starting with Judy Centers as the Maryland blueprint.

I hope my passion comes across. But if there's a local hospital that gives birth to a child, I think the school systems should be notified. I know we have systems in place like [inaudible 00:25:52] Our Judy Center does an excellent job. For example, if you walked in on Monday at 9:00, you would see our ones, twos, and three-year-old students. They are children, their families come in, and they participate in an educational learning fun game.

That's in the school. I have one-year-olds and two-year-olds walking in only on Monday. Don't worry, they're not on the roster. They don't have a state ID number, but that relationship is already building. I cannot stress that enough because when it comes to getting things done, and if you look at any kind of roadblocks, it either has to do with trust or competence. If we can build the trust, and then they see their little one developing, the competence will be there.

Teachers are held at a very high standard. Ms. Tariq is seeking a master's degree. She's probably going to get another master's degree. Both Mrs. Matlock and I are doctoral students. The competence is there. It has to be done in an equitable and commutative way. But I think the trust piece would be the piece.

We're finding that with our Maryland Leads grant. We are making progress in the transforming of neighborhoods, but that is for selected families. There are incidental beneficiaries to all of that, better students and better families create a better school. I don't know if I'm being specific enough, but I would echo.

Superintendent Choudhury: You are. I hear what you're saying. We need to find a way to systematize the connection to school. Everyone is known, and everyone has the level of support. As soon as the child is born, the school that they're already zoned to make that connection.

I remember walking into the Judy Center with you. The first thing that came out of the mouth of the Judy Center staff was, oh, we go to the house, and we work with them at their homes or apartments, and we work with them. We work on lessons and we help them do what some people might think is a simple task that is developing a very complex skill, that makes it that much more likely they're coming to school prepared, so teachers don't have to make up for certain gaps or build off of that.

I really appreciate you sharing that. Yes, you guys are a recipient of the Maryland Leads grant to do a collective impact model in Snow Hill and one other neighborhood. For me, that grant is just signaling, I believe if we can build up more proof points around this, then I can make a bigger case around, look at what happens when you build this robust network system of support with the school being an essential player in there. What can we do? It's very much possible, so I appreciate you sharing that.

Matthew: What I would say is division one, athletic recruiters are going into the homes of fifth graders and sixth graders. They're building a relationship so that they can attend their college. We need to do the same thing for the benefit of education, not for the benefit of a championship, but for the benefit of an education with young, early childhood families. We have to be just as aggressive.

Superintendent Choudhury: I love it. Do you have something to add, Ms. Tariq?

Aisha: I will just piggyback off of what Mr. Record said that the Judy Center is so important in all that we do and that early intervention, especially from the Special Ed viewpoint of it, because there have been students that if it was not for the Judy Center and home program, we wouldn't have had these students that had disabilities that stepped on the first day of school, and never would have received any services, and we wouldn't have known.

They really play that part of helping us make those connections with the parents and getting those students the services that they need so that transition from home to school is so easier, and it's not as stressful. Like Mr. Record said, it builds that trust with the parent as well, that we're taking their little babies, we're bringing them to school, and we have those high expectations for them, whether they have a disability or not. That is across the board from Pre-K to third grade. We just want to share that secret with everyone so that across the state, that can be replicated too.

Superintendent Choudhury: Got it. Do you really like looping? Is that something that you feel like you should always be doing? Or is that something you started doing more recently?

Aisha: This is my sixth year. For the last five years, I have looped with my students, and it is super helpful in my opinion. Most of my students are nonverbal, or they're on the autism spectrum. Having that first year of Pre-K to set that groundwork of Ms. Tariq gives you those high expectations. This is how we're going to achieve them.

It really does make a difference when they walk into the kindergarten classroom, because their kindergarten teacher has to make that new relationship with them. But on that first day of kindergarten, Ms. Tariq and my students, we start right off where we left off in Pre -K.

I truly do feel that that makes a difference in the KRA administration of the assessment, especially this year. For some of my kids, it takes a while to make that relationship and for them to trust their teacher. But it truly made a difference when I stepped in the room and I was like, okay, this is the task, and this is what I need you to do. I know how they express themselves and things like that, so I can help lead the teacher to understand what the student actually knows.

Superintendent Choudhury: Got it. I'm a fan of looping. I was a middle school and high school teacher, but my first three years of my time in the classroom for about almost 10, I looped with sixth, seventh, and eighth with that same two groups of classes. Then I teamed up with a partner teachers who did the math and science, and then I did the English and social studies. I'm a huge fan of it. But that looping, for me and it sounds like for you, is a difference maker. It's not for everyone.

I have one other question for you. For KRA administration, do you think you have good flexibility to how to administer it? Would you change anything about it? We give you guys windows of time to administer it. It is a multidimensional instrument.

You heard principal Record talk about all of the other domains, and I really appreciate him lifting that up, because they do correlate with one another and reinforce. And that's playing out in Snow Hill's data, but would you change anything? The reporting, the way it looks, we're enhancing features, we're going to introduce a bilingual version as well. We're working on that as well, but anything there that you would want to share?

Aisha: From my personal standpoint, I feel like it's perfect that we have that window. Worcester County does a really good job of setting us up for success, where they don't tell us how to do it, but they give us suggestions of timelines. By this time, you should have this many indicators done.

We have a day. We're provided a substitute, and the teachers promised that substitute so that we're not doing KRA in the back of the classroom while the other kids are playing. We're in a quiet environment, where the teacher is able to really connect with the student and they're focused.

The reports, I feel, are super helpful, especially in IEP meetings when there's that visual of hearing the milestone where you want your student to be. This is how close they are, they're so close. I feel like the state is doing a wonderful job in helping us be successful as well.

I know from other kindergarten teachers that the first month of school is a lot, you're assessing them, but you're still trying to get to know them. I think I speak for other kindergarten teachers, where they would say the deadline for it to be done if they could push it back a little bit, but then you're getting that fine line of are you teaching to the test at that point? Are you really assessing if they're ready for kindergarten?

Superintendent Choudhury: I always like to say new policies, new problems. You push the deadline, you push the reporting deadline. Every time I interact with people, why don't you just do it? Then here's what will happen next. I appreciate you sharing that. That's real talk.

Mrs. Matlock, do you have anything for us in terms of policies or legislative action that you would recommend, that would help make things better for you on the ground? If not, I want to go to my last question.

Erica: Yeah, just quickly, superintendent. I'm really excited about the blueprint too. One of the pillars is hiring a diverse staff and leaders. That is so important. I can't say enough about that.

Here at Snow Hill Elementary school in third grade, students take the CogAT test too and be eligible for GT programs. We know just historically that a lot of those placement decisions are subjective. They're based on teachers. We know the power that a diverse teaching staff, a teacher of color that looks like kids, looks like the students, really can make the difference on recognizing giftedness and talentedness in students and pushing them forward. We need to keep that in the forefront.

It's so important that students in this global society that they have experiences with all different types of people and learn how to relate with everybody. Not only are you a diverse teaching staff because you may look different, you're different races, different languages, but it's also the diversity of thoughts that strengthens the school. When we can all wrap our minds around our issues and our problems, we can come together and collaborate, we can have different people coming to the table to weigh in on things that we need to make decisions about. Diversity is a strength.

Superintendent Choudhury: I appreciate you sharing that. One of the things we won't go into today because of time, but I want to invite our audience to go and look at the board meeting, where we invited the school and their entire team who looks like Snow Hill. They shared about how long teachers and staff have been at the school as well, this retention piece.

We want a diverse workforce. We also have to build conditions to retain a diverse workforce. There is definitely that happening, given the level of longevity and such. One of the benefits of having a principal come in, and you've been there you said two years, but having this team who was just solid, who had been scoring the school and being able to build off of them.

I would invite our audience to go listen to that. There's just a fun moment of sharing. She went to school with my mom. My mom went to school, and I just love it. I was like, okay, everyone's connected in some way. It was awesome. Here's my last question. Do you have something to add?

Matthew: No, it's fun, and then it starts to get a little creepy.

Superintendent Choudhury: Yeah. No, I got it. My last question, I call it the million-dollar question. If you could invest a million dollars in your local school community, what would you invest in? If I said principal Record, here's a million-dollar check. You could spend it how you want it, and superintendent Taylor can't tell you what to do with that, only you can. Same question goes for Mrs. Matlock and Ms. Tariq.

I'm actually going to reverse this. I'm going to start with Ms. Tariq. I'm going to have her go first. Not to be influenced by the principal just in case, although I know he's a leader who empowers each and every day. He's not like that, but just to have control for bias, I'm going to make sure I

start with you. Ms. Tariq, if you had a million dollars, here's a million dollars, you get to decide what to do with that for Snow Hill, what would you invest it in?

Aisha: Goodness. If I had a million dollars, I would truly use that money to help the amount of poverty that our students deal with. At Snow Hill, we believe in teaching the whole student.

While most people would say, human resources, more teachers, more educational assistance, I would want to use that money to help our students with their home lives so that they can come to school ready to learn all the time. That means buying them glasses, helping their parents so that they have a stable home environment. That's where I truly would want to use that million dollars for.

Superintendent Choudhury: I appreciate that that is just straight up talk. People forget about how much wraparound services and social safety nets lead to better reading outcomes and such. I'm a huge housing policy and education policy guy, for example. I really appreciate you sharing that.

We had a whole experiment during Covid, where the Child Tax Credit cut the poverty rate in half for children, and now it's going back up. What you saw is, most families used it across all racial lines, used it for essentials, needs, and everything else. I appreciate you sharing that. Mrs. Matlock?

Erica: Yeah, thank you so much for asking me the question before Mr. Record, I love that. We are a school just like every other school in Maryland. One of the things that we have challenges with is this behavior, let's just be honest. We do have behavior concerns here.

I would use that money to get not only people but the right people, trained people, trained social workers, trained mental health professionals, trained counselors, to come into our school to work with our students, because that is part of being ready to learn. That also would be a help for teachers to train our teachers to use trauma informed practices, culturally responsive practices, so we can actually reach every student right where they are.

One of the things that our secret sauce that we didn't really talk about was how our school counselor and our social worker treat behavior just like we treat academics. That's a whole another thing.

I would use that million dollars to get some behavior specialists or mental health specialists in our school only for our school, working with our students. It is not an effective strategy to have one counselor working with 400 kids. That doesn't work. We need specialists to help us with behavior and mental health.

Superintendent Choudhury: Got it. Last but not least, what would you do with a million dollars in your line item budget on discretionary spending, principal Record?

Matthew: I think the first thing is I would immediately go after another Pre-K expansion grant. I would hire another Pre-K3 and a Special Ed teacher. That is not because more people solve the problem. I am well aware of the concept of social living, where more doesn't always work.

I would say, it's Pre-K expansion, especially in the threes with a Special Ed teacher. I think that's most beneficial. I think secondly, I would look at the other barriers that are created for our students. What does that look like? We hit up on that a little bit in our answers, but I think vision, dental, both in areas of special education, I think of our speech and language pathologist, both the language deficits and the articulation deficits, especially at that early age, that matters so much when you're talking about early learners.

Thirdly, I would take the last \$333,000. I would put it towards differentiated programs in second and third grade that were career oriented. Every child, when they move into those middle school years, the upper elementary, the fourth grade, the fifth grade, even the sixth grade, every child develops a talent. They have to start to see that talent, and they have to start to believe that talent.

What I'm referring to is self-efficacy from the student perspective. That seed has to be planted in those early years. Every family wants to know, what are you doing for my child differently that you're not doing for another child? How are you promoting little Matthew, little Erica, little Aisha, and little Mohammed. How are you promoting them? What gifts are you giving them?

The answer is differentiation. That full differentiation not just within the math block, not just within your reading groups, that full differentiation has to expand beyond the core four subjects, or even we talked about the core four or five special areas. So looking at that whole child development.

Superintendent Choudhury: Got it. Guys, thank you so much. I really appreciate you guys taking the time to hang out with me. This is something that I have told myself. When I came into this role, I cannot forget about practices each and every day. I have to obsess about them.

The answers are within our 1400 schools, they truly are. It's about uncovering them. The departments here, I put that on us. Our job is to uncover, use the bullhorn, and to be able to help people to see like, hey, here's how to do something, and here's a colleague of yours who has similar demographics pulling this off. I really appreciate you guys sharing about your practices, your priorities, your policies.

I heard a lot of things today, I want to uplift some things. One, literacy matters. Learning to read and then ultimately, reading to learn is fundamental, and being able to do that and approach that in a very thoughtful and scientific way.

Frankly, it doesn't start in kindergarten, it starts in Pre-K, and it doesn't even start in the Pre-K classroom. It starts in the home and working with the school to do that. I heard about the priorities for you guys about being able to use your Judy Center and really bring that wraparound services, working with families to life, and doing that well. That was a clear priority for you guys.

The other thing I heard and I just have to share, because I'm a huge implementation person, just the ability to adapt, prioritize, and get down to root causes. Why is this happening? Why is this happening? Why is this not happening? All right, adjust and move forward. It doesn't mean you drop the rigor of your goals, but it just means you adjust your strategies in a timely manner.

Intervene often and frequently to reach the goal that you want to see. That is what's happening at Snow Hill Elementary. They are improving over time, through the pandemic, guys. Those are some of the things I heard.

In terms of policies, we need to continue to strengthen investments in Pre-K. We need to make sure that we invest in policies that support a diverse workforce, given diversity is not just a strategy to make sure that our students see themselves in the people that are teaching them everyday, but it's also a student achievement strategy.

We also need to think creatively about how our teachers work with our students. That could mean that, hey, I'm going to loop with them. That could mean, I'm going to spend the time to make sure I have the ability to intervene and do small group instruction with my teachers, with my students, and have the freedom to do that, and trust that when I'm with a small group, the students who are not with me are taking care of, because it's a whole school approach. Your special area teachers are a secret sauce. Everyone in the audience should know what special area teachers are today.

With that, I thank you guys very much. It means a lot to me. You guys are just going to continue to get better. Maryland's fate in terms of where our students are, you guys just helped us uncover answers to get that much better today. It means a lot to me. Thank you very much.

Matthew: Thank you. What a great honor.

Aisha: Thank you.

Erica: Thank you so much.