
Elementary Teacher Planning Time

Strategic Focus Group Report

How do we add *five* hours of planning time each week for elementary school teachers?

The Office of Strategic Initiatives conducts focus groups dedicated to specific questions directed by the Superintendent for creative brainstorming and problem-solving by diverse stakeholders.

March 27, 2023

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HARFORD COUNTY

Dr. Carol Mueller, *President* • Wade Sewell, *Vice President*

Dr. Joyce Herold • Dr. Roy Phillips • Patrice Riccardi • Denise Perry

Melissa Hahn • Carol Bruce • Diane Alvarez • Noa Blanken, *Student Member*

Dr. Sean Bulson, *Superintendent of Schools*



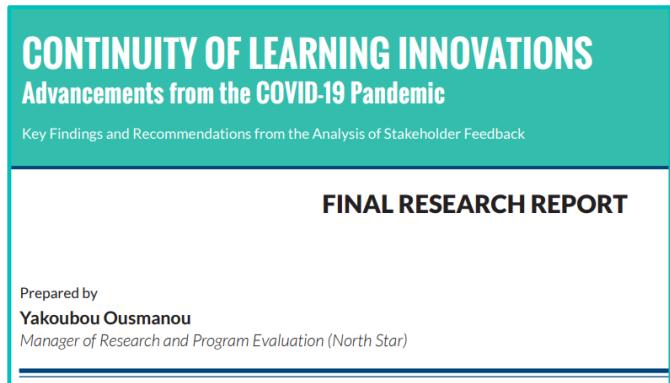
Office of Strategic Initiatives

Katie Ridgway, Director

Introduction

In 2022, the Office of Strategic Initiatives conducted interviews with several staff members and stakeholders and collected data on innovations from the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to analyze which ideas and adaptations are most important to stakeholders and which innovations meet the Board of Education Strategic Plan Goals.

The following recommendations came from this research.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. **Invest in the expansion, formalization, and further integration of technology initiatives in the district beyond the pandemic.** Many staff members at all levels named innovations such as 1:1 technology, virtual meetings, remote learning, and remote work opportunities as particularly impactful and good candidates for sustainment beyond the pandemic. All four of those innovations were cited by multiple respondents as supportive and directly aligned to all four of HCPS' strategic goals.
- II. **Explore more permanent funding strategies to keep extra daily substitute teachers at school sites.** Stakeholders appreciated the addition of extra substitute teachers funded by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) and believe the change supports all four of HCPS' strategic goals—particularly in building staff capacity and healthy learning environments.
- III. **Codify HCPS' commitment to prioritizing student and staff health and wellbeing.** Throughout COVID-19, stakeholders recognized the district's increased prioritization and awareness of the importance of mental and physical health. Staff members believe that providing and maintaining resources for stakeholder wellbeing will further support the district's progress towards its strategic goals.
- IV. **Continue to explore opportunities to increase planning time for teachers.** Throughout COVID-19, teachers utilized their planning time to provide individualized support to students, to plan lessons, and to provide outreach supports to families. Many teachers said that the dedicated time and space are good for their own wellbeing.

Full Report:

https://www.hcps.org/superintendent/docs/Continuity_of_Learning_Innovations_Advancements_from_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_HCPS_July_2022.pdf

Contents

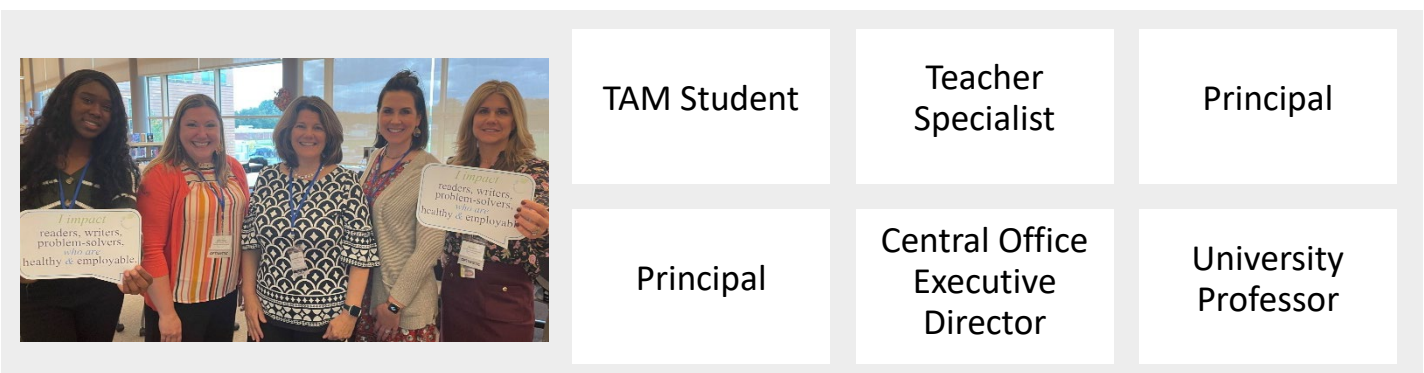
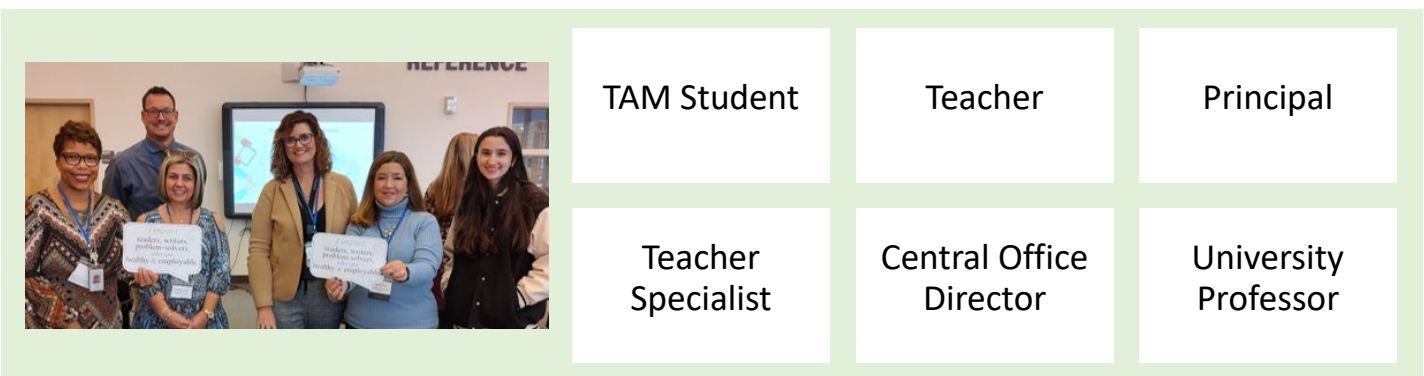
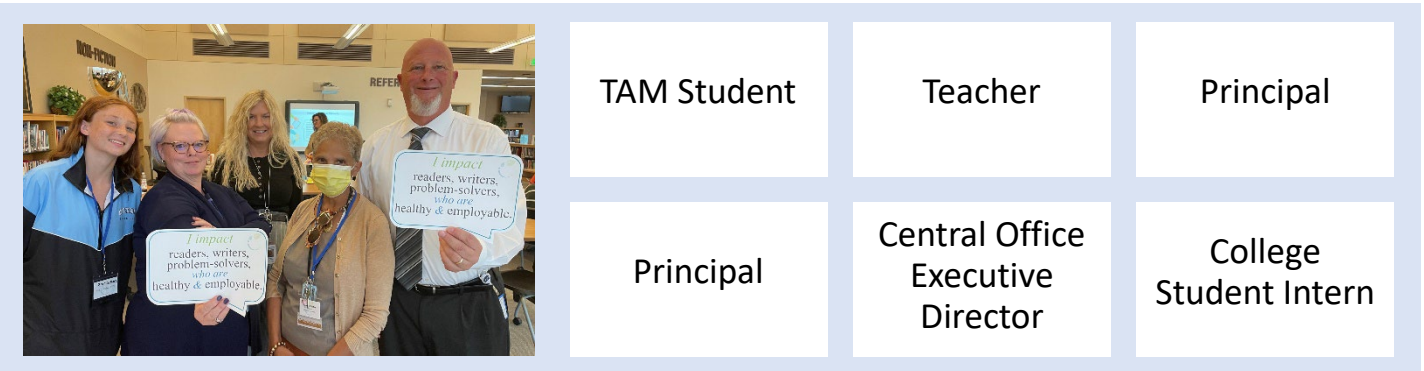
Methodology	p. 3
Inquiry	p. 5
Ideas	p. 12
Recommendations	p. 14
Teacher Feedback	p. 20
Summary	p. 22
Action Items	p. 23
Acknowledgements	p. 24

Methodology

The Superintendent of Schools proffered a question to prioritize planning time: *“How do we add five hours of planning time each week for elementary school teachers?”*

In order to effectively explore the multifaceted interpretations, dependencies, and possible solutions to this question, the Office of Strategic Initiatives facilitated a deliberate process over the course of three months to expand thinking, have adequate time for research, and to engage stakeholders.

Teachers, Teacher Specialists, Principals, University Professors, Central Office Leaders, College Student Interns, and students in the Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM) comprised three groups to work through the question together, blend perspectives, find innovative solutions, and make recommendations for more planning time for elementary school teachers.



Collaboration is a process “through which parties who see different perspectives of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.”

(Thomas & Perry, 2006)

Inquiry

Each group dissected the question by broadening and narrowing the scope of the question, finding themes among the groups' diverse reasoning, and prioritizing new questions that emerged from the exercise.

The themes that emerged reflect values, priorities, concerns, and restraints that impact how schools could provide additional planning time. All groups had primary themes about teacher well-being and student learning outcomes.

Themes

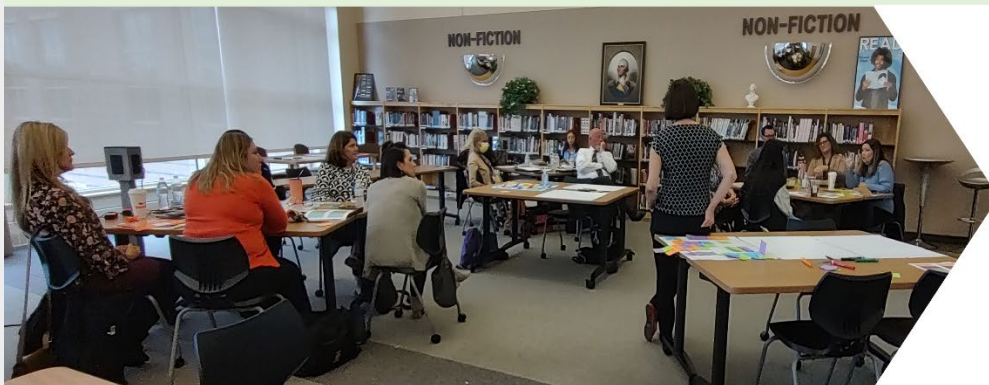
Teacher physical and mental health	Planning effectiveness, methods, and processes	Student needs and achievement
Curriculum needs	Administration considerations (e.g., Budget, Rules)	Staffing structures
Use of time and schedules	Recruitment and retention	"Better Together"

After dissecting the question, each group identified critical data needed to inform their decision-making. Participants wanted to frame their brainstorming with an understanding of state and local scheduling constraints and national and local common practices.

Participant Questions

Four specific questions emerged:

- How many instructional hours does HCPS provide compared to state requirements?
- What are content minimums for instruction?
- What amount of planning time do teachers get around the country?
- What are HCPS schools currently doing for planning time beyond the negotiated 45 minutes?



Participant Questions

How many instructional hours does HCPS provide compared to state requirements?

Schools are required by the State of Maryland to:

- be open for at least three hours each school day,
- for at least 180 days school days, and
 - for at least 1,080 school hours (elementary)
- during a 10-month period in each school year.

Our 22-23 calendar plans for:

- 6.5 hours a day for elementary schools
- 13 shortened days (early dismissal)
- Total 1,131 hours for elementary
- 51 hours above the 1,080 minimum

What are content minimums for instruction?

State of Maryland

- Instruction must meet the content standards.
 - For example, in Physical Education (PE), COMAR 13A.04.13: “Provide in public schools an instructional program in physical education each year with sufficient frequency and duration to meet the requirements of the State [curriculum] Framework for all students.”

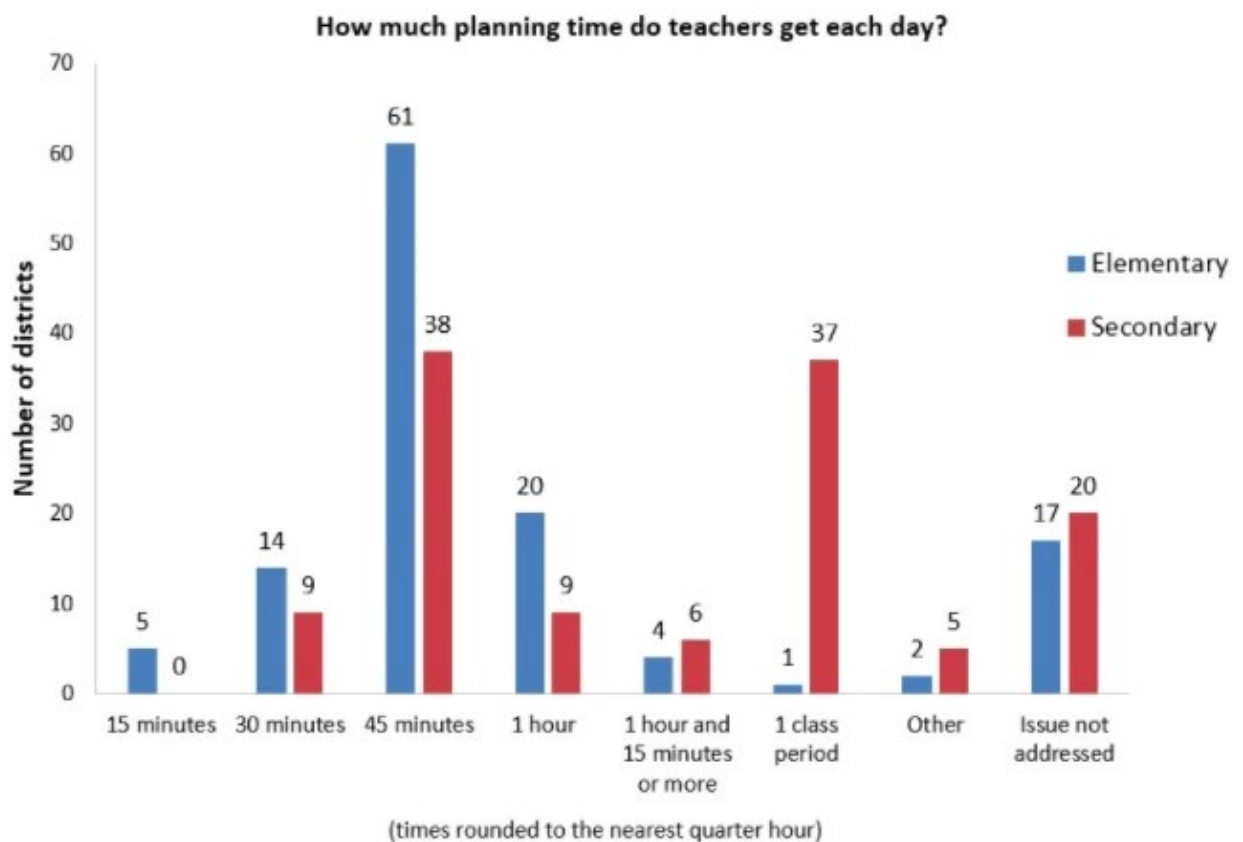
HCPS

- An HCPS Board Policy requires a minimum of 275 minutes per month for Elementary PE.
- Mathematics:
 - Grades 1-5: 65 minutes.
 - Kindergarten: 15-minute opening; 40-minute mathematics block of direct instruction aligned to MCCRS; and 30-minutes of learning centers (multiple disciplines).
- RELA:
 - Since at least 1995, primary is allotted 190 minutes and secondary is 160 minutes.



What amount of planning time do teachers get around the country?

In 2017, Education Week published an article reviewing data collected through the National Council on Teacher Quality on teacher planning time (Loewus, 2017).



Loewus, L. (2017, Nov 29). How Much Planning and Collaboration Time Are Teachers Getting? [Education Week](#).

What are HCPS schools currently doing for planning time beyond the negotiated 45 minutes?

31 HCPS elementary schools responded to the following survey questions through Elementary Education Services. All schools had **unique** responses.

Principal responses

QUESTION: *What model do you use to provide collaborative planning to your teachers? Please include pertinent information like time of day, length of the planning, who assists with coverages, etc.*

EXAMPLE RESPONSES

- "In grades K-3, we have collaborative from 3:00-3:50 one day for each grade level M-Th. The Unified Arts Teachers cover the class, and they report to the classroom at 2:50 (all specials end at 2:45) so the teachers can get to collaborative ready to start at 3:00. Grades 4 and 5 have collaborative during Chorus time as all students are in chorus."
 - "All collaborative planning takes place on one day, throughout the day. Each grade level gets 45-minutes for collaborative planning, which is supported by utilizing Unified Art Teachers, Counselor, Paras, & ESSERs."
 - "We use a double special model, so no coverage is needed. Each grade level receives 45 minutes of planning supported by one of our teacher specialists once per week. This double special block occurs from 9:35 - 10:20 for all grade levels."
 - "We use a model that starts at 3:15 and runs through dismissal with coverage remaining in the classrooms to dismiss students. This enables teachers to work past their duty day, uninterrupted, if they choose and 35 minutes during their duty day."
 - "Our model is 'Twisted Thursday.' Every class in K-5 gets a double special. We also use this time for full chorus in grades 4/5 with another option for those students who opt out of chorus."
-

Principal responses

QUESTION: *What other additional planning time do you provide to all teachers, or some teachers, in addition to collaborative planning and negotiated planning?*

EXAMPLE RESPONSES

- "During school based early dismissal PD, we dedicate that time to collaborative planning. We also provide one faculty meeting a month to collaborative planning."
- "Co-Planning (Gen Ed-Special Ed, Gen Ed-Reading Specialist, Gen Ed-G/T) in the first 30 minutes of the doors opening (i.e. 8:30-9:00)."
- "This year we have been able to use our ESSER subs to provide extended coverage for our primary teachers to unpack the new reading units with the Reading Specialist."
- "We have a Wellness block once every 3 weeks that teachers can sign up for to get another planning block. This is managed by the PE teacher."
- "As supported through The Office of Special Education, our teachers receive compensation for additional planning hours as it relates to IEP case management."
- "There are some weekly faculty meeting times that become the gift of time for planning."
- "We rotate planning time for 3 grade levels each early dismissal day."
- "Paid planning through Title I."

Inquiry

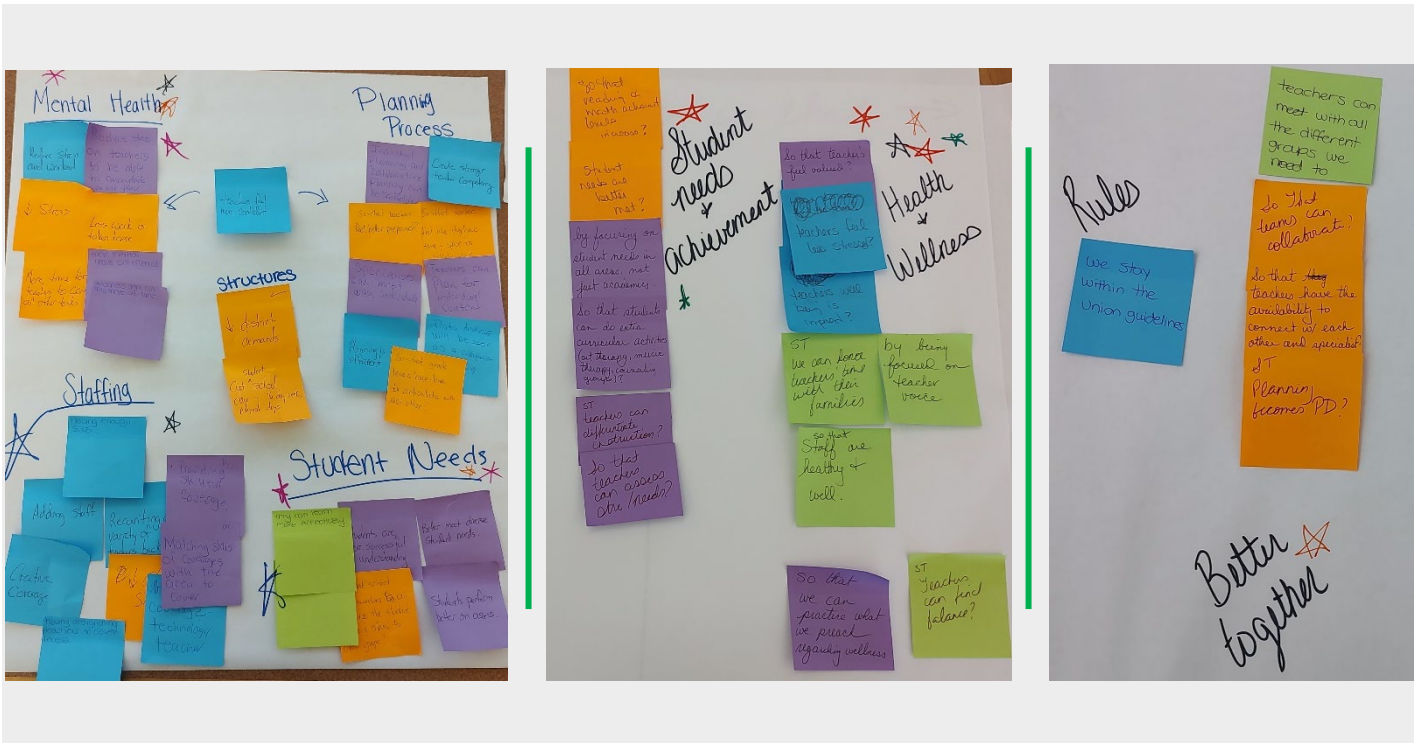
QUESTION: *What other information should be considered when looking to increase planning time at the elementary level?*

EXAMPLE RESPONSES

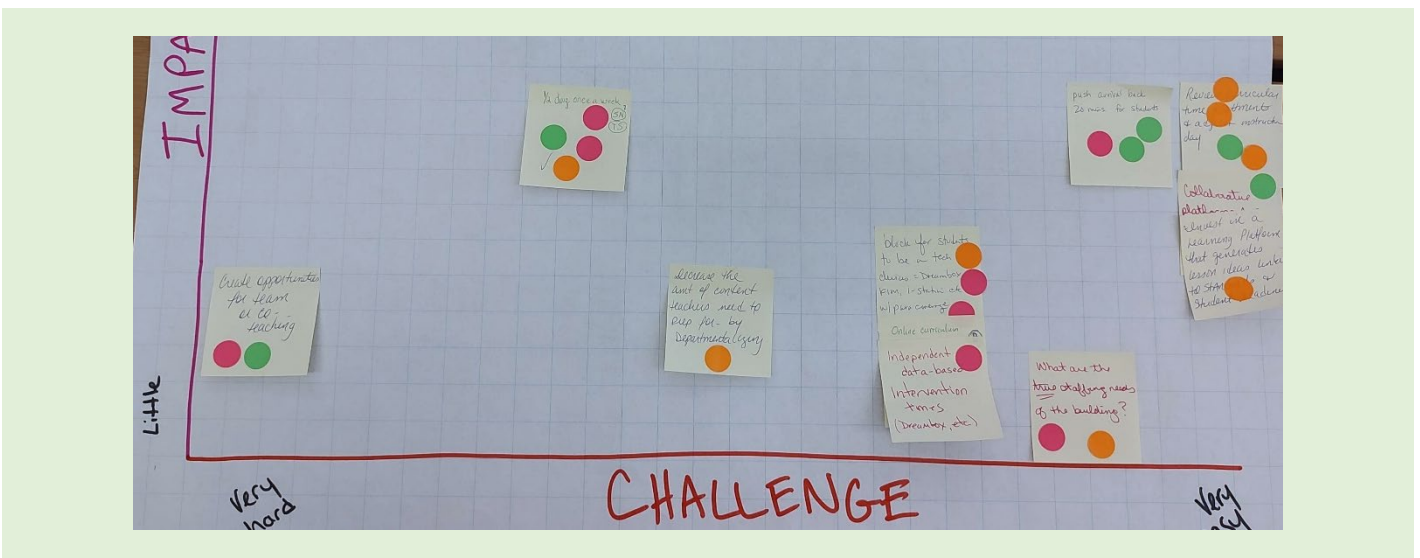
- "I'm concerned with who can do this if we have the same amount of staff, as we need coverage for lunch duty. We do not get a lot of lunch volunteers, so a lot of staff are performing a variety of coverages throughout the week already."
- "I know the perception of the full Friday planning during covid was not great, but teachers were really productive, meetings and collaboration could happen (virtually). More parent communication occurred."
- "Have students arrive 20 minutes later. This approach will give elementary teachers 400 minutes monthly."
- "Perhaps we can consider two specials a day with a second special being one where students can learn a foreign language (yes, the earlier the better for foreign language!)."
- "Equity is needed between classroom-based teachers, unified arts teachers, and SE teachers."
- "Special area classes could be longer. Instead of 45 minutes, perhaps look at 60 minutes."
- "Time allotments for core content areas need to be adjusted."

Ideas

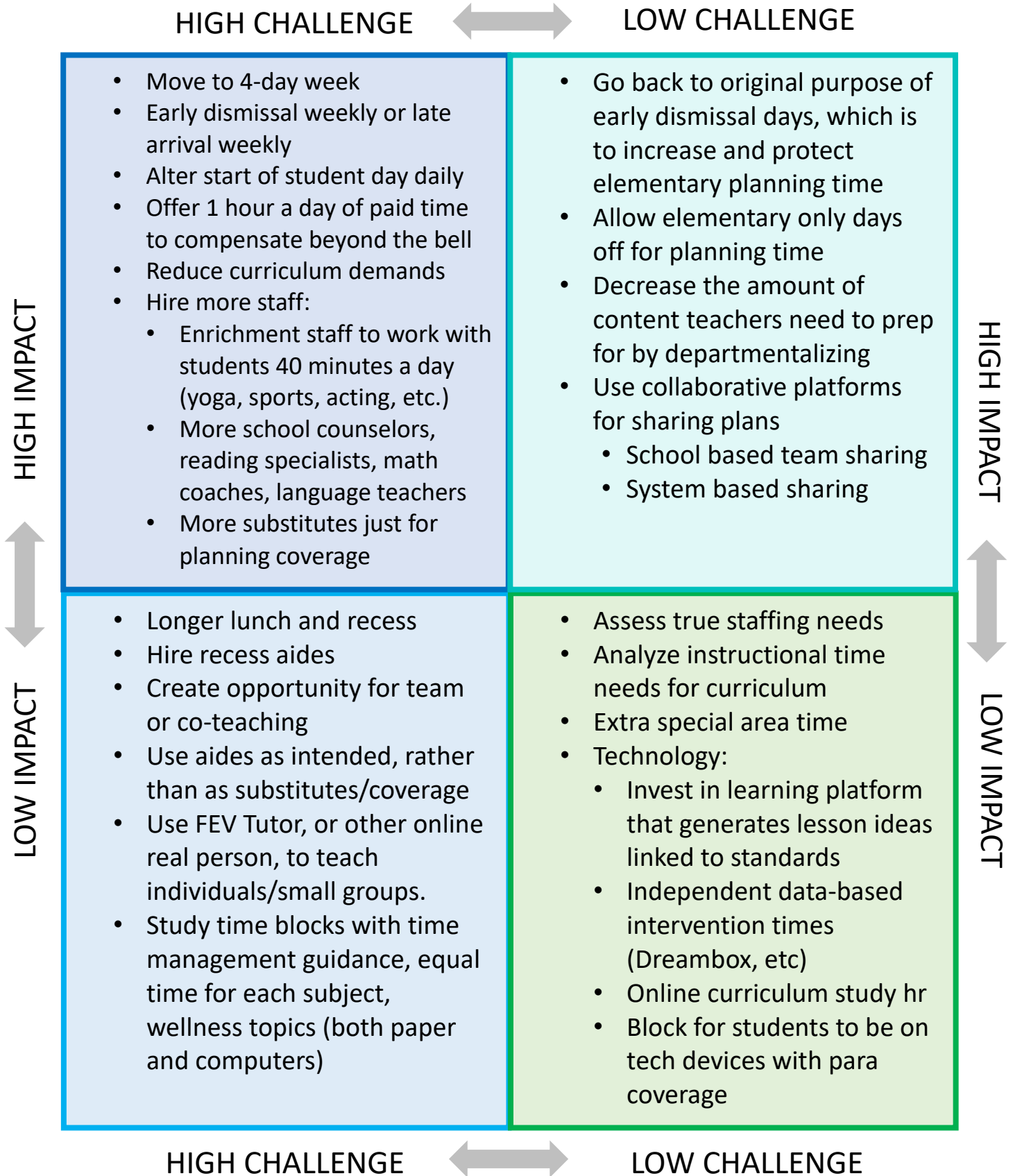
Each group brainstormed solutions in each of their prioritized categories, discussed ideas together, and built off each other's thoughts.



Next, the groups considered the scale of challenge each idea presented and the positive impact the idea could have if implemented.

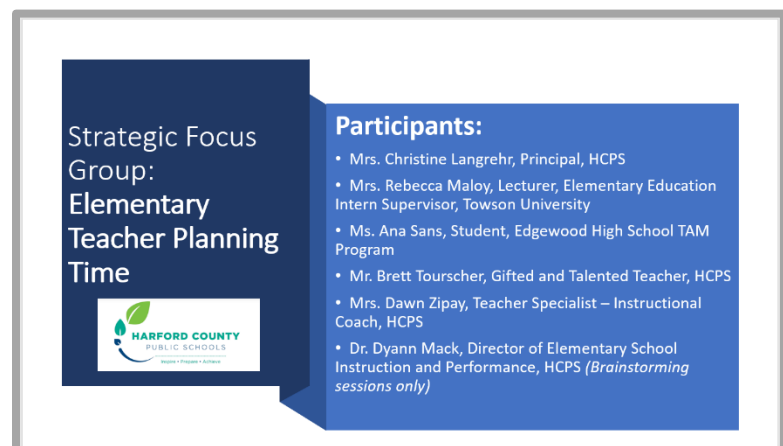
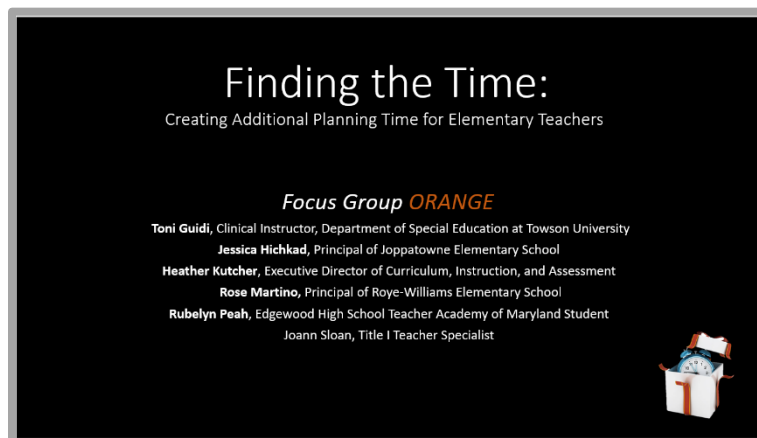
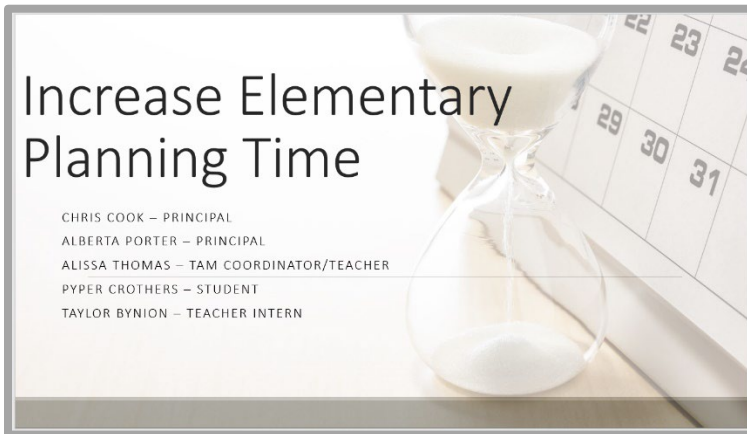


Impact - Challenge



Recommendations

Each group worked together to create a presentation with recommendations for the Superintendent of Schools. Presentations took place virtually with the Executive Director and Director of Elementary School Instruction & Performance included.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement a **focus day** on Friday of each week. **Planning time** and coverage for K-2 in the morning and 3-5 in the afternoon. This **can alternate** so that K-2 would be in the afternoon and 3-5 would be in the morning the following week if a school desires.

GOALS

- **How do we accomplish this without impacting childcare needs for our families?**
HCPS has diverse needs across our schools. We discussed how this might impact families in various capacities.
- **How do we fit this into an instructional day that is already packed?**
We discussed how this impacts instructional goals based on our curriculum goals and student needs.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

- Intervention – reading, math, etc.
- Guest speakers from APG
- Lego League
- Library
- Health Department
- Healthy Eating presentations
- Agriculture program Program
- Fire/Police Department
- Good News Assemblies
- Guidance Counselors
- Yoga For Kids
- Puzzles/Games
- Music groups from High Schools
- Physical Activity

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Make early dismissals a whole day off for students
 - Teacher planning- AM; Professional development opportunities- PM
 - *Parents are already accounting for half day childcare*
 - Have options for teachers to commit to 2.5 additional hours of paid planning (\$25/hour rate) outside of the contractual day.
 - Reimagine collaborative planning to meet teacher needs with time and topics driven by the grade level team. Choice can be limited but if teachers are given choice (such as next unit exploration or assessment review) then it can be counted as planning.
 - Departmentalize across the county and reallocate teachers based on their teaching strengths to meet specific school needs. This will limit the amount of planning a teacher needs to do.
-

Implement a **focus day** on Friday of each week. **Planning time** and coverage for K-2 in the morning and 3-5 in the afternoon. This **can alternate** so that K-2 would be in the afternoon and 3-5 would be in the morning the following week if a school desires.

Pros

Increased intervention opportunities for all subject areas.

Timing allows teachers prep for the upcoming week.

Supports staff mental health needs by alleviating the need to weekend plan.

Students are still in school which does not impact childcare needs.

Increased STEAM and community partnership opportunities for students.

Project-based learning opportunities for students.

Time for counseling lessons and mental health themed activities from HCPS.

Students will still receive RELA and Math instruction during their day.

Cons

Logistics for administration

Finding resources

Time constraints

Use of special area teachers? Equal planning time for all

Potential attendance concerns on Friday's

Does not fully meet time request

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement a **menu** of ideas that add up to five hours or more of additional planning time for teachers. The menu is organized by the **impact** of the change on **HCPS families**.

MINIMAL COMMUNITY IMPACT

Menu of Ideas	Time Impact
<p>Rework existing weekly instructional schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students engage in 3 hours per week of PE, structured indoor and outdoor play, social-emotional focused learning, soft skill practice, and career exploration - Blocks are led by additional Unified Arts/Physical Education staff, community partners, University partners, and/or volunteers 	<p>3 hours per week</p>
<p>5 of the 10 scheduled student Early Dismissal Days will be reallocated from professional development to teacher planning</p>	<p>15 hours per school year</p>
<p>One collaborative planning session per month will be reallocated to individual planning</p>	<p>45 minutes per month</p>
<p>Rework Recess</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recess will be extended 20 minutes per grade level - Volunteers and/or paid additional staff will monitor all recess periods 	<p>1 hour and 40 minutes per week</p>
<p>Buddy Class Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pair primary grade classes with intermediate grade classes for paired reading time - <i>Paired teachers alternate supervision of both classes</i> 	<p>30 minutes every other week</p>
<p>Additional Unified Arts/Physical Education Block per Week Affords each grade level teacher 1 additional planning block per week Classes planned and covered by additional Unified Arts/Physical Education staff</p>	<p>45 minutes per week</p>

INCREASED COMMUNITY IMPACT

Menu of Ideas	Time Impact
<p>Adjusted Start Time for Students Begin elementary school 15 minutes later than current start time at all schools</p>	1 hour and 15 minutes per week
<p>Weekly Delayed Opening Use a one-hour delayed opening schedule for all elementary schools one time per week (consistent day)</p>	1 hour per week
<p>4-Day School Week Time is added to the normal school day – other districts have added approximately 35 minutes to each of the 4 days. School is closed to students one day per week – most districts that have implemented this use either Monday or Friday (deduct extra 2 hours and 10 minutes added to the daily schedule 4 days/week)</p>	5 hours per week



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make no decision without systemic feedback from elementary teachers
2. Early dismissal days
3. Alter student arrival time
4. Recess coverage

TEACHER FEEDBACK

Those who are impacted and will receive the most benefit need to have representation and input into this process.

EARLY DISMISSAL DAYS

Return the 10 planned early dismissal days as unassigned planning time exclusively to elementary teachers. 10 days x 3 hours = 30 hours; Average of + 45 minutes per week

STUDENT ARRIVAL TIME

One day a week, elementary students arrive to school 75 minutes later than normal. Increase of + 47.5 hours of planning time year (38-week year).

RECESS

Increase recess time for elementary students to 30 minutes per day and provide coverage for general educators.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Update elementary curriculum time allotments to accommodate planning time increase.
- Transportation costs associated with delaying student arrival and parent reaction.
- Staff for recess coverage.
- Encourage elementary departmentalizing.



Teacher Feedback

TEACHERS SUPPORT

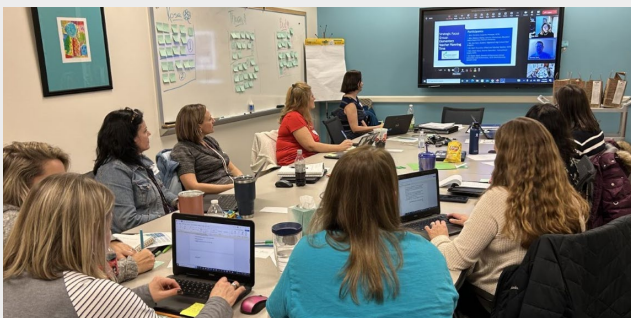
- Planning time on early dismissal days
- Planning time in larger time increments

TEACHERS SEE POTENTIAL

- Creative scheduling for half day planning while students are in school for full day
- Recess coverage/extension, if staff are hired
- Late arrival days for students
- Departmentalizing
- Four-day school week
- Adjusting curriculum minimums per day/week
- Increase number of half days
- Asynchronous learning during the school day
- Extra physical education or specials

TEACHERS ARE HESITANT ABOUT

- Whether staffing is possible for recess and impact of weather
- Additional planning time coming in small increments (15 minutes)
- The amount of planning and logistics needed for creative scheduling of half day planning for teachers while students attend school full day
- Additional pay at the hourly rate for planning. This topic had mixed feelings within the teachers participating in the focus group session.



1) Make early dismissals all planning

2) Adjust the school schedule with double specials or longer specials

3) Extend duty day by 30 minutes with pay (This recommendation did not have consensus)

4) Adjust HCPS curriculum time requirements

5) Departmentalize grades 1-5

6) Have a 75-minute delay one day a week for elementary with modified specials

7) Have 2 half days per month

Note, an option is one of these days being a full day with a flexible school schedule for half of the day

8) Reduce the number of Faculty Meetings and allow for planning time instead

Teacher Feedback

Summary

All Recommendations

Provide flexible content one day per week

- Implement a flexible focus day once per week with alternative health, wellness, career, and community activities.
- Implement a flexible 3-hour block once a week for PE, structured indoor and outdoor play, social-emotional focused learning, soft skill practice, and career exploration.

Early dismissal

- 5 of the 10 scheduled student early dismissal days reallocated from P.D. to teacher planning
- Return the 10 planned early dismissal days as unassigned planning time exclusively to elementary teachers
- Make these whole days off for elementary schools
- Add more half days to the calendar

Recess

- Extend to 30 or 40 minutes
- Hire recess aides or hire additional full-day support staff that includes recess duty

Adjusted school day

- Additional Unified Arts/Physical Education block each week
- 15-minute start time adjustment
- Weekly 1-hour delay or 75-minute delay
- 4-Day School Week whereby time is added to the normal school day – other districts have added approximately 35 minutes
- Buddy class time: Pair primary grade classes with intermediate grade classes for paired reading time

Reallocate collaborative planning or faculty meetings

- One collaborative planning session per month will be reallocated to individual planning
- Allow choice in this time for individual or collaborative time based on team needs
- Give the gift of time instead of faculty meetings

Departmentalization or co-teaching opportunities

Additional pay for optional planning after the bell

Action Items

1

Central leadership team(s) review half days.

2

Leadership and principal teams collaborate on short and long-term recommendations. (*Departmentalization, collaborative planning, "Flex Friday" creative schedules, faculty meetings, etc.*)

3

Include recommendations that impact the budget in the FY25 budget process. (*Increasing specials, recess aides, etc.*)

4

Share report with calendar committee for consideration in the FY25 Calendar. Include an elementary and secondary teacher on the calendar committee.

Special Thanks

Focus Group Contributors

Alberta Porter, Principal of Darlington Elementary School, HCPS

Alissa Thomas, Teacher Academy of Maryland Coordinator, Teacher, Edgewood High School, HCPS

Ana Sans, Student, Edgewood High School Teacher Academy of Maryland Program, HCPS

Ashley Bowley, Administrative Assistant, Department of Strategic Initiatives, HCPS

Brett Tourscher, Gifted and Talented Teacher, Hickory and Meadowvale Elementary, HCPS

Chris Cook, Principal of Homestead/Wakefield Elementary School, HCPS

Christine Langrehr, Principal of George D. Lisby Elementary School at Hillsdale, HCPS

Dawn Zipay, Teacher Specialist, Instructional Coach, HCPS

Dyann Mack, Director of Elementary School Instruction and Performance, HCPS

Heather Kutcher, Executive Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, HCPS

Jessica Hichkad, Principal of Joppatowne Elementary School, HCPS

Joann Sloan, Title I Teacher Specialist, HCPS

Pyper Crothers, Student, Edgewood High School Teacher Academy of Maryland Program, HCPS

Rebecca Maloy, Lecturer, Elementary Education Intern Supervisor, Towson University

Renee Vaught, Executive Director of Elementary School Instruction and Performance, HCPS

Rose Martino, Principal of Roye-Williams Elementary School, HCPS

Rubelyn Peah, Student, Edgewood High School Teacher Academy of Maryland Program, HCPS

Taylor Bynion, Teacher Intern, Church Creek Elementary School, Notre de Dame of Maryland University

Toni Guidi, Clinical Instructor, Department of Special Education at Towson University

Special Thanks

HCEA Teacher Feedback

Judy Burinsky, 5th Grade Teacher, North Bend Elementary School

Laurie Evans, Special Education Teacher, Meadowvale Elementary School

Heather Morris, Teacher Specialist - Literacy, Roye-Williams Elementary School

Erinn Ragan, 4th Grade Teacher, Ring Factory Elementary School

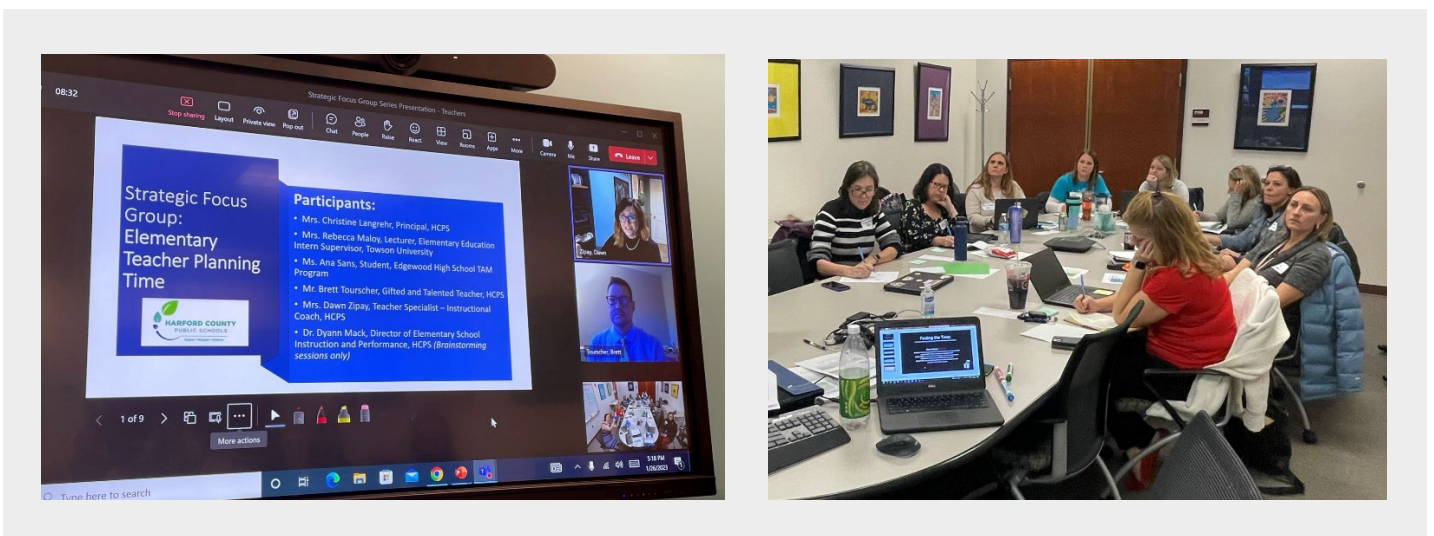
Amy Cook, 2nd Grade Teacher, Forest Hill Elementary School

Colleen Bianco, 1st Grade Teacher, George D. Lisby Elementary School at Hillsdale

Wendy Nesbitt, Music Teacher, Darlington Elementary School

Kelly Dilworth, 3rd Grade Teacher, Homestead/Wakefield Elementary School

Chrystie Crawford-Smick, President, Harford County Education Association (HCEA)





Harford County Public Schools Nondiscrimination Statement

The Board of Education of Harford County does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry/national origin, color, disability, pregnancy, gender identity/expression, marital status, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation in matters affecting employment or in providing access to programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.

In accordance with the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §1681, et seq.), Harford County Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any of its programs or activities or with regard to employment. Inquiries about the application of Title IX, and its implementing regulations to Harford County Public Schools: Involving **students, refer to:** Ken Miller, 102 South Hickory Avenue, Bel Air, MD 21014 at [\(410\) 375-0408](tel:4103750408) or Kenneth.Miller@hcps.org; Involving **all other members of the school community, refer to:** Renee McGlothlin, 102 South Hickory Avenue, Bel Air, MD 21014 at [\(410\) 809-6087](tel:4108096087) or Renee.McGlothlin@hcps.org. Discrimination complaints may also be filed with other agencies, such as the Office of Civil Rights in the United States Department of Education. Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights: 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202, 1-800-421-3481. For updated information on the Board of Education, visit www.hcps.org.
