A Case Study of

# Harford County Public Schools

Bel Air, Maryland



HARFORD COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Inspire • Prepare • Achieve

LEARNING 2025
Student-Centered
Equity-Focused
Future-Driven
Education

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

# An Introduction to the Learning 2025
# Case Studies Series

*AASA Learning 2025: Student-Centered, Equity-Focused, Future-Driven Education* is a movement that calls for a holistic redesign of the public school system by 2025. This initiative is grounded in the foundational work of the [AASA Learning 2025](#) National Commission, comprised of thought leaders in education, business, community, and philanthropy. The work of AASA Learning 2025 is guided by the commission's report, *An American Imperative: A NewVision of Public Schools*.

As part of this initiative, AASA Learning 2025 demonstration systems are creating student-centered, equity-focused, and future-driven educational systems that serve ALL learners. This initiative is based on recurrent core redesign components, including:

1. **Culture**: Systems redesign must occur within an intentional and relationships-based culture that is Whole Learner focused; dedicated to ensuring that no learner is marginalized; and future driven; anticipating forthcoming changes in post-secondary and career landscapes to inform all decisions today.
2. **Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Growth**: Educational systems must address the strengths and needs of the Whole Learner, including key physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development as a holistic component of educational transformation.
3. **Resources**: Every learner must succeed and have equitable access to the educational resources and support services necessary to ensure their success.

To demonstrate the power and effectiveness of participating AASA Learning 2025 school districts, AASA is sharing with members of the educational community case studies showcasing exemplary school systems that are a part of this network. In this case study, leaders and their staffs will explore the transformation initiatives and processes currently underway in Harford County Public Schools, Maryland.

As you will learn in this case study, Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) aims to meet the mandates of the State of Maryland articulated in its *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. In addition, it has become a demonstrate site for the AASA Learning 2025 initiative through its HCPS North Star Initiative, Board of Education long-range goals, and its commitment to the following key priorities: ensuring equity; reinforcing safety and security in all schools and related learning organizations; addressing the current teacher shortage; and promoting community engagement.

# Harford County Vision, Mission, and Core Values

## Vision
We will inspire and prepare each student to achieve success in college and career.

## Mission
Each student will attain academic and personal success in a safe and caring environment that honors the diversity of our students and staff.

## Core Values

1. We empower each student to achieve academic excellence.
2. We create reciprocal relationships with families and members of the community.
3. We attract and retain highly skilled personnel.
4. We ensure an efficient and effective organization.
5. We provide a safe and secure environment.

# A Profile of the Harford County School District

Approximately 38,000 students are currently enrolled in HCPS. The district has the eighth largest student enrollment of the 24 public school systems in Maryland. The district employs 5,400 personnel to provide necessary educational programs and supporting services for students. Currently, the district has 33 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, 9 comprehensive high schools, the Harford Academy (a separate day school for students with disabilities), Harford Technical High School, and Swan Creek School (which offers multiple options for students, including an eLearning Blended Virtual Program in students grades 1 through 12).

This Learning 2025 district is deeply committed to the implementation of the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* state legislation. Its programs and services are aligned with this framework, including sustained implementation of Blueprint structural components:

1. **Early Childhood Education:** e.g., expansion of full-day Pre-K programs and working with private pre-K providers, and ensuring kindergarten readiness.
2. **Elevating Educators:** e.g., hiring and retaining high quality and diverse employees, creating a career ladder for teachers, and providing talent pathways for future educators.
3. **North Star Goals:** e.g., College and Career Readiness; college-level coursework, dual enrollment/credit, career credentials, and support plans for students for post-graduation success.
4. **Student Supports:** e.g., behavioral and health services, community schools and health centers, and services for Special Education and English Learners.

# District Priority Goals Aligned with the AASA Learning 2025 Initiative

Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) is committed to addressing a range of redesign components associated with the AASA Learning 2025 initiative. Each redesign component has a specific and clearly articulated purpose, aligned with the following systemic and Maryland state requirements: The Blueprint for Maryland's Future; the HCPS North Star Initiative (designed to ensure that all students have access to academic opportunities, social-emotional support, and real-world experiences tailored to their needs); and Board of Education goals.

In complement to its vision, mission, and core values, the school system identified four long-term goals:

1. Prepare every student for success in post-secondary education and career.
2. Engage families and the community to be partners in the education of our students.
3. Hire and support highly effective staff who are committed to building their own professional capacity in order to increase student achievement.
4. Provide safe, secure, and healthy learning environments conducive to effective teaching and learning, creativity, and innovation.

Specific goals aligned with the AASA Learning 2025 initiative include the following:

## Social-Emotional Learning

Reinforcing student physical health through a comprehensive system of supports, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, mental health specialists, and community service provider partnerships.

## Future-Ready Learners

Monitoring the extent to which students are prepared for either college or a career by analyzing which students meet criteria for college credit, earn college credit through dual enrollment coursework, and/or earn career licensure.

## Equity-Focused

Offering a wide range of equity-focused services and programs.

The district also emphasizes the following "Learning Accelerators" identified by AASA Learning 2025:
1. Ensuring that all students access and succeed in early learning programs.
2. Promoting active family engagement, including ongoing facilitation by Parent and Community Engagement Liaisons.
3. Using Technology as a "Force Multiplier" to Meet the Needs of the Whole Learner.
4. Unlocking community resources.

# Reinforcing a Deep Commitment to Equity

A major priority of Harford County Public Schools is its deep and sustained commitment to being equity focused. The goal of its Office of Equity and Cultural proficiency, for example, is to improve student performance for all students through efficient and effective use of resources and delivery of instruction designed to address equity issues in culturally diverse school communities.

## Superintedent's Task Force on Equity

The district has a clearly articulated equity policy and related equity procedures as well as a Superintendent's Task Force on Equity. Part of its data collection and analysis process involves equity curriculum audits as well as equity walks in which observations are conducted to review school culture and climate. The district has a differentiated staffing model with poverty weightings to provide additional supports to students who need it the most. The system also offers a wide range of equity-focused services and programs, including Voices of Equity (a student movement); a diversity recruitment and retention diversity workgroup; and partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as part of its Talent Pathways initiative.

## Cultural Proficiency Professional Development

Cultural proficiency professional development is provided to all new staff, including support staff such as bus drivers, food and nutrition workers, custodians, and clerical as well as instructional employees. Its goal is to develop culturally responsive teachers, administrators, and support staff. Additionally, the Superintendent's Task Force on Equity is comprised of diverse community leaders who meet several times a year and serve as advisors to the superintendent. The task force is charged with making recommendations to ensure safe, supportive, and inclusive learning and working environments as well as a continuing focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## Strategic Programming

Harford County Public Schools' deep commitment to equity is also evident in its approach to strategic programming for students requiring individualized education services, including those identified as Special Education, English Learners, and Academic Interventions. According to its "Continuity of Learning Plan: 2022-2023," HCPS is committed to providing the highest level of education and support to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Services include delivering high quality instruction with related services, accommodations, and supports reflected in the student's IEP. This process also involves ongoing monitoring of student progress and the use of a data-driven decision-making process to provide appropriate compensatory education/recovery services.

## EL Learners

A range of programs and services ensure that high-quality instruction is available for all identified English Learners (EL). Schools are assigned an EL teacher responsible for providing direct services. Along with a proficiency rating, teachers use WIDA guidelines to establish "can do" statements that are shared with each student's teachers to ensure they are aware of the student's specific strengths and needs. EL teachers work collaboratively with the student's classroom teachers to provide opportunities for work modification, accommodation, and assessment. Finally, EL teachers meet regularly with each student on English-specific structures, rules, models, and nuances.

# Progress Monitoring Using Data-Driven Evidence

## Student Outcome Related Performance Indicators

Harford County Public Schools has established a range of metrics related to identified student outcomes related performance indicators, including:

1. academic achievement and preparedness
2. learner attributes (e.g., determining the extent to which all students are readers, writers, problem solvers, healthy, and employable)
3. engagement surveys
4. wellness assessments
5. staff retention data
6. staff diversity data
7. teacher pipeline data.
8. dashboards on student progress
9. focus groups on problems of practice
10. program evaluation and analysis

## Teacher Pipeline Data

Analysis of teacher pipeline data includes the following measures:

1. percentage of Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM) students
2. paraprofessionals seeking teacher certification
3. number of Provisional Certifications converted into full-time educational professional status
4. numbers of current vacancies
5. numbers of individual staff receiving "Provisional Status"
6. diversity recruitment and retention metrics

# Using a Systems Approach to Achieve AASA Learning 2025 Identified Goals & Performance Targets

Harford County Public Schools uses a systems approach to ensure alignment with stated performance goals, the monitoring of student academic progress and staff performance, and a structural commitment to address key priorities, including funding for English Learners and Special Education Students; expansion of the Community School Model; sustained provision of behavioral health services; ongoing staff training on student behavioral health and trauma-related behaviors; connecting services for schools without school-based health centers (connecting services with those who do); and a COVID-19 targeted support and recovery initiative (including interventions to address learning loss).

Specific programs, initiatives, and structural changes to support identified performance targets include the following:

## 1. Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Poverty

A significant extension of HCPS's commitment to being equity focused is its strategic program is its strategic program for students experiencing poverty. "Unique School Designations" that address this issue include Targeted Assistance Programs and School-wide Programs for Title 1 Schools (in which 66% or more of students come from low-income families).

- **Title 1:** High-poverty schools meeting identified criteria are eligible to adopt Title 1 programs and funding to raise student achievement.
- **Targeted Schools in Improvement (TSI)** is a designation given to schools based on performance of specific student groups (i.e., those scoring below 34.44% of schools earned points based upon the Maryland ESSA Accountability Framework). The district is required to develop action plans that include evidence-based interventions to address identified need for TSI sites.
- **Priority School designation** reflects a local budgetary effort to provide additional resources to schools that meet certain criteria, including teacher retention and staffing challenges. A Priority School may receive additional resources, staffing, and professional development in the district's operating budget to support the critical needs of that school.
- **Community Schools:** The district is dedicated to ensuring that schools develop and utilize partnerships to connect the school, students, families, and surrounding community for resources required to ensure that all students thrive. This commitment to equity ensures that traditionally underserved communities receive appropriate services and supports, differentiated staffing ratios, parent liaisons, and leveraged partnerships with other organizations to provide essential services.

## 2. Addressing Individualized Student Supports

- **Special Education:** HCPS has initiated a collaborative approach to involve schools, families, and community agencies in working together to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all children with disabilities.

- **English Learners:** The districts EL program serves 49 language groups through plug-in and pullout services in all schools. This program facilitates students' language acquisition to help students become independent learners at their grade level.
- **Behavioral and Mental Health Services:** Students receive daily support by school counselors, psychologists, and social workers who may also teach classroom lessons, meet with students, use restorative conflict resolution strategies, and align with support instructional staff to reinforce classroom-based interventions. Also, staff members work with students and families to locate and access behavioral and mental health services in the community. All schools have at least one outpatient mental health clinic partner for therapy services at school during the academic day.
- **Health Needs Assessment:** Harford County Public Schools prioritizes its use of data to address the mental and physical health needs of all students. In addition to completing mental health needs assessments for learners, the district has now added physical health needs assessments to monitor students' physical growth, development, and needs. A dashboard has been created to help schools view school-wide data.

# Addressing the "Future Ready" Whole Learner and Issues Related to Anti-Marginalization

The HCPS Blueprint implementation plan reinforces the need to support all students, especially those who need it the most. The blueprint emphasizes strategies for:

1. Broad and sustained supports for schools serving high concentrations of students living in poverty
2. Student access to needed prevention and intervention, including health and social services
3. Increased support for English Language Learners and Special Education students.

The blueprint building blocks for individualized student support include the following:

1. Funding for English Learners and Special Education students, ensuring that their educational experience is grounded in the principles of equity and excellence.
2. Expansion of the Community School model, developing and utilizing partnerships to connect the school, students, families, and surrounding communities, especially those with a high level of economically disadvantaged and traditionally under-served citizens.
3. Behavioral and mental health services, including in-school therapy services for referred students during their academic day.
4. Professional learning on student behavioral health, including issues related to trauma-informed intervention and support.
5. Schools without school-based health centers develop and implement plans to connect available services within the community.
6. The district—like school systems throughout the United States—continues to monitor the effects of school closures and related learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Incorporating AASA Learning 2025 "Learning Accelerators"

Harford County Public Schools is using a variety of learning accelerators to promote its long-range goals aligned with the AASA Learning 2025 initiative. These include the following:

**Promoting a Diverse Educator Pipeline**: HCPS has made a $5,000,000 commitment over the next five years to sustain a diverse educator pipeline.

**Providing All Children Access to High-Quality Early Experiences That Prepare Them for Success in their K-12 Educational Journey**: Three committees are working on this issue currently, including Blueprint Early Childhood, General Curriculum Committee for Early Childhood, and the Early Childhood Citizen Advisory Committee.

**Using Technology as a "Force Multiplier" to Meet the Needs of the Whole Learner**: Although not identified as a specific AASA Learning 2025 learning accelerator, the district has been striving to integrate technology into its instructional programs at all grade levels, extending from its post-pandemic framework.

**Unlocking Community Resources**: This learning accelerator is a major component of the HCPS Learning 2025 initiative. For example, the district now offers a "Family Friendly" school award (with 10 school sites—including elementary and middle—receiving the award so far). Similarly, the district has implemented a wide range of advisory committees to address this learning accelerator, including:
1. Superintendent's Advisory Council
2. Parent Advisory Council
3. Business Advisory Committee
4. Customer Service Taskforce
5. Special Education Advisory Council
6. Judy Center/Early Childhood Advisory Council
7. Audit Committee
8. School Health Council
9. Five Blueprint committees with 12 workgroups involving 150 participants, a third of which are representing community stakeholder.

As suggested previously, HCPS emphasizes the power and importance of community schools, which develop and utilize partnerships to connect the school, students, families, and surrounding community services to the resources needed for students to thrive. At its core, the community school strategy is deeply routed in equity: it highlights the assets in traditionally underserved communities, leveraging additional partnerships to provide essential services.

Community schools, funded by Concentration of Poverty Grants, in HCPS work to provide access for students and families to health services, mental health support, academic enrichment, out-of-school time programming, crisis support, adult education classes, leadership development, and other services required to address the needs of the Whole Learner.

# Suggested Guide Questions

1. How has Harford County Public Schools aligned its AASA Learning 2025 priority areas around key systemic and state frameworks, including the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the goals of the district's North Star initiative, and its Board of Education goals?

2. In your opinion, how are HCPS' vision, mission, and core values reflected in the priorities, processes, programs, and related initiatives showcased in this case study?

3. How is HCPS striving to be "future-driven"? What questions would you pose to leaders in the district about how they are working to address this long-range goal?

4. The health and well-being of students in HCPS is presented as a major priority in this case study. What are the major student supports and assessments used by the district to achieve this goal?

5. Ensuring that students are "future-ready" is presented as a major priority in this district. What are the key criteria used by Harford County Public Schools to monitor student progress in this area? What questions might you ask district leaders about their achievement in this focus area?

6. Early childhood education is identified as a key component of the HCPS improvement process. In your opinion, why is this focus area such a key component of the district's strategic planning efforts?

7. Family and community engagement is another key element of the HCPS continuous improvement process. How is the district using a cross-functional team approach to addressing this key issue?

8. To achieve its stated goals for AASA Learning 2025, HCPS is using a range of strategies and structural components. How does the Office of Strategic Initiatives engage key stakeholders in the process of school and district improvement?

9. In your opinion, how effectively is HCPS addressing the needs of the whole learner? For example, what roles does the whole learner play in the district's implementation of "Blueprint for Maryland's Future"?

10. What questions would you ask district leaders about their various programs and initiatives? In your opinion, what criteria would you use to assess the impact and "value-add" of identified programs and practices?

You can access the most up-to-date information about HCPS' strategic initiatives and its implementation of the Maryland Blueprint for Maryland's Future by going to: https://www.hcps.org/departments/Strategicinitiatives/Default.aspx

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