
Measuring Reading

Strategic Focus Group Report

How do we *effectively*
measure reading?

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.

May 22, 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



Contents

Methodology	p. 3
Inquiry	p. 4
Ideas	p. 9
Recommendations	p. 11
Action Items	p. 15
Acknowledgements	p. 16

Methodology

The Superintendent of Schools proffered a question to elevate our evaluation of reading at HCPS: *“How do we effectively measure reading?”*

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. A variety of education professionals comprised three groups to work through the question together, blend perspectives, find innovative ideas, and make recommendations for how HCPS can effectively measure reading.

Groups

Area of Expertise

	Accountability	Teachers	Principal
	North Star & School Performance	Special Education	Reading Specialist
	Harford Community College	Accountability	Reading Specialists
	Curriculum	Special Education	ESOL Specialist
	Accountability	Teacher	Curriculum
	Special Education	Reading Specialist	Program Evaluation
		Principal	

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 methods and values for measuring reading.

Themes

Motivation/ attitude towards Reading	Cultural relevance	College & Career	Logistical considerations; procedures & rules
Parents and family	Assessment philosophy vs. tool	Data collection methods	Professional learning
Authentic learning	Student lifelong and future needs	Interventions	Narrowing the gap
Communication	Leading by example	Correlating skills	Data driven instruction

Participant Questions

After dissecting the question, each group identified critical data needed to inform their decision-making. Five substantive questions emerged:

1. *How many hours are we allotted to test students per grade level?*
2. *What assessments do we currently use?*
3. *What measures of success are we currently using?*
4. *What is the catalyst for the question, "How do we effectively measure reading?"*
5. *What are our legal parameters?*

Question 1: *How many hours are we allotted to test students per grade level?*



The State allows for 2.2% of total minutes of district assessment in a school year (1426 minutes) in elementary, and 2.3% (1490 minutes) in middle and high schools.

If we exceed this time allotment, we must negotiate with HCEA, our teacher's union.

Teacher quizzes, unit tests, and personal choice in class assessments are not included in the minute calculation.

The [22-23 school year assessment](#) calendar is available on hcps.org.



Question 2: *What assessments do we currently use?* In addition to State testing, assessments include:

Grade Level(s)	Assessment	Type (diagnostic, formative, summative)	Frequency of Administration	Purpose
K-3	DIBELS benchmark assessments, 8 th edition	Diagnostic	3 times per year for benchmark	Universal screener to determine fluency measures
K-3	DIBELS progress monitoring assessments, 8 th edition	Diagnostic, administered to students who score at risk on the DIBELS benchmark assessments	Every 30 days	Progress monitoring to determine student growth on the various subtests of early literacy skills
K-5	Fountas and Pinnell	Diagnostic	Optional assessment for students, based upon need	To identify a student's reading level and progress along a gradient of text levels over time.
2-8	Reading Inventory	Growth	3 times per year	To determine a student's independent reading level

Question 3: What measures of success are we currently using?

Measure	Rationale	Grade Level(s)
Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)	Readiness tool to measure each student's readiness across multiple domains, including mathematics.	Kindergarten
DIBELS, 8 th edition (benchmarks and progress monitoring)	Universal screener and progress monitoring components to identify early literacy skills	Grades K-3
Fountas and Pinnell	Identify a student's reading level and progress along a gradient of text levels over time	Grades K-5
Early Warning Indicators provided in Performance Matters (the HCPS instructional and assessment system)	Monitor mobility, attendance, and student discipline referrals	Grades Pre-K-12
Grade 9 on-track early warning indicators	Criteria for adequate progress towards graduation and allows for early intervention and supports to be in place for student success.	Grade 9



Question 4: What is the catalyst for the question, “How do we effectively measure reading?”

Literacy is a core attribute and value at HCPS:

- **Board of Education Strategic Plan: [Goal 1](#):** Prepare every student for success in postsecondary education and career
- **Blueprint for Maryland’s Future: [Pillar 3, Objective 1 \(English Language Arts\)](#):** Students shall have equitable opportunities to become college and career ready (CCR) and shall meet the CCR standard at an equal rate
- **HCPS [North Star](#) Initiative Learner Attributes:** *Readers, writers, problem-solvers, healthy, employable.*

Question 5: What are our legal parameters?

From the Maryland State Department of Education website March 1, 2023:

The MCAP English Language Arts and Literacy assessments focus on the content outlined in the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards for each grade level.

Grades K-2

The MCAP K-2 English Language Arts and Literacy diagnostic assessments will be made available for administration in the fall of grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3 on content from the previous year of instruction. As an additional part of the MCAP K-2 assessment system, the [Kindergarten Readiness Assessment](#) (KRA) is administered at the beginning of kindergarten.

Grades 3-8, and 10

For students in grades 3 through 8, the assessments are administered toward the end of the school year. Assessments in grade 10 are administered after a student has completed most of the required course.

Content Standards: [Maryland College and Career Ready Standards](#)

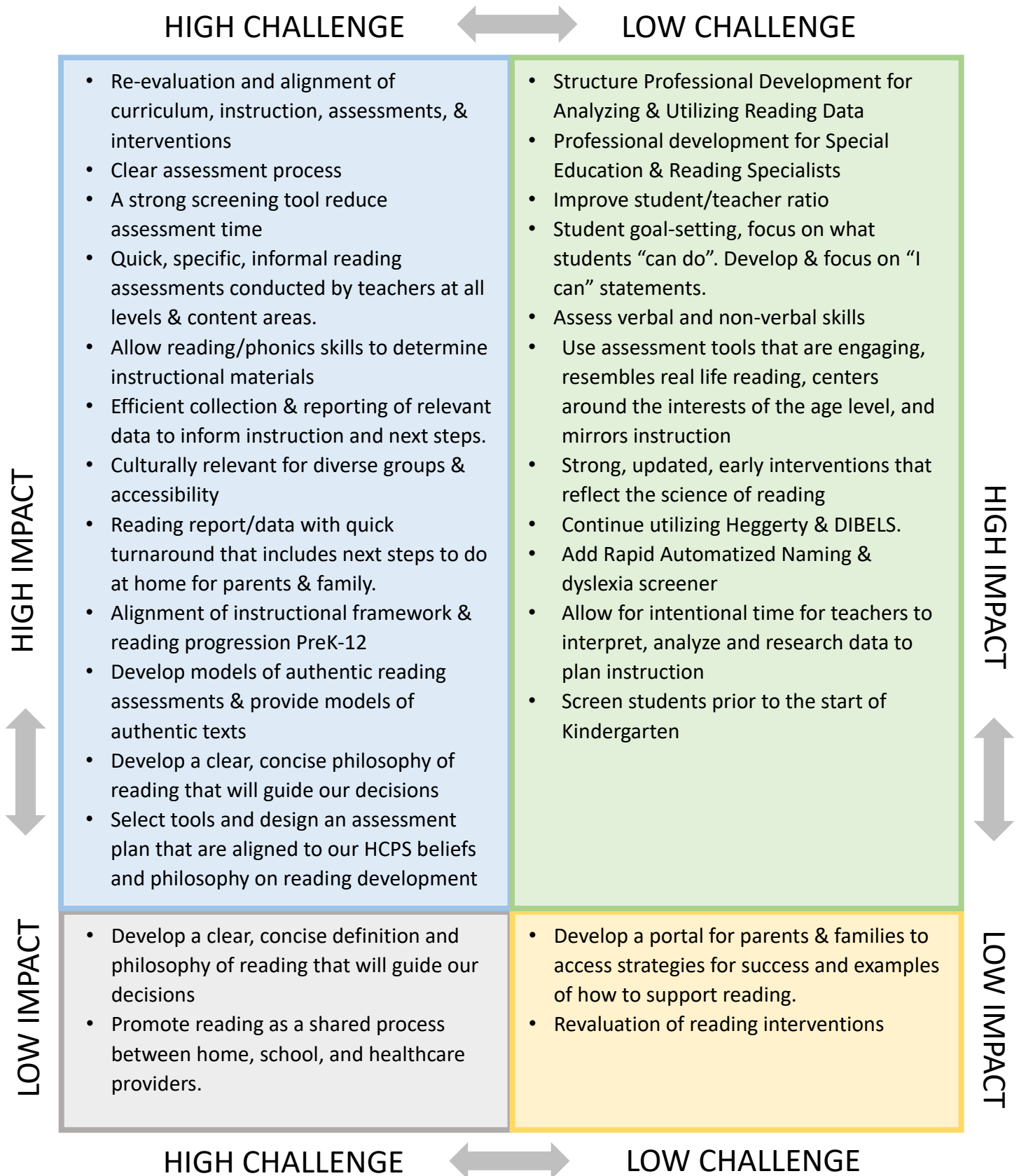


Ideas

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. Groups placed their ideas on an impact-challenge chart to visualize what ideas may be the most viable or impactful.

Impact - Challenge

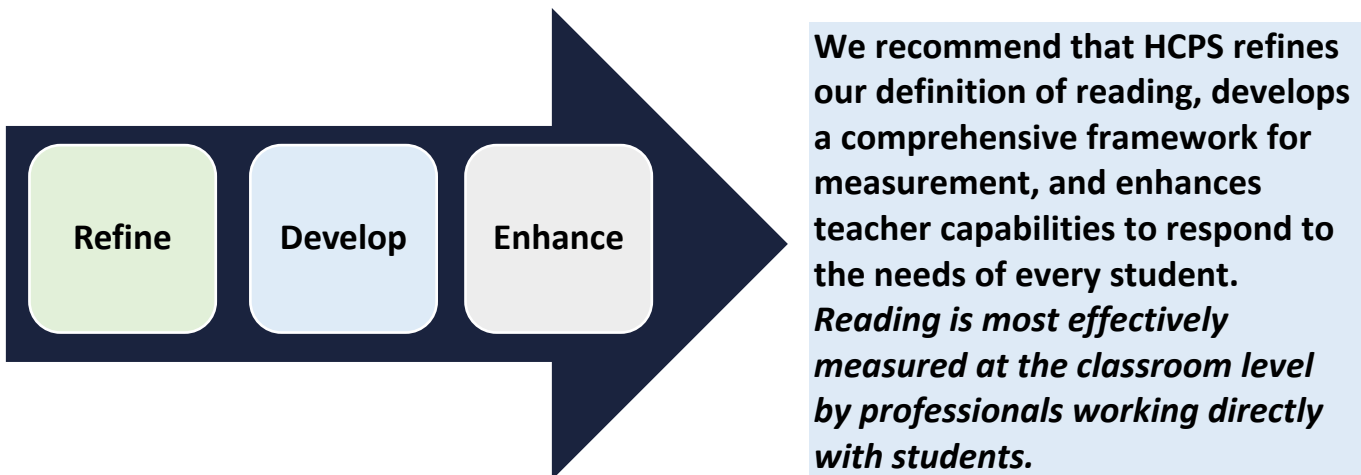


Recommendations

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 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment included.

Group 1

RECOMMENDATION



REFINE READING

- Beliefs
- Expectations
- Teacher

DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK

- Reading Development Continuum Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 12+
- Standards Alignment with Tiered Instructional Supports
- Specific and Measurable Success Mastery all Grades and Contents
- Multiple Measures including Curriculum-Embedded Formative Assessments
- Monitoring Tools for Daily Instructional Use

ENHANCE TEACHER CAPACITY

- Prioritize Time for Data Analysis and Instructional Planning
- Transition Professional Development from Program-driven to Literacy Skills and Processes
- Implement Systematic Phonics Progression

Group 2

RECOMMENDATION

Reading can be effectively measured when there is an alignment between standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

GRADE LEVEL READING STANDARDS

Ensure instructors, through ongoing professional learning:

- have a deep understanding of the full intent of the standards
- understand what students need to know and do to achieve the work of the standard

READING CURRICULUM

Ensure that curriculum:

- aligns and fully addresses the grade-level English Language Arts/Literacy Standards
- includes a process that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate a deep understanding of the standards
- possesses a scope and sequence that incorporates engaging materials, lesson seeds, and performance tasks that clearly reflect the standards

DAILY READING INSTRUCTION

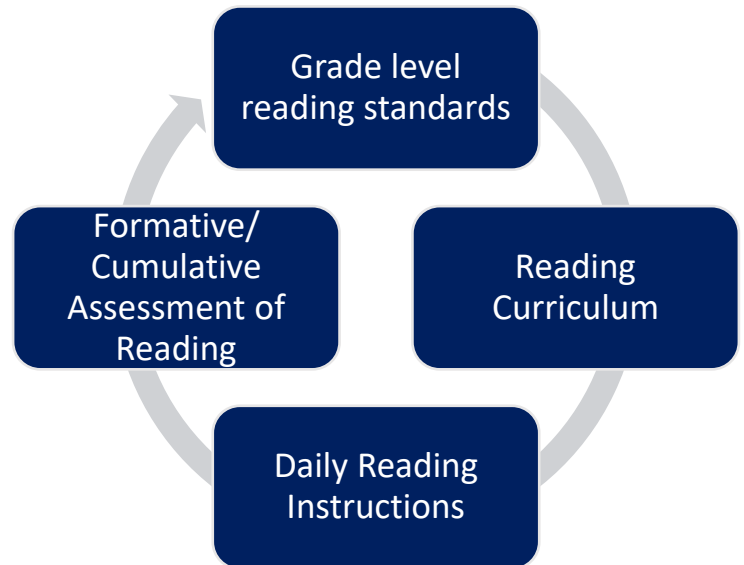
Ensure our teaching:

- reflects a cycle of fidelity to the HCPS approved ELA curriculum
- happens in an effective student-teacher ratio to allow opportunities for greater individualized instruction
- includes instructional planning cycles with a focus on increasing cognitive engagement to meet learners' needs
- uses ongoing student achievement data to help address gaps within small groups and/or interventions

FORMATIVE AND CUMULATIVE ASSESSMENT OF READING

To effectively measure reading, we recommend:

- selecting a reading screening tool that can be administered across grade bands at periodic intervals to monitor student progress
- providing teachers with an actionable road map for using the reading screening data to address standards-based skill gaps and to determine if further diagnostic assessments are needed
- developing a timely communication plan/portal for teachers, parents and students to include goal posts, examples and growth strategies
- including students in a goal setting process rooted in grade-level standards



Group 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, measuring reading effectively requires a comprehensive approach that considers multiple factors and provides ongoing feedback and support to students and teachers. Key takeaways:

- 1) Use a variety of assessment methods
- 2) Incorporate formative assessments
- 3) Ensure assessments are valid and reliable
- 4) Consider cultural and linguistic diversity
- 5) Measure both decoding and comprehension
- 6) Monitor progress over time
- 7) Use data to inform instruction

SHARED PURPOSE

Define and share considerations that strongly impact a successful model that effectively measures reading *and* encompasses the roles of all stakeholders to best prepare students to become life-long readers and learners. We believe the following matters:

- Motivation and Attitude Towards Reading
- Professional Learning
- Data Collection
- Assessment Format
- Cultural Relevance
- College and Career Ready
- Parent/Family Reports

CONSIDERATIONS

- Assessment that mirrors instruction
 - Maintains alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This sends a consistent message to teachers that ALL HCPS employees work together for the success of the student.
 - Gives newer teachers an exemplar so that they can more effectively learn to plan with the end in mind.
 - Re-emphasizes the importance of the standards that we teach.
 - Allows for consistency in the delivery of accommodations to students.
- Accessibility to all students
 - Different skills are encompassed in the big picture of accessibility, so it is important to include representatives from all disciplines when selecting reading assessment materials.
 - Assistive Technology

- Special Education
 - Culturally Responsive/Culturally Neutral Assessment
 - Considers English Language Learners who may have exited ESOL services, but who are still developing English language skills
- Promotes college and career readiness
 - Assessment data can be used for goal setting and/or pathway planning for students in high school looking at post-secondary options.
 - Aligned with the expectations for incoming students in HCC English courses.
 - Greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy as a need for careers that do not require college education.
 - Include more authentic informational texts that students are likely to encounter (tax forms, DMV literature, email correspondence for work, etc.)
 - Timely assessment data
 - Data that can be used by the student, parent/guardian, school, teacher to increase achievement
 - Archived on an in-house system so once teachers learn it, they won't have to relearn a new system if a contract, license, or user support runs out.
 - Data dashboards created and maintained internally for easy access and use



Action Items

1. SHARE GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS WITH:

- a. The Board of Education of Harford County
- b. Instructional Leadership Team
- c. Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- d. Office of Organizational Development
- e. General Curriculum Committee
- f. Blueprint North Star Early Warning Indicator Work Group
- g. Blueprint Career Ladder Work Group

2. FORM AN ASSESSMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE WITH THE GOAL OF REPLACING READING INVENTORY.

3. BUILD TEACHER CAPACITY THROUGH:

- a. systemic prioritization of professional development for literacy skills aligned to state standards, science of reading, and assessment recommendations within this report.
- b. an actionable roadmap for using standards-based reading screening data to address standards-based skills gaps.
- c. elevating the value of literacy expertise through compensation, incentives, and/or recognition. Literacy certifications or credentials that meet a level of expertise or mastery should be identified by the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, such as Orton-Gillingham Practitioner Certification or Lexia LETRS.

4. INVEST IN:

- a. developing assessment milestones in a continuum Pre-K through 12th grade. Tie measures into future expansion of the HCPS “Early Warning Indicators” for elementary school.
- b. literacy specialist positions in schools.

Special Thanks

Focus Group Contributors

Alex Pfeifer, Reading Specialist, Roye-Williams Elementary School

Ann Marie Steltzer, Assistant Supervisor of English & Language Arts

Ashley Bowley, Administrative Assistant, Department of Strategic Initiatives

Beth Thatcher, Teacher Specialist, Special Education

Christina Carpenter, Teacher Specialist, Special Education

Dr. Kim Davis, Dean of Arts and Humanities of Arts & Humanities, Harford Community College

Emmy Tsomos, English Teacher, Aberdeen High School

Gina Re, Instructional Data Specialist

Helen Miller, Principal, Southampton Middle School

Jaime Bancells, Reading Specialist, Forest Lakes Elementary School

Juraj Duracka, Teacher Specialist, English Language Learners

Justin Harbin, English Teacher, Harford Technical High School

Karen Jankowiak, Principal, Prospect Mill Elementary School

Kim Heeter, Coordinator Special Education - Elementary

Kris Scarry, Supervisor of English & Language Arts

Lauren Hunter, Reading Specialist, Old Post Road Elementary School

Lindsay Greenbaum, Reading Specialist, Jarrettsville Elementary School

Mike James, English Teacher, North Harford High School

Ousmanou Yakoubou, Manager of North Star Research and Program Evaluation

Phil Snyder, Supervisor of Accountability

Ray San Juan, Instructional Data Specialist

Sara Saacks, Coordinator of North Star and School Performance Initiatives



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.