



Findings of Root Cause Analysis for Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools

Achievement Academy
@
Harbor City High School

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COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL
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This report was prepared by the University of Maryland College Park Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement at the College of Education and in partnership with the Bowie State University College of Education and the

Morgan State University School of Education & Urban Studies. The Root Cause Analysis process was facilitated by Christian Anderson and Dr. Segun Eubanks, who also co-authored this report.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to share the outcomes of a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) conducted to support Achievement Academy @ Harbor City High School in identifying underlying causes of school performance problems. The report provides an overview of the RCA process, school profile, problem statement, root cause analysis, and recommendations to address the root causes.

The Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan requires schools that have been identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) engage in a root cause analysis process facilitated by a third party. CSI schools are the lowest achieving 5 percent of Title I schools; high schools that do not graduate one third or more of their students; or schools that have federal school improvement grants (SIG). Achievement Academy was identified as a CSI school because of graduation rates. Outcomes of the root cause analysis must be used to inform the development of intervention plans to improve school performance.

CSI schools that were identified in the 2018-2019 school year have three years to exit CSI status. CSI school leaders will receive a leadership coach to support the development and implementation of the intervention plan. CSI principals are also required to participate in the Leading for School Improvement Institute which provides customized professional learning experiences to support school improvement. CSI principals are also required to engage in monitoring visits by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to ensure that progress is being made toward school improvement goals.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) established a memorandum of understanding with the University of Maryland College Park to facilitate the RCA process. The University of Maryland College Park collaborated with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to develop RCA tools and train field teams. Field teams consisted of researchers, data analysts, and education practitioners from Morgan State University, Johns Hopkins University, Bowie State University, and other organizations. Field team members worked with all CSI schools to go through an RCA process. MSDE will support each school to engage in a long-term continuous improvement process that includes RCA analyses, recommended interventions, and evaluations of employed interventions. As part of this process, CSI schools were first required to go through a needs-assessment process that was used to drive the RCA work.

I. INTRODUCTION

RCA Process for CSI Schools

A Root Cause Analysis Facilitator Guide was developed to promote consistency in the root cause analysis process. The Facilitator Guide contains protocols designed to engage school leaders and stakeholders in identifying a specific problem and prioritizing root causes for the problem.

There was a four step process used to facilitate the root cause analysis:

1. Craft a Problem Statement Based on Data.
2. Brainstorm Causal Factors
3. Analyze Underlying Causes to Identify Root Causes
4. Prioritize Root Causes for Intervention

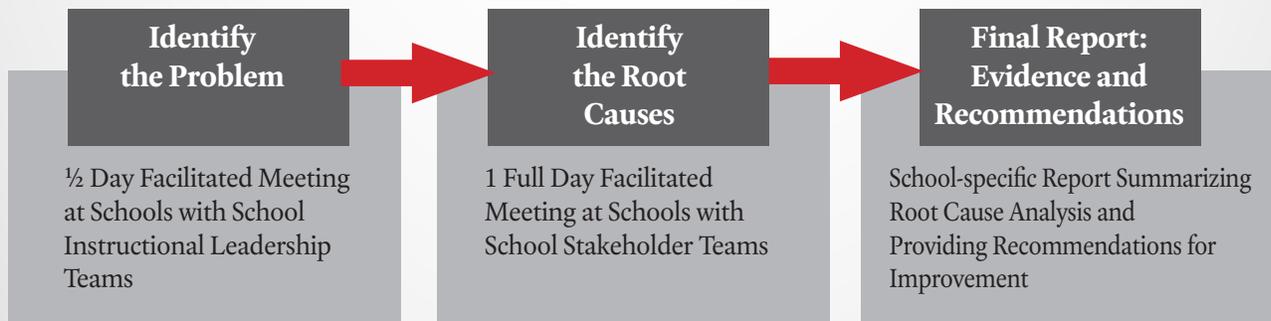
The root cause analysis process translates the successes and challenges identified through the CSI needs assessment into priorities to inform actionable improvement planning. The work with schools was staged in three steps: 1) identify

the problem; 2) identify the root causes; 3) draft a school report with recommendations for improvement.

First, the root cause analysis team worked with school leadership teams to craft a problem statement in a half-day meeting. Using the available school, school system, and state data, the school team selected a problem that relates to their CSI status and provides a direction for the root cause analysis.

Second, the facilitators returned to the school for a full-day meeting with the school's stakeholder team to better understand the root causes of the problem. Once the stakeholders worked through the process of determining the root causes, they prioritized those root causes based on importance, feasibility, and alignment to CSI status.

As a third and final step, the root cause analysis teams created these school-specific reports with recommendations for addressing the problem and root causes in improvement planning.



I. INTRODUCTION

An RCA starts with asking the question: What problem do we face that, if solved or mitigated, would most effectively lead to our desired outcomes (in this case significant improvement in student outcomes that would lead to the school being removed from CSI status)? This “Problem Statement” is then studied and interrogated by a team of stakeholders through the RCA process that answers questions such as:

- Why do we get the outcomes that we currently do?
- Who are the people involved in this problem?
- What policies, procedures, or rules contribute to this problem?
- What resources are currently engaging with this problem?
- What environmental issues impact this problem?

This process led to a small number of “root causes” to the problem designed to help school stakeholders design strategies and programs that are more likely to lead to significant improvement for students. In addition, the process will include conducting research on the problem and prioritized root causes and recommending evidence-based strategies for improvement.

II. SCHOOL PROFILE

School Name: Achievement Academy @ Harbor City High School
 2201 Pinewood Ave, Baltimore, MD 21214
 (410) 396-6241

Total teachers : 23

Student Demographics								
Total Students	Asian	Black African Americans	Hispanic/Latino	White	Other	% Economically Disadvantaged	% English Learners	% Students with Disabilities
343	<10	332	<10	<10	<10	67.73%	2.95%	25.61%

Achievement Academy @ Harbor City High School MSDE School Report Card Profile for 9-12									
Academic Achievement		School Quality and Student Success		Graduation Rate		Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency		Readiness for Postsecondary Success	
% Proficient in Mathematics	1.4%	Students Not Chronically Absent	4%	Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate	23.3%	% English Learners Making Progress Toward Learning English	N/A	Credit for Well-Rounded Curriculum	100%
Average Performance Mathematics	1.5								
% Proficient in English Language Arts (ELA)	0%	Access to Well Rounded Curriculum	46.5%	Five-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate	28.6%			On Track in Ninth Grade for Graduation	12%
Average Performance ELA	1.3								
Earned Points	4.4/30	Earned Points	5.6/25	Earned Points	3.8/15	Earned Points	N/A	Earned Points	5.6/100
Total Earned Percent:				24%					

To view this school's full report card, visit www.mdreportcard.org

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Description of the Process

The first step in the RCA process was to convene a half-day meeting that was facilitated by a two-member RCA team. Achievement Academy convened on April 25, 2019 for day one of the RCA process. Present at the meeting were the school principal, two vice-principals, two educational associates, a mathematics teacher, school counselor, and two officials from Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) - a Title I coordinator and a family and community engagement specialist (see Appendix A). The primary goal of this meeting was to craft a “Problem Statement” that would drive the root cause analysis. A Problem Statement can be defined as a statement describing a situation, issue, barrier, impediment, or challenge that a school must address to significantly improve students’ outcomes related particularly to those outcomes that led to the school being placed on the CSI list.

The goals of the first day were as follows: 1) to review and analyze school data related to key areas of performance leading to the school’s designation as a CSI school, and 2) to determine a problem of practice to drive the RCA process. The school team reviewed available data for this process, including:

- The MSDE Comprehensive Support and Improvement School Needs Assessment 2018-19
- The Maryland State School Report Card 2017-2018
- The BCPS School Profile, Fall 2018
- The BCPS School Survey for Parents 2017-2018 Results

Problem Statement Criteria

Participants arrived at a problem statement by examining how CSI schools were identified; by using data to understand why the school received CSI status; by organizing data trends into themes; by evaluating the feasibility of addressing those themes; and by prioritizing addressable themes to identify

the RCA area of focus. The problem statement was crafted based on the following criteria:

1. *How important is the problem to addressing our needs?*

Importance is determined by whether student outcomes will be improved, teacher efficacy is increased, and/or organizational systems will be improved.

2. *How feasible is it to address this problem?*

Feasibility is defined by the availability of adequate resources, staff, and capacity, and whether there is sufficient support and buy-in.

3. *How aligned is the problem to our needs?*

The problem statement should be related to the reason the school was identified as a CSI school. Also the school should be able to address the problem and its root causes by the effective selection and implementation of evidence-based practices.

Day One Summary

Achievement Academy was designated a CSI school because its four-year cohort graduation rate is 14.44%. Achievement Academy is an alternative school that serves students who are significantly behind in credits, unsuccessful in the traditional school setting (behavior, academics, or both) and/or engaged in the criminal justice system. The leadership team discussed the fact that the nature of the alternative school system meant that most students entering the school are already too far behind to graduate in the four-year cohort, making the CSI criteria virtually impossible for the school to meet. At the same time, the school acknowledged the need to focus on the significant improvement of graduation rates. These factors led to a robust and engaging discussion of the data and a problem statement that the leadership team was fully committed to addressing.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Key Data Themes

Data Source	Key Takeaways
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSDE CSI School Needs Assessment-Maryland School Report Card BCPS School Profile Maryland School Report Card 	<p>Data Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dropout rate has decreased from 2016 to 2018 Staff members have solid experience, and staff retention is high iREADY scores showed a slight increase A spike in the tenth grade dropout rate was observed Mobility rates for students are remarkably high Suspensions were way down; no suspensions so far this year Far fewer students take end-of-year tests than beginning-of-year tests End-of-year testing window is very short while beginning-of-year testing is wide open Attendance is consistently very low Difference between often, sometimes, and never not reflected in the data Attendance rates on the needs assessment and MSDE school report card are different, though both indicate low attendance More than one-quarter of all students have special needs and/or disabilities Very few students graduate with a certificate (only one certificate program in the school) Over 90 percent of students are two or more grade levels behind in beginning-of-year assessments This number drops to 35-50 percent by end-of-year for ELA, but no change in mathematics Gap between the presence of high-quality curriculum and access to high-quality curriculum on MSDE report card School enrollment is increasing Low parent engagement based on survey numbers, but has increased over the last two years <p>Possible Data Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rolling admissions of students and intake process impact testing schedules Changing from semesters to trimesters and back to semesters again impacts course schedules and graduation timelines Structure of an alternative school makes gaining “points” on MSDE report card implausible

Themes Across Data Sources (Topics) (1 being highest priority)	Ranking
<p>Attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No-show rate Chronic/sporadic Students who attend regularly seem to be doing better Recruitment versus placement Students enrolled that have never once attended Geography of city and transportation 	1
Students enroll in the school at all times during the year with differing ages, credit acquisition, ability levels, etc., and do not have the knowledge, information, or support they need to succeed at Achievement Academy.	2
Students enter Achievement Academy two or more levels below grade level.	3

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Final Problem Statement

97% of Achievement Academy students are deemed chronically absent, including many that are enrolled but never attend.

Evidence Base for Problem Statement

This section represents a brief research summary of the evidence related to the significance and/or impact of the problem statement identified above.

The research evidence is strong that chronic absence in high school is directly correlated to high school graduation. A summary of research

by the nonprofit organization, Attendance Works, cites multiple studies connecting attendance and chronic absence to student academic achievement, growing achievement gaps, and high school graduation (Attendance Works, 2016). A study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that ninth grade attendance is a better predictor of persistence to graduation than test scores (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Still another research study conducted in the BCPS system found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation. (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Day Two Summary

Achievement Academy convened on April 30, 2019 for day two of the RCA process. Day two was devoted to working with the school's stakeholder team to identify and prioritize the root causes of the problem statement so that the school's improvement planning efforts could address these causes. The team consisted of fourteen participants including teachers, administrators, organizational partners, and BCPS district staff (see complete list in Appendix A).

The stakeholder team started the day by reviewing the draft problem statement and modifying the finalized version to extend the parameters of the problem from students' classroom engagement to their broader school engagement. The stakeholder team was then divided into two smaller groups where they generated ideas as to what factors contribute to the problem of student absenteeism. Each group created a "Fishbone" diagram to represent their thinking. The two diagrams were then shared and combined into one composite Fishbone. The finalized Fishbone reflected the group's perceptions that the contributing causes of chronic absenteeism included health and safety, motivation and emotional well-being, housing and financial obligations, transportation, engagement in the criminal justice system, family support, and administrative policy (see Fishbone diagram). The Fishbone outlined an exploration of causal factors that were located both inside and outside of schools. The 5 Whys exercise helped to prioritize underlying causes through a whole group discussion and voting, with stakeholders zeroing in on the factors over which they

had agency to improve. At the close of the second day, stakeholders were eager to consider potential solutions to the challenges they had discussed during the two days of analysis.

Specifically, the goals for Day two included:

- Determining factors contributing to the problem statement.
- Identify underlying causes of the problem and determine which underlying causes are primary "root" causes.
- Prioritize the root causes for the importance of impacting student outcomes and the feasibility of implementing strategies to address them.

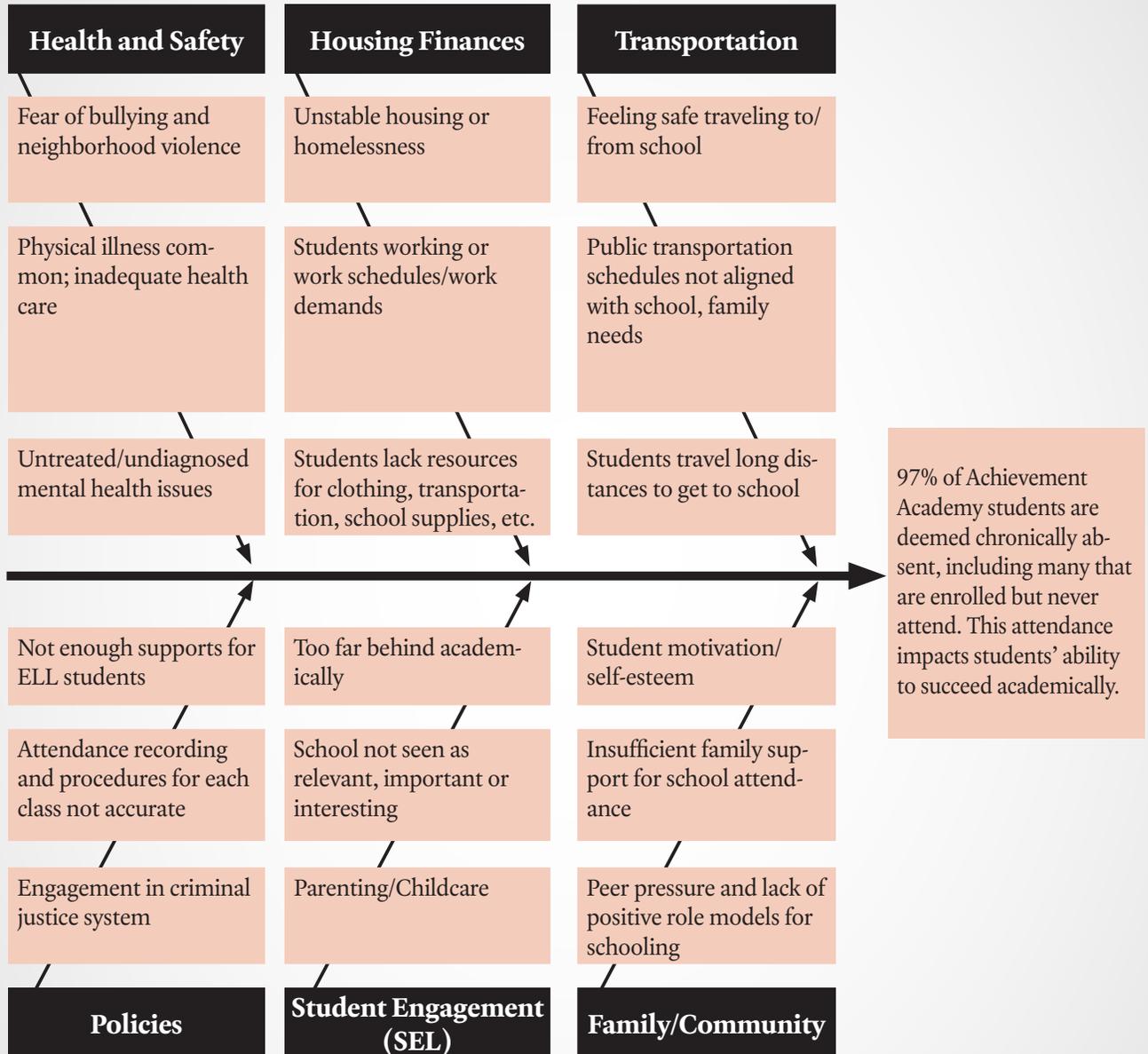
There was consensus among the group that Achievement Academy has had a relatively stable and very committed staff. Students have made progress when the staff and school can keep them engaged and regularly attending. Issues around student placement, boundaries, and policies related to school selection were some of the systemic challenges identified by the group. These systemic challenges were not a part of the RCA because the stakeholders focused mainly on those causes most in their direct control and influence.

Casual Factors

The "Fishbone" diagram represents the stakeholder group's initial assessment of all of the individual factors contributing to the existence or recurrence of the problem statement.

IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Achievement Academy Fishbone: Exploring Causes



IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Prioritized Root Causes

Following several group exercises, the stakeholder group came to consensus on the priority root causes. These are the causes most critical to addressing the problem based on the criteria of importance, feasibility, and alignment.

Final Output. Prioritized Root Causes:	Ranking
Lack of supports for social emotional learning.	1
Low expectations for students throughout the community.	2
Lack of focus on employability training to prepare graduates.	3

Evidence Base for Prioritized Root Causes

The What Works Clearinghouse identifies numerous evidence-based studies that demonstrate that improved student coping skills can positively impact academic outcomes (What Works Clearinghouse, 2011; What Works Clearinghouse, 2006). The research shows that curriculum has been designed to be infused into other academic subject areas and give

students opportunities to role play the application of positive behaviors and coping skills. Practices such as school-wide positive behavior and interventions support help to develop coping and engagement skills needed in the school setting (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015).

Research regarding employment training is outlined in the Recommendations section below.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Brainstormed Ideas for Improvement Planning from Stakeholders

At the conclusion of day two, the stakeholders had a brief opportunity to brainstorm ideas and strategies that might help to address the root causes identified. This brainstorming activity asked participants to list any good ideas they have. These ideas were not prioritized or identified as formal recommendations to the school.

Summary of recommended areas for improvement and change brainstormed by stakeholders.

- Employ a robust Social Emotional Learning (SEL) component to support the academic program.
 - Invite speakers to advisory to support students
 - Recollection and immersion programs once a month
 - Schedule advisory as A/B day: Monday-Wednesday-Friday/Tuesday-Thursday
 - Implement SEL curriculum (ex. School-Connect)
 - Yoga and stretches before school and after lunch-mindfulness meditations
 - Journals and diary circles
- Check in/check out
- Mentoring
- Project-based learning
- Student groups on different topics
 - Grief and loss
- Self-care
- Resilience-persistence
- Advisory
- Building on internship opportunities
- Goal-setting conferences with students
- De-escalation training for staff
- Each student to have a teacher mentor to provide support
- Stage scenarios for students on coping
 - Offer coping sessions for students
 - How to handle stress (anxiety)
- Coping skills development
 - Teacher mentors during advisory
 - Stress management
 - School place supports
 - More training around advisory and planning; trauma-informed work
 - More use of peace room
 - Five core competencies training
 - Youth ownership and leadership opportunities to develop and demonstrate coping skills
- Looking at ABC of education:
 - Academics
 - Behavioral
 - Clinical
- Mindfulness
- Drama classes
- Spoken word
- Outlets for stress
- Writing
- Safe space

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recommendations for Evidence-Based Improvement

Final recommendations for this report have been developed by the University of Maryland College Park in consultation with RCA facilitators and leaders at MSDE. Recommendations were developed using the following process:

- Reviewing the ideas, notes, and stakeholder perspectives gathered throughout the Root Cause Analysis process;
- Conducting a scan of the research literature related to the problem statement and prioritized root causes identified throughout the process. While a comprehensive research analysis was outside the scope of this project, the team reviewed research using the stand-

ards of evidence model outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to offer research that had moderate or strong evidence of effectiveness (Level 2 or Level 1 on the ESSA framework);

- Compiling, organizing and categorizing over 150 recommendations submitted by RCA facilitators.

These recommendations are offered by the University of Maryland College Park in consultation with MSDE. They represent only a portion of the potential strategies and interventions that will become a part of the school's three-year improvement plan developed in concert with the MSDE Title I office.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION	Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement ¹
<p>Implement SEL to explicitly teach SEL skills focused on self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.</p> <p>Employ a robust SEL program that is inclusive of all school-based staff, including but not limited to, administrators, teachers, school social workers, guidance counselors, and para-professionals. Effective school-based, SEL programs are comprised of five major components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-awareness 2. Self-management 3. Social awareness 4. Relationship skills 5. Responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2013). <p>These components are more impactful when they are set in an environment in which organizational culture, climate, and conditions all support SEL (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).</p> <p>One goal of SEL programs is to improve the quality of interactions among individuals in schools and within classrooms; therefore, school-level social processes are important to examine when considering an SEL program. Moreover, some evaluation studies find that within low-income urban communities, school climate may be particularly salient (Aber, Jones, Brown, Chaudry, & Samples, 1998; Hughes, Cavell, Meehan, Zhang, & Collie, 2005). Though the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning endorses the use of evidence-based SEL programs in the context of systemic schoolwide and districtwide approaches (Devaney, O'Brien, Resnick, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006), it is necessary that a systemic approach to SEL programming entails integration of SEL across school activities, both in and outside of the classroom, and even reaching into the community.</p>	<p><i>Culture Shift</i></p>

¹The Maryland State Department of Education uses the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd's Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement as a framework for continuous improvement. The framework identifies four areas as central to rapid and significant improvement: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift. The recommendations in this report are aligned to the four domains as a way to organize and frame the improvement efforts. For more information: <https://centeronschoolturnaround.org>.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION	Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement ¹
<p>Develop or expand a mentor program to ensure every student at risk of failure has an adult advocate in the school.</p> <p>Pairing students with an adult mentor or advocate gives at-risk students a positive role model in the school who can provide progress checks against key academic benchmark and graduation requirements, as well as serve as a conduit for referring students to other services as needed. Programs that provide this level of individual monitoring and feedback have been documented to have positive effects on school persistence for low-income urban students (Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). This type of intervention has also been demonstrated to be effective for students with disabilities (Pyle & Wexler, 2012).</p> <p>Built into this recommendation is the need to develop an accessible list of support services that mentors can use as a resource bank with students, as it is not reasonable to expect that mentors are able to combat all student needs. Such mentoring programs should focus on authentic goal setting for students that is related to college and career readiness. In addition, researchers recognize that effective mentoring and advocacy require orientation and training for those who serve in the role as mentors, including teachers and other school staff (Dynarski et al., 2008; Rumberger et al., 2017).</p>	<p><i>Culture Shift</i></p> <p><i>Turnaround Leadership</i></p>

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION	Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement ¹
<p>Expand career-related curricular programming, pathways, and opportunities for students.</p> <p>In an effort to make learning more relevant to students, schools should deliberately align curriculum and program offerings to the worlds of work and academics. Effective strategies include career electives, career academies, or more fully developed career pathways or certificate programs (Dynarski et al., 2008; Rumberger et al., 2017; Pyle and Wexler, 2012). Many of the research studies in dropout prevention agree that the integration of career and technical education with academic content is a proven strategy to engage students in school (Loera, Nakamoto, Oh, & Rueda, 2013; Plank, Deluca, & Estacion, 2008).</p> <p>We recommend expanding access to high-quality career and technical education programs, such as P-TECH, Apprenticeship Maryland, National Academy Foundation (NAF academies). More robust partnerships with local businesses should be explored from which the school can then develop collaborative learning experiences, career or resume coaching, job shadowing, and internships and mentorships. Additionally, schools can expand their career education offerings to include the integration of project-based learning assessments, exposure to a variety of occupational fields, and guided practice opportunities in developing skills that can be applied in vocational settings.</p>	<p><i>Instructional Transformation</i></p>

APPENDICES

Appendix B: Bios of Facilitators

Christian Anderson, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development at Morgan State University. He is a mathematics educator with over twenty years of K-12 teaching and administrative experience. Prior to his appointment to the faculty at Morgan State, Anderson served as a teacher, mathematics department chairperson, and an administrator at the school-based and central office levels. Anderson's research interests include the following: supervision in urban mathematics classrooms, mathematical concept development in urban classrooms, and beliefs of teachers in urban mathematics classrooms.



Segun Eubanks is the Director of the Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement and Visiting Professor at UMD. Eubanks also served over five years as the Chair of the Board of Education for Prince George's County Public Schools, a 132,000-student school district bordering Washington, DC. In September 2017, Eubanks became a Senior Fellow at the Center for Teaching Quality. Prior to joining UMD, Eubanks worked in various leadership roles at the National Education Association, including Director of Teacher Quality and Director of Professional Educator Support. In these roles, Eubanks led major policy initiatives and programs such as the Teacher Leadership Initiative, Teacher Residency Taskforce, National Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, and the Committee on Professional Standards and Practice. Eubanks is a staunch advocate for public education and an expert in teacher quality, teacher diversity, and teacher professionalism. He has served in various leadership roles with national nonprofit education organizations, including Executive Director of the Community Teachers Institute and Vice President of Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. Eubanks earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Educational Advocacy from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a Master of Science degree in Human Services Administration from Springfield College, and a Doctorate of Education in Teaching and Learning Policy from UMD.



APPENDICES

Appendix C: Citations of research

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Harris, D. M., & Kiyama, J. M. (2015). The role of school and community-based programs in aiding Latina/o high school persistence. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(2), 182-206.

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Rumberger, R., Addis, H., Allensworth, E., Balfanz, R., Bruch, J., Dillon, E., Duardo, D., Dynarski, M., Furgeson, J., Jayanthi, M., Newman-Gonchar, R., Place, K., & Tuttle, C. (2017). *Preventing dropout in secondary schools*. NCEE 2017-4028. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance NCEE, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education.

APPENDICES

