COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS LISTENING TOUR

CURRENT PERCEPTIONS OF BLUEPRINT IMPLEMENTATION

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to thank all participants in this listening tour who shared their valuable perspectives on the current state of college and career readiness in Harford County Public Schools.

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"We need more clear opportunities for kids at earlier grades to dream about their lives with the requisite knowledge and skills to do so. We could have a reimagined high school campus with different partners coming in and out, more non-credit classes that are on par with credit bearing options. More flexibility and better transportation. This is about building your life and community, not working on a treadmill. More joy and excitement."

-Central Office staff

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is a decade-long investment in public education initiated by the Maryland General Assembly in 2021. The intent behind this legislation was "to transform public education in the state into a world-class education system, to enrich student experiences and accelerate student outcomes, and to improve the quality of education for all children in Maryland, especially those who have been historically underserved" (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024a). The structure of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint) includes five pillars, each of which serve as an implementation construct through which educational systems will be transformed. While all five pillars interact cross-functionally to improve educational outcomes for students, for the purpose of this report, the scope of observations were limited to topics associated with Pillar 3: College and Career Readiness. Pillar 3 of the Blueprint standardized expectations for College and Career Readiness (CCR), although these have thus far proven mutable throughout early implementation.

There are five total implementation components of Pillar 3 and two primary components related to the scope of this report: first, helping students meet the standard for CCR eligibility, and second, expanding opportunities for students to benefit from CCR status. At the time of this report, there are two options for students to attain CCR eligibility (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024b):
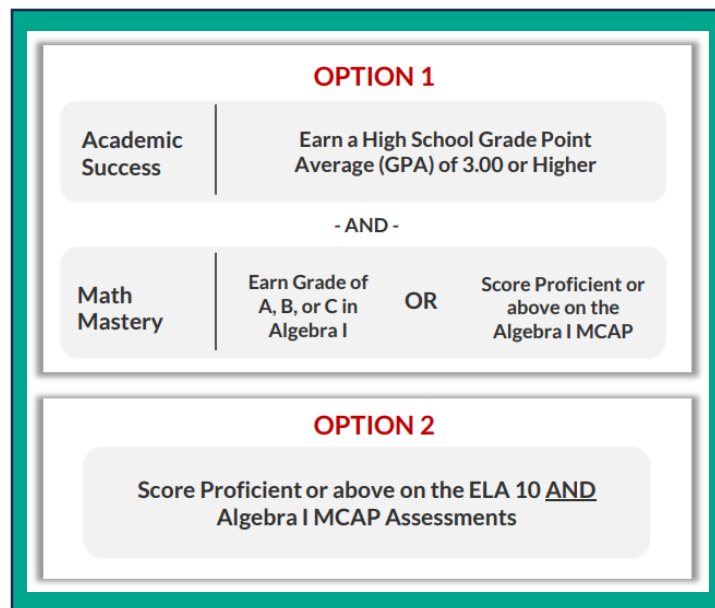
CCR eligibility empowers the Local Education Agency (LEA) to receive state funding to cover the costs of student access to post-CCR pathways such as dual enrollment and apprenticeship opportunities. It is important to note that CCR eligibility is not currently a graduation requirement and students cannot be denied matriculation because of ineligible CCR status. Students who are ineligible to access post-CCR pathways have not met the criteria above; however, the cause of ineligibility is murky and best investigated on a student-by-student basis. One student may be ineligible due to significant knowledge discrepancies, while another may be ineligible

because of assessment apathy. The Student Support Pathway is a meaningful component of Pillar 3 Blueprint implementation that aims to address gaps in CCR eligibility.

Students who attain CCR status are eligible to access available post-CCR pathways. These pathways might include college preparatory programs such as IB Diploma Programme, Cambridge AICE Diploma Program, and Advanced Placement Program. Dual enrollment programs, middle and early college high school programs, and CTE programs with opportunities for apprenticeships and other industry-recognized credentials are also viable post-CCR pathways. LEAs are charged with ensuring that every student has access to post-CCR pathways; however, the breadth of these offerings are local decisions, typically constrained in various ways by resource scarcity.

For background purposes, it is important to note that Dr. Sean Bulson, superintendent of Harford County Public Schools (HCPS), initiated the district's HCPS North Star initiative in 2019, prior to the enactment of Blueprint legislation. Through the North Star initiative, the school system commanded a bold vision for the community: that every student will graduate ready for success in college, career, and life. The North Star initiative laid the groundwork for raising expectations about student achievement and broadening opportunities for college and career readiness months before these priorities were codified by the state legislature. The HCPS North Star and Pillar 3 of the Blueprint share a tight alignment among their goals for student success.

OVERVIEW

Maryland's Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) is the state agency charged with the oversight of the implementation of the Blueprint and provides support and technical assistance to those agencies responsible for implementation, including LEAs. AIB created a grant to provide intentional support and funding to assist school districts in the complex, transformative work required to meet the Blueprint's objectives. Each LEA was afforded the opportunity to work with a qualified Strategic Facilitator to develop a project plan to support the execution of ambitious, strategic, systems change as articulated in their respective Blueprint implementation plans. Strategic Facilitators are charged with working with their LEA(s) to build shared visions and plans for success, support ongoing implementation, and drive difficult and impactful conversations around challenges and opportunities as they arise to ensure the ultimate goal of improved education for all students is achieved (Accountability & Implementation Board, 2023a). As part of the technical assistance grant, AIB evaluated potential Strategic Facilitators' experience and qualifications through both an application and an interview process to qualify expertise. Dr. Laurie Baker engaged with HCPS in December 2023 as the Strategic Facilitator.

Given HCPS's earlier adoption of the North Star initiative, many of the foundational components of Blueprint implementation were well underway prior to Maryland's legislative mandate for systemic change. The Strategic Facilitator and Director of Strategic Initiatives, Ms. Katie Ridgway, agreed to the benefit of conducting a listening tour to gauge current perceptions of Pillar 3 implementation with school and central office staff, as well as key partners outside of the school community who are essential to this work. The purpose of this listening tour was to assess the current state of the district regarding multiple Pillar 3 initiatives, including efforts toward CCR eligibility and post-CCR pathways. Following the listening tour, findings and their respective potential actions led to implementation prioritization for the 2024-2025 school year.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the listening tour were to:

- Appraise how HCPS nurtures students at varying levels of CCR eligibility,
- Audit current support structures and embedded instructional assistance,
- Identify existing opportunities for students to engage in real world experiences and career counseling supports, and,
- Note channels of stakeholder engagement.

This report represents the output from the listening tour, and includes themes, key findings, and future considerations for amplifying or expediting the promise of Blueprint Pillar 3 and HCPS's North Star initiative.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the listening tour was developed to harvest salient feedback from various stakeholders while concurrently building rapport for future technical assistance efforts. Thirty-three individuals were interviewed, selected by the Director of Strategic Initiatives. These interviews took place between January 11, 2024, and March 29, 2024; 30 were conducted in-person and three were conducted virtually. All principal interviews were conducted at the school sites.

Participants were assured that no individually identifiable information would be shared from these interviews. For this reason, in the following section the reader will note quotes are attributed to central office staff, principals, or community members. The category "community members" refers to any contributing individual who was not a member of central office staff or a principal; these individuals included students, teachers, union representatives, and leaders from other partner organizations.

Because these conversations held the dual purpose of rapport-building, interview protocols were not strictly followed. The Strategic Facilitator diverged from the protocols when a participant had less experience or deeper knowledge of certain sub-topics. Often, participants provided responses to questions that were forthcoming in the protocol. Most interviews lasted one hour, and many participants noted that the conversation felt therapeutic. Interview protocols are available in the Appendix, and each analysis section then follows includes a list of the protocol questions that lead to the thematic responses curated in this report. For example, the question, "Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?" led to far-reaching topics regarding successful Blueprint implementation.

Data were collected via live transcription from the Strategic Facilitator in a matrix with each protocol question and the respective participants' names and roles for future coding. These data were then systematically analyzed and categorized based on recurring themes or patterns. This process involved reviewing the data through three filters: first, data were grouped into large concepts such as "resources" and "partnerships." Second, data within these large concepts were placed into affinity groups such as "decision-making" and "state guidance" within the resource category. Third, the data were divided by stakeholder group to ascertain additional response patterns.

Once data were coded, further analysis and interpretation was applied to identify key findings. Key findings were highlighted when a topic had many similar responses or when the Strategic Facilitator noted a common, potential derailer to implementation goals. The section that follows includes an analysis of participant responses by theme and all associated quotes by theme.

KEY FINDINGS

As described in the methodology section of this report, key findings emerged when a topic had many similar responses or when the Strategic Facilitator noted a common, potential derailer to Blueprint implementation goals. The stakeholder analysis portion of this report includes key findings presented in narrative format with representative quotes. Key findings by themes (darker blue) and sub-themes (lighter blue) are offered concisely in the matrix below.

Themes & Sub-Themes	Key Findings
HCPS North Star & Blueprint Pillar 3 Alignment	• The HCPS North Star initiative is well-aligned to Pillar 3 of the Blueprint. • North Star provided HCPS and its partners with a head start in obtaining the goals of the Blueprint.
District Support & Resources	• The district has intentionally restructured personnel, partnerships, and culture to reimaging opportunities for students. • Although scarcity of resources was acknowledged, so too was HCPS's commitment to getting school leaders what they need.
Unified Decision-Making & Communications	• There is perceived ambiguity around who is in-charge that is inhibiting implementation progress. • Communication between the schools and the central office is perceived as disorganized.
Financial Sustainability	• Staff in grant-funded positions are concerned about the sustainability of their jobs. • Current funding levels do not adequately meet the needs for full, successful, equitable implementation.
Outsourcing Student Opportunities	• There is a half-day departure of upperclassmen that is perceived as negatively impacting school culture. • Student instruction once provided by HCPS staff is now outsourced to other partners with implications for the number of teaching staff in schools. • Fewer students in the school building have created new limitations on elective and advanced course-taking availability.
State Guidance	• Mid-year changes to state guidance confuse stakeholders and create unnecessary effort on the part of both students and educators. • More guidance is needed in terms of best practices, definitions, and Blueprint alignment to graduation requirements.
Progress of College & Career Readiness Efforts	• As expected for the early years of any initiative of this scope, much of the implementation work is in-flight while HCPS and partners work together to improve student outcomes collectively and intentionally.
Dual Enrollment	• HCPS students are successful in dual enrollment course-taking, but barriers to access (CCR eligibility,

	transportation, instructor availability) may mask the overall success of this initiative. • The demand for dual enrollment courses is outstripping the supply of qualified instructors. • Students cannot leverage all opportunities for dual enrollment, AP, and IB concurrently. • Students who are academically qualified for dual enrollment may benefit from additional preparation to succeed.
The Workforce Investment Program	• This program is designed to impact a small number of students who are not CCR eligible. • There is a question around whether this program is to connect students to workforce opportunities that provide a living wage, or if it is a work-study dropout prevention initiative. • An increase in industry noncredit industry certifications for students is desired.
Apprenticeship Programs	• The apprenticeship program is universally valued, with exponential growth since its inception. • There are concerns about scalability and where the ceiling for business partnerships might emerge. • The support staff associated with the apprenticeship programs are well qualified and making observable connections between students and businesses. • Department of Labor areas connect student interests to viable employment sectors, which may not align with all student interests.
Career Coaching	• Career coaching is a new innovation in the early stages of implementation. • Career coaching will fill an important gap in the K-12 work based learning continuum by providing exploration activities for middle grade students. • HCPS staff prepared lesson plans, materials, and facilitated career lessons for students through February as SWN was staffing up to provide these services. • Naviance is a valued tool for career exploration.
Student Support Pathway	• The pace of support pathway implementation was perceived as positioning central office staff against school staff, where the former hoped to reduce the burden on principals and the latter hoped for more influence over remediation options. • The disconnect between graduation requirements and CCR eligibility has implied to students, staff, and families that MCAP results don't matter. • Many students may have been unsuccessful on the MCAP because they didn't try on the test – for these students, remediation is viewed as a waste of effort.

	• There is a desire to increase school-based options to meet the diverse needs of students. • FEV Tutor has mixed reviews from school leaders; the district is studying its impact.
Meeting Students' Needs Equitably	• Deficit-based language surrounding schools ("the 40 corridor schools") and students ("the 40%") is inconducive to collective efficacy. • English language learners and students with disabilities struggle to access all Pillar 3 initiatives, including the Student Support Pathway. • Access to trades education is very limited and many students who share interests in those fields are turned away due to a misalignment of available seats vs demand. • Transportation inhibits equitable access to Pillar 3 opportunities. • Inconsistent access to dual enrollment experiences (e.g., personally designed AA programs for some in the comprehensive high schools, in-person instruction vs. asynchronous virtual instruction) exacerbates equity challenges. • School counselors may not be positioned to simultaneously manage dual enrollment responsibilities with crisis response responsibilities in schools with large opportunity gaps among students.
Overall Progress	• The vision for Pillar 3 and the North Star is universally valued. • There is an appreciation for current effort and an optimism that implementation will be a positive, yet iterative process.
Visioning for the Future	• Students and families need effective communication to understand the universe of opportunities available to them. • Career-readiness should remain an emphasis, with a focus on expanding the breadth of work-based learning opportunities for more students. • Vertical alignment of K-12 Pillar 3 efforts will improve student experiences. • Additional staffing would accelerate Blueprint outcomes for students, but financial limitations are widely understood.

ANALYSIS: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

HCPS NORTH STAR & BLUEPRINT PILLAR 3 ALIGNMENT

> ### Key Findings
> - The HCPS North Star initiative is well-aligned to Pillar 3 of the Blueprint.
> - North Star provided HCPS and its partners with a head start in obtaining the goals of the Blueprint.

Participants were asked to describe the relationship between the HCPS North Star initiative and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future as it pertains to College and Career Readiness.

> To what extent does the Blueprint for Maryland's Future align with the overarching goals of HCPS's North Star initiative?

All participants described tight alignment among the goals of both endeavors, and many spoke with pride about HCPS's leadership in College and Career Readiness. There was a general sense among participants that HCPS's North Star established a more coherent and comprehensive vision for HCPS students than did the Blueprint for Maryland's Future; however, the Blueprint infused a greater sense of accountability and urgency for implementation. Concerns raised about the clarity of the Blueprint are discussed in the "Support and Resources" section of this analysis.

Some participants described the Blueprint as an expansion of HCPS's North Star initiative, noting that much of the early efforts to expand College and Career Readiness were focused at the high school level. The Blueprint incentivized deeper college and career preparation and exploration in the earlier grades. One principal noted that the introduction of the Blueprint required minor changes to the vocabulary used to describe student experiences; this was undertaken to minimize confusion and bring continuity to the efforts. HCPS's North Star initiative and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future share a parallel vision for College and Career Readiness and have interdependent goals for student success. The HCPS Blueprint Committee for this Pillar is entitled, "Blueprint North Star," to represent the continuity of these initiatives.

Relevant Quotes: Alignment of North Star and Blueprint Pillar 3	
"HCPS was ahead of the curve because of what we were already implementing. The Blueprint allowed us to accelerate with deadlines."	-Central Office staff
"Together these initiatives give us the flexibility to create systems that have an impact across buildings, not just a building. This is a system level approach that is bringing alignment to how we support students and conduct business."	-Central Office staff
"The North Star at the front really helped. Everyone knows the focus. We all know the goals and the target. The train is moving fast, you've got to jump on."	-Principal
"Once the Blueprint came, you could see we already had the ball rolling. In terms of the accountability piece, Blueprint gave us a greater sense of urgency. Now students and parents understand their options more. We have been really purposeful in drawing connections between school goals and classroom goals."	-Principal

DISTRICT SUPPORT & RESOURCES

> **Key Findings**
> - The district has intentionally restructured personnel, partnerships, and culture to reimaging opportunities for students.
> - Although scarcity of resources was acknowledged, so too was HCPS's commitment to getting school leaders what they need.

Participants were asked to describe how the district currently supports schools in implementing College and Career Readiness initiatives. They were also asked to describe any missing supports or resources that could further enable North Star/Pillar 3 goal attainment.

To gauge participants' perspectives on the relationship between Pillar 3 of the Blueprint and HCPS's North Star initiative, the following interview protocol questions were employed:

- How would you describe how Pillar 3 of the Blueprint fits within the HCPS North Star initiative?
- What has been your role in implementing the Blueprint?
- How has the district supported schools regarding these initiatives?
- Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

> How has the district supported schools in implementing the Blueprint initiatives?

The urgency toward implementation established by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future appears to have created strains on district capacity; however, participants were consistent in acknowledging HCPS's efforts to support schools by engaging in new partnerships, restructuring staff responsibilities, building the infrastructure for data-driven decision-making, and making progress transparent. Blueprint implementation was very much regarded as a work in progress, with participants broadly noting that the district is operating from a position of continuous improvement. Several participants explained that one of the more impactful roles the district has played has been to reframe culture by firmly centering student outcomes in the work, rather than adhering to minimal compliance activities.

Relevant Quotes: District Support for School-Based Implementation	
"Support from the district has been very strong. They have developed tools for the approval process and dashboards that help with communication as students apply for new opportunities. HCPS has put the infrastructure in place to support this initiative."	-Principal
"We have a lot of support, lots of people giving us resources – lots of people working together here to provide our kids with what they need. Flexibility is allowed."	-Principal
"Changing the beliefs and values in this process is more important than the template. We are moving away from this being a compliance activity. School leaders have had a lot of input on the process. Things are now moving in a streamlined pattern."	-Central Office staff
"We are working hard to build a culture of camaraderie and trust by breaking down content area silos. The more we work together, the more collaborative we are. Dr. Bulson made it clear he wanted us to work on culture and climate. Regardless of the challenge, we've figured something out."	-Central Office staff

> ☀ Are there any gaps in resources or supports that hinder effective implementation of the Blueprint?

Participants were asked a series of questions to determine where areas for enhancement to resources and support systems might reside. The questions from the interview protocols associated with this line of inquiry were:

- What district supports or resources are missing?
- What challenges or barriers have you faced?
- What changes would you like to see systematically regarding attaining North Star goals and the Blueprint implementation?
- What are changes you would like to see at your school regarding the North Star goals and Blueprint implementation?
- Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

Participants described several gaps in resources and supports. These discrepancies fall into four themes: challenges with unified decision-making, concerns around the sustainability of grant-funded resources, a negative feedback loop tied to outsourcing student opportunities, and frustrations around changing information from the state. Each theme is explored more thoroughly in the sections that follow.

Unified Decision-Making & Communication

Key Findings
- There is perceived ambiguity around who is in-charge that is inhibiting implementation progress.
- Communication between the schools and the central office is perceived as disorganized.

While participants felt the intent of current resources and support structures was laudable, they did commonly reference concerns around the alignment of efforts. For example, several participants noted the positive infusion of new roles to support College and Career Readiness activities, but added the caveat that there isn't one clear voice when it comes to decision-making. Participants perceived external communication with families about College and Career Readiness options as improved, but many raised concerns about internal communications.

Several participants cited concerns about the pragmatism or general understanding from their counterparts. Some principals felt that Central Office staff were making decisions related to the student support pathway without the perspective of building-level experience, which was deemed essential; some Central Office staff felt principals could be unyielding with implementation strategies designed to comply with state requirements, which were also essential. On both sides, participants often conceded that the other party was acting in good faith (e.g., "they are trying to make things easier for us," or "they are doing what they think is best for their students").

Relevant Quotes: Unified Decision-Making & Communication	
"There are so many offices and pieces that overlap in this work. How can we work better together, but have clear lines of ownership? We need suggestions for better system-wide collaboration."	-Central Office staff
"We don't have a systemic communication protocol – information comes through in a way that is very disjointed. People need predictability around how information comes out. What are the priorities? The Blueprint is huge. What are the top 3 priorities? If we could know that systematically, that could help us with implementation."	-Central Office staff
"The phrase 'we want to keep one more thing off the principals' plates' is admirable, but we need to be informed. No one is making sure the executive directors are playing nice in the sand and moving in the same direction. When we express concerns, we hear 'I feel the same way you do, and I shared that' – this shouldn't be the constant answer to our concerns."	-Principal
"No one is arranging right now and it's impacting all of us. Everyone in Central Office likes to be in charge. It's a system of schools, not a school system. Tell us what to do. We don't have the energy or time. Principals need to be aware of everything, even when they aren't in charge."	-Principal

Financial Sustainability

> **Key Findings**
> - Staff in grant-funded positions are concerned about the sustainability of their jobs.
> - Current funding levels do not adequately meet the needs for full, successful, equitable implementation.

Resource sustainability, including the continuation of positions, learning platforms, transportation, and other essential components was cited as a concern by many. Two commonly expressed concerns were about the sustainability of grant-funded positions and the waning availability of school-based staff to carry out a comprehensive academic program. There is concern that the aspirations of Pillar 3 will outpace the resources to implement it fully and equitably.

Relevant Quotes: Concerns Regarding Sustainability	
"We will need funding. This grant runs out in 2024 and pays for coordinators, FEV tutor, and so on."	-Central Office Staff
"We are going to run out of money, and nobody wants this to go away."	-Central Office Staff
"The funding gap is a concern. We must have people in schools to keep the work going."	-Central Office Staff
"We are short four positions we could really use back. We can't take any more hits, or we won't be able to provide a high-quality customer experience."	-Principal
"What is our plan for sustainability?"	-Principal

Outsourcing Student Opportunities

> **Key Findings**
> - There is a half-day departure of upperclassmen that is perceived as negatively impacting school culture.
> - Student instruction once provided by HCPS staff is now outsourced to other partners with implications for the number of teaching staff in schools.
> - Fewer students in the school building have created new limitations on elective and advanced course-taking availability.

Two themes emerged from interviews with school leaders and some central office staff: one, that when large numbers of academically successful students leave the building at mid-morning, it diminishes on-site student leadership as a positive contributor to school culture, and two, that fewer numbers of on-campus students impact the availability of funding for instructional staff. Enhancements to College and Career Readiness opportunities have brought new systems that incentivize upperclassmen to leave the school building for dual enrollment or work-based learning activities. Among the principals, there is an abiding concern that this strategy is decreasing the availability of elective courses and negatively changing the culture. When large numbers of upperclassmen leave campus, it diminishes the number of in-house course sections, which in turn decreases the number of staff needed. When staffing decreases affect schools, leaders protect core courses and those required for graduation – meaning elective courses typically bear the greatest impact. There is a hypothesis that if traditional high schools lose elective offerings, they may become less attractive to students and their families.

Relevant Quotes: Consequences of Outsourcing Student Opportunities	
"They always get us the resources and people they think we need, but we shouldn't have to sacrifice our staffing to make the North Star and dual enrollment work."	-Principal
"It seems like K-12 resources have shifted to early childhood education with high school educational experiences being outsourced to the community college and workforce."	-Principal
"High school has dramatically changed. What we can offer is because of what we can fill. The amount of students leaving at half day has dramatically increased. There is a group of parents upset because of a lack of electives and changes to the traditional high school experience. We've stripped the senior experience away from students. We hear: 'Why is my kid home at 10:30?' and 'Why can't my student take French IV?'"	-Central Office staff
"It's hard to offer AP courses in schools if there aren't enough students on site who want the courses. This is changing the environment of schools – there is a lack of senior presence. It's a good opportunity for students to expand their courseload, but we should provide traditional settings for students who struggle. Adults have a nostalgic view of what high schools should be like, but students are 50/50 on this."	-Community member

State Guidance

Key Findings
- Mid-year changes to state guidance confuse stakeholders and create unnecessary effort on the part of both students and educators.
- More guidance is needed in terms of best practices, definitions, and Blueprint alignment to graduation requirements.

Frustrations with changing information from the state were referenced by all participants. The saying "building the plane while we're flying it," was used by several interviewees, who further explained that from a decision-making and communications perspective, it is difficult to know when to move forward and when to wait for additional state guidance. For example, the district and schools navigated a change to College and Career Readiness requirements in January. The new requirements expanded potential access for students, which was favorable, but it impacted the relevance of forthcoming MCAP performance for some students. School staff is responsible for communicating opportunities and pathways to students and their families – when those opportunities and pathways are in continuous flux, it erodes confidence from the community and creates additional work for school and district leaders.

Relevant Quotes: Changes to or Missing State Guidance	
"We put kids through retesting who didn't even need to retest according to the new standards."	-Central Office staff
"While we were implementing the student support pathway the state was revising standards. The plane is being built in flight. We are in a better position now with a new definition."	-Central Office staff
"The changing Blueprint guidelines are happening so fast it's hard to keep up. We weren't always on the same page because changes were happening. We were getting confused; parents were getting confused. . .the target is moving. Now it looks like attendance is no longer a requirement."	-Principal
"The CCR target is moving mid-year."	-Principal
"The folks [from the state] who have put forth deadlines have done so with the best intentions, but it has been misleading in districts."	-Community member

PROGRESS OF COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS EFFORTS

Key Finding
- As expected for the early years of any initiative of this scope, much of the implementation work is in-flight while HCPS and partners work together to improve student outcomes collectively and intentionally.

There are many initiatives currently underway in HCPS to advance students' college and career readiness, access, and success. As previously described, much of this work is in-fight and the district is committed to a continuous improvement model. This section of the report is divided into two overarching focus questions. First, how do Pillar 3 initiatives currently contribute to students' College and Career Readiness, access, and success? And second, what partnership experiences contribute to or detract from advancing students' College and Career

Readiness, access, and success? Findings for each focus question are segmented by specific initiative (i.e., dual enrollment, the workforce investment program, apprenticeship programs, career coaching, and the student support pathway). The following interview protocol questions supported these findings:

- What initiatives stand out to you as the most valuable? Least valuable?
- Could you describe the impact that the following have had on schools:
    - Dual enrollment?
    - The workforce investment program (at HCC)?
    - Apprenticeship programs?
    - Career coaching?
    - The Student Support Pathway for students not meeting CCR?
    - Other College & Career Readiness programs?
- Could you describe the impact that dual enrollment has had on your school operations and student experience?
    - The workforce investment program (at HCC)?
    - Apprenticeship programs?
    - Career coaching?
    - The Student Support Pathway for students not meeting CCR?
    - Other College & Career Readiness programs?
- How have schools changed with the Blueprint requirements?
- How has your school changed with the Pillar 3 requirements?
- Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

> 💡 How do Pillar 3 initiatives currently contribute to students' College and Career Readiness, access, and success?

Dual Enrollment

Key Findings
- HCPS students are successful in dual enrollment course-taking, but barriers to access (CCR eligibility, transportation, instructor availability) may mask the overall success of this initiative.
- The demand for dual enrollment courses is outstripping the supply of qualified instructors.
- Students cannot leverage all opportunities for dual enrollment, AP, and IB concurrently.
- Students who are academically qualified for dual enrollment may benefit from additional preparation to succeed.

While dual enrollment opportunities are not new to HCPS, their availability has been substantially increased since the inception of the North Star initiative and Pillar 3 Blueprint implementation. This rapid increase has been generally positive for students and their families but is not without challenges. Some students and parents are so enthusiastic about dual enrollment opportunities that they are actively seeking ways to amplify access, sometimes even creating their own associate degree programs within traditional, comprehensive high schools. This practice does create concerns around equitable access, where those students whose parents hold advanced knowledge about college access are the most likely to benefit.

Other concerns about equitable access were centered on transportation, where only students with the ability to drive themselves to the HCC campus could engage in in-person instruction. Some, but not all, schools offer on-site HCC instruction, while others' students must choose between transporting themselves or virtual coursework. This concern is related to cited logistics challenges such as scheduling conflicts, ambiguity around course-taking options, and perceived partnership difficulties.

Several participants noted concerns about students' readiness for college coursework. There appears to be a need for increased support for students participating in dual enrollment, including better preparation, communication, and progress-monitoring. School counselors are currently responsible for facilitating students' success in dual enrollment, and participants expressed concerns about the viability of this strategy, given the many other responsibilities placed upon school counselors. Some schools have been able to devise supplemental supports for dual enrollment through creative scheduling.

Some participants expressed frustration with the enrollment process and data sharing arrangements between HCPS and HCC. Issues such as difficulty in getting students enrolled, lack of timely updates on student progress, and insufficient course offerings have created obstacles to effective collaboration in the past. HCC faces challenges related to staffing and resources, which impact its ability to meet the demand of increased student access. Issues such as staffing shortages, difficulty in offering sufficient courses, and struggles to accommodate the volume of dual enrollment students poses a challenge to both parties. Participants from both HCPS and HCC indicated a desire to work out avenues for HCPS teachers to provide dual enrollment instruction.

Despite these challenges, there are ongoing efforts to improve collaboration and address issues within the partnership. HCPS and HCC staff engage in regular meetings to discuss and resolve issues, adjust scheduling and curriculum to better align, and problem-solve together. In spring 2024, the five current MOUs are being revised into one comprehensive document – this should facilitate more streamlined messaging around expectations and responsibilities. Both partners share a desire for improvement in the partnership. Stakeholders expressed the need for better alignment, increased responsiveness, and improved communication to enhance student access and success. Overall, the relationship between HCPS and HCC is characterized by cooperation through growing pains, with stakeholders actively seeking solutions to address challenges and improve collaboration.

One participant cited the 2023 fall semester dual enrollment success rate as 86% - defined as that proportion of students who completed the class with an A, B, or C grade. This is in line with success rates for early college students and exceeds success rates for traditional community college students. In 2022, the Richmond Federal Reserve conducted a pilot Survey of Community College Outcomes with data from 63 community colleges across Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and North and South Carolina. HCC's data were included in the pilot study; approximately 50% of enrolled college students were successful (Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, 2023; Maryland Association of Community Colleges, 2023). The same study found only 13.8% of Maryland's dually enrolled students were successful. This is promising news as HCPS benchmarks dual enrollment progress.

Progress aside, it was unclear how withdrawals were calculated in the HCPS percentage, or whether the 1,300 students who accessed these courses comprised course-taking from underrepresented populations of students. Some participants speculated that the increase in dual enrollment has simply added more access for students who were already college-bound, rather than providing college access for students who might not otherwise consider that pathway.

At the conclusion of the listening tour, additional data were shared by the Assistant Supervisor of Accountability to describe the change in HCPS's dual enrollment access over the last two school years. One listening tour

participant noted disappointment in the disparities among dual enrollment access among high schools, which prompted further interrogation of the data. Each high school's dual enrollment data for 11th and 12th grade students during the Blueprint implementation period is displayed below:

| | 2023 | | | | | | 2024 | | | | | | | |
| | Grade 11 | | | Grade 12 | | | Grade 11 | | | | Grade 12 | | | |
	Total	DE	%DE	Total	DE	%DE	Total	DE	%DE	%Δ	Total	DE	%DE	%Δ
Aberdeen High School	303	16	5.3%	284	69	24.3%	317	37	11.7%	6.4%	327	122	37.3%	13.0%
Bel Air High School	358	14	3.9%	358	157	43.9%	343	9	2.6%	-1.3%	376	171	45.5%	1.6%
C. Milton Wright High School	312	6	1.9%	292	66	22.6%	320	23	7.2%	5.3%	335	140	41.8%	19.2%
CEO at Swan Creek	14	0	0.0%	11	1	9.1%	36	2	5.6%	5.6%	27	3	11.1%	2.0%
Edgewood High School	238	3	1.3%	318	44	13.8%	305	3	1.0%	-0.3%	265	40	15.1%	1.3%
Fallston High School	253	42	16.6%	253	114	45.1%	253	59	23.3%	6.7%	262	126	48.1%	3.0%
Harford Technical High School	242	47	19.4%	219	104	47.5%	242	75	31.0%	11.6%	242	163	67.4%	19.9%
Havre de Grace High School	170	15	8.8%	152	29	19.1%	181	48	26.5%	17.7%	187	93	49.7%	30.7%
Joppatowne High School	157	24	15.3%	150	8	5.3%	192	34	17.7%	2.4%	168	46	27.4%	22.0%
North Harford High School	259	8	3.1%	301	114	37.9%	279	33	11.8%	8.7%	266	99	37.2%	-0.7%
Patterson Mill Middle High School	208	0	0.0%	206	77	37.4%	171	3	1.8%	1.8%	215	135	62.8%	25.4%
Swan Creek School	55	1	1.8%	64	4	6.3%	40	6	15.0%	13.2%	59	11	18.6%	12.4%
Total	2569	176	6.9%	2608	787	30.2%	2679	332	12.4%	5.5%	2729	1149	42.1%	11.9%

These data are worthy of further consideration as the district strives to increase equitable access to dual enrollment. Several factors may be influencing these indicators of access, from CCR eligibility to transportation.

Relevant Quotes: Dual Enrollment	
"We need more clarity around all of it for kids. Principals ask questions when they don't know something; kids don't know what they don't know. Do middle school principals know how dual enrollment works? Just because you have access doesn't mean you have readiness. We need a readiness type of class – I would like to see one other step that helps students prepare."	-Principal
"We want to provide opportunities for students to access dual enrollment, but not all students are ready for it."	-Principal
"I'm concerned about paying for dual enrollment. Getting HCPS and HCC on the same schedule is difficult. We really need someone in the building working with dual enrollment kids and checking on them, looking at grades – schools and parents are in the dark about progress. Counselors already have 300-450 students on their caseloads; we need dual enrollment liaisons to check in with students about progress."	-Central Office staff
"The college stuff takes care of itself. The 'haves' have more, the kids who have barriers (transportation, etc.) aren't accessing dual enrollment courses at a greater rate. There are serious issues with completion of asynchronous classwork."	-Central Office staff
"We would love to have high school teachers performing community college instruction."	-Community member
"Students struggle with online courses and the majority of HCC courses are online – students never even saw their professors. Students who don't necessarily want an HCC class take it anyway because their friends are gone."	-Community member

The Workforce Investment Program

Key Findings
- This program is designed to impact a small number of students who are not CCR eligible.
- There is a question around whether this program is to connect students to workforce opportunities that provide a living wage, or if it is a work-study dropout prevention initiative.
- An increase in industry noncredit industry certifications for students is desired.

The Workforce Investment Program is an opportunity provided to HCPS high school seniors through a partnership with HCC. Students who participate in these noncredit, career-ready training programs can earn industry recognized certifications and gain valuable hands-on experiences in the workforce. This program was designed to make students attractive candidates for employment immediately following graduation and can serve as a steppingstone into both credit and noncredit degree programs at HCC. The program is free to HCPS seniors, and HCPS provides grant-funded transportation to alleviate any concerns with equitable access (Harford County Public Schools, 2024). Originally this work was funded by the MD Leads grant; next year this will be funded by the Susquehanna Workforce Network.

Among listening tour participants, this program was recognized for its ability to positively impact students' lives on an individual level, providing them with valuable skills and opportunities for success. Grant funds and efforts to remove barriers like transportation have helped students access training and certification programs, offering them opportunities they might not otherwise have had. While the program has shown promise, there are concerns about its scalability and long-term sustainability due to financial limitations and logistical challenges. Although some students have actively participated and benefitted from the program, there are varying levels of interest and engagement among students, with factors such as scheduling constraints and differing expectations influencing participation. There are ongoing discussions about the importance of aligning these opportunities with career pathways that lead to sustainable employment and a living wage, as well as concerns about the quality and quantifiability of experiences and credentials offered through this program. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, the hourly rate that one individual must earn to support themselves in Harford County (as of February 2024) is $23.84 (Glasmeier, 2024). One criticism this program has received is that the post-graduation opportunities for which students will qualify may not be within reach of a living wage.

Relevant Quotes: Workforce Investment Program	
"This was implemented very fast, and we have lots of lessons learned. Our new specialist is very boots on the ground helping students prepare for this experience. The question is how we are going to expand on this. It's very controlled with the number of students and seats. If we could take this to scale it would be huge."	-Central Office staff
"We are going to run out of money to support this program – we can only afford to do this for one more school year and SWN will cover for one year after this. It's a small number of students. The kids who have benefitted are the kids who have needed a boost to have something to do after high school. They would likely be unemployed otherwise. For them to have transportation, free access to credentials sets them up for independence after high school. Nobody wants this to go away. I would like to see this elevated in terms of status. They got rid of trades programs because they weren't respected professions. They need reselling in the community."	-Central Office staff

"I've only had conversations with a few kids involved in this program. It's hit or miss in terms of how they feel about it. The job fairs are awesome. Transportation to and from is a big plus. Kids that go part time must go into this program or the apprenticeship program. We need to invest in it – the exposure and options are important."	-Principal
"Offering more non-credit things and trades is good. We are pushing kids into college who aren't ready."	-Principal
"We have a moral and ethical responsibility to leave students better off than when they started. I'm not a fan of offering programs that don't offer a path to a living wage. There is no way to quantify the credentialling or quality of internships at the high schools."	-Community member

Apprenticeship Programs

> **Key Findings**
> - The apprenticeship program is universally valued, with exponential growth since its inception.
> - There are concerns about scalability and where the ceiling for business partnerships might emerge.
> - The support staff associated with the apprenticeship programs are well qualified and making observable connections between students and businesses.
> - The requirement for all opportunities to align with Department of Labor areas is limiting to the interests of students.

There is much positive momentum to report about HCPS's apprenticeship programs. Students are enthusiastic to participate in these opportunities, which are seen as valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth. There is a strong collaboration between HCPS and employers to provide students with practical work experience, with businesses becoming increasingly receptive to hiring students as interns and apprentices.

Transportation remains a significant barrier for student participation, with concerns about accessibility hindering efforts to involve more students in these programs. There is also a recognition of the need to provide students with apprenticeship options that are as wide-ranging as their career interests; this point lends to scalability challenges, as there are a finite number of available business partners. Undaunted, HCPS is striving toward a goal of meeting the state goal for apprenticeships prior to graduation.

Relevant Quotes: Apprenticeship Programs	
"They are starting as soon as junior year. It's helping to improve outcomes for the students who need it. Employers are now on board with keeping students in school. Schools are working with employers to keep them in school until 10:30, and students are happy to know they are upwardly mobile. Our workforce coach is phenomenal – works well with administrators, businesses, and students."	-Principal
"This is our fastest growing initiative. 8-12% of the senior class is involved in apprenticeships. This is the most important aspect of Pillar 3."	-Principal
"Apprenticeships are the most valuable [aspect of Pillar 3]. They are desperately needed within the community, especially the Bayside community. I can't offer as much as I want because of the size of the building. We've received 600 more students since Covid. The middle section of kids needs this."	-Principal

"Businesses are still reluctant to work with students under age 18. More businesses would help expand opportunities for students. If every student had an internship or apprenticeship, it would be beneficial, but we need businesses in the county to do so. If every business opened its doors and we had more staffing positions, we could add more programs."	-Central Office staff
"The apprenticeship program is new. Zero students were in the apprenticeship program when we started; the goal was to grow the program. The process for hosting an apprentice is filling out an application for the Youth Apprenticeship Program with the DOL, then we conduct a site visit – the approval process is cumbersome. Formalizing these relationships is necessary to get students high school credit. We've presented to chambers of commerce, business networking groups, and gained traction through word-of-mouth. This grew faster than anyone anticipated. We had to sell to the schools to convince them that it's ok for students to leave for these opportunities and that it's a great opportunity to build off current instruction (e.g., business management)."	-Central Office staff

Career Coaching

> ### Key Findings
> - Career coaching is a new innovation in the early stages of implementation.
> - Career coaching will fill an important gap in the K-12 work based learning continuum by providing exploration activities for middle grade students.
> - HCPS staff prepared lesson plans, materials, and facilitated career lessons for students through February as SWN was staffing up to provide these services.
> - Naviance is a valued tool for career exploration.

The career coaching component of Pillar 3 places a clear emphasis on increasing career exploration opportunities, particularly in middle schools, to help students identify their interests and skills early on. Career coaches have the opportunity to play a significant role in guiding students through career exploration activities and helping them utilize resources like Naviance, but there are questions about the coaches' training and effectiveness. Some stakeholders expressed frustration over the rollout process and the lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of career coaches. Collaboration with the Susquehanna Workforce Network (SWN) is crucial for implementing this component of the Blueprint, and this partnership is still in development.

There have been ongoing discussions between HCPS and SWN about the utilization of funding sources, including concerns about the effectiveness of resource allocation and deployment of resources to students, such as VR devices and hot spots. Delayed hiring, a lack of involvement from HCPS in the hiring process, and concerns about the qualifications and experience of hired staff contributed to early frustrations among participants; however, many of the initial challenges have been mitigated at this stage.

It is important to note that HCPS and SWN are new to working together at the scale required by the Blueprint, and that many of the concerns expressed by participants reflect typical stages of group development (i.e., Tuckerman's forming, storming, norming, and performing phases). Some participants reported challenges related to communication, expectations, and general understanding of systems among SWN, HCPS, and the hired career coaches. Misalignment of expectations, deferred service, and a disconnect in understanding school logistics

(schedules, calendars, etc.) lead to dissatisfaction and confusion from both partners. Challenges in implementing the career coaching program within schools, including delays in delivering lessons, the need for parallel teacher involvement, and issues with coach performance highlight operational difficulties and the need for adjustments to ensure effectiveness. Both organizations are working toward resolving these early roadblocks. Overall, this process involves a learning curve for both organizations as they navigate new relationships and attempt to understand one another's operations and expectations.

Lastly, there is some tension between promoting college readiness and career readiness, with some participants questioning whether students are being pushed into career pathways prematurely. Although good faith efforts have been made to integrate career coaching into the schools and district, there are concerns about logistical issues such as access to technology and coordination with existing school resources. Schools are structuring advisory periods and scheduling to accommodate career coaching access, but there are challenges in finding the right balance between instructional time and career exploration.

Relevant Quotes: Career Coaching	
"The career coaches are hired out of the workforce development board (SWN) who work with counselors that are not part of the CTE office. Career coaches aren't necessarily trained teachers. Because they are career coaches, the CTE office is working with the counseling office to make sure efforts don't overlap and that tools aren't redundant."	-Central Office staff
"Nine hundred kids have had lessons – that's a positive! Career coaches are in Naviance and understand how to use it. Scheduling is done [to ensure career coach access in all schools]. Many coaches are finally out in the buildings. [The Director of Strategic Initiatives] has been very supportive."	-Central Office staff
"This has had a clunky rollout. We're working with the business department to start small scale and plan better for it next year."	-Principal
"This is a step in the right direction, but we may be pushing students into pathways before they are prepared to make a decision. The state messages that everyone needs to be college ready [not necessarily career ready]."	-Principal

The Student Support Pathway

Key Findings
- The pace of support pathway implementation was perceived as positioning central office staff against school staff, where the former hoped to reduce the burden on principals and the latter hoped for more influence over remediation options.
- The disconnect between graduation requirements and CCR eligibility has implied to students, staff, and families that MCAP results don't matter.
- Many students may have been unsuccessful on the MCAP because they didn't try on the test – for these students, remediation is viewed as a waste of effort.
- There is a desire to increase school-based options to meet the diverse needs of students.
- FEV Tutor has mixed reviews from school leaders; the district is studying its impact.

Perhaps the most contentious of Pillar 3 initiatives, the Student Support Pathway strives to assist students who have not yet qualified for CCR eligibility. In response to the state mandate to devise systematized supports for these students, HCPS central office staff developed a multi-tiered framework for test preparation that afforded schools choice about how to best serve their students. The speed of expected implementation for the Student Support Pathway created perceived conflict among central office staff and principals. Central office staff thoughtfully devised differentiated student supports, which provided school choice; however, principals were not able to participate in the design of these options as much as they would have liked due to the state's brisk timeline.

FEV tutor has been deployed in most schools, to varying levels of fidelity, and is a fee-for-service online platform that provides 24-hour access to instructional support for students. There were mixed opinions about the effectiveness of FEV Tutor as a remediation tool. While some viewed it as a valuable resource for providing support to students (at no additional burden to HCPS instructional staff), others questioned its efficacy, citing concerns about student engagement, the quality of instruction, and the perceived lack of live interaction. Schools face challenges in implementing FEV Tutor and the Student Support Pathway effectively. Issues such as low student participation, logistical constraints, and the difficulty of incorporating remediation into the school day contribute to these challenges.

There is skepticism among both students and educators about the value of the MCAP as a gatekeeper of CCR eligibility, particularly when it does not directly impact graduation requirements. Students may lack motivation to engage in remediation efforts for tests they perceive as irrelevant to their academic goals. One Central Office staff member exquisitely summarized this conceptual disconnect: "[The Blueprint] is about college and career readiness, not test readiness." Members of the school community have not received or communicated consistent messaging about the impact of MCAP on student opportunities and the purpose of remediation efforts. Some students may not fully understand the implications of their test scores, leading to disengagement from remediation activities.

Schools recognize the need for differentiated support pathways based on individual student needs; however, there is a struggle to design effective pathways that address varying levels of academic readiness and engagement. Disaggregating the root causes of MCAP insufficiencies is difficult to discern when some students choose not to put forth meaningful effort, others have fundamental gaps in their understanding, and yet others may be impacted by performance anxiety. Among these possibilities, only one group, those with fundamental gaps in understanding, is likely to be impacted by supplementary instruction and other supports such as coaching may be more valuable.

While many advanced students leave campus during the day to access post-CCR opportunities, those who remain often require intensive remediation. Schools are grappling with the opportunity costs of remediation activities, as there are well-defined limitations to how much instructional time is afforded in the school day. It is very challenging to match resource allocation with the most effective strategies for supporting students who are not yet CCR eligible. Balancing the need for targeted interventions with limited resources poses a significant challenge.

HCPS is actively monitoring the impact of FEV Tutor on student outcomes to determine the viability of continued investment. Each school's fidelity of implementation is being considered in this analysis; however, the district is advised to catalogue the full array of interventions offered as part of this study. Some schools elected to place minimal emphasis on FEV Tutor but provided remedial instruction through their own teaching staff. In such a case, a high correlation of MCAP success for those who engaged FEV Tutor may be more relative to their in-

person instruction. As we know, correlation does not equate causation. Nevertheless, data analysis and evaluation play a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of these interventions and guiding future decision-making. Early analyses of all student experiences (inclusive of students in both the support pathway and other FEV opportunities) demonstrate that FEV tutor perceptions run counter to many participants' observations, with 721 total students served, an average session rating of 4.2 out of 5, and an average tutor rating of 4.4 out of 5.

Relevant Quotes: Student Support Pathway	
"We worked really hard to get kids CCR eligible. We reached out to every junior who wasn't CCR and offered after-school tutoring."	-Principal
"This had good intentions, but the jury is still out on FEV effectiveness. We're convinced it's a bot. Parents have complained. It was presented as 'just do it after school.' We pull students out of homeroom and first period to have them do it. We were retesting during snow, but I don't know if that matters. I don't see the bang for the buck. We have students in AP calculus who have to take the test from 2 years ago."	-Principal
All [remediation] numbers will be lower to begin with because kids now know the test matters. We want student support to be meaningful. After school is so hard – they will not give up extra-curricular activities to do FEV tutoring."	-Principal
"We are studying the impact of FEV tutor. This is supposed to be about college and career readiness, not test readiness."	-Central Office staff
"They took an impossible situation and made it into something manageable. It didn't pull students from instruction, didn't cost families anything, didn't require an additional lift for teachers. It empowered schools to make choices and wasn't one-size-fits-all. Our hands were tied by the state, but we made lemonade."	-Central Office staff
"We haven't landed on a sweet spot for the support pathway; it's work heavy and results light. We attacked it too remedial – when kids don't pass a test that isn't required for graduation, we push them into remedial classes that don't align with the students' end goal."	-Central Office staff
"State testing is a real frustration for students."	-Community member

REACHING TOWARD OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

> What aspirations do we have for the future of schooling as we achieve full implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future?

- What successes have you seen?
- In five years, what should high school look like with the Blueprint initiatives more fully implemented?
- In five years, do you believe students will be more college and career ready? Why or why not?
- What are changes you would like to see systematically regarding attaining North Star goals and the Blueprint implementation?
- Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS EQUITABLY

There were significant concerns about equity in Pillar 3 opportunities, particularly regarding English Language Learners (ELL), students with disabilities, and underserved populations. Issues such as language barriers, a lack of resources such as transportation and home internet, and limited opportunities for certain groups were highlighted. Some participants noted disparities in program availability across schools. Limitations to access of educational opportunities, including dual enrollment, career pathways, and specialized programs like Harford Tech, was a recurring theme.

Efforts to engage students, address dropout rates, and provide relevant pathways for students who wish to directly enter the workforce were emphasized. There was a common recognition of the need for individualized, hands-on approaches to education and workforce development to meet the diverse needs of students. Concerns about data collection, accountability measures, and outcome tracking were raised. Many participants referred to "the 40%" (of students who are not engaging in CCR activities prior to graduation), but few articulated knowledge of that subgroup that moved beyond generalities. Participants seemed keenly aware that HCPS is not serving "the 40%," but there were minimal connections to how specific strategies could be matched to specific students within this group.

The importance of teacher quality and training, particularly in serving diverse student populations such as ELL students and students with disabilities was emphasized. Personalized and culturally responsive teaching approaches are seen as essential of meeting the needs of all students effectively. Similarly, there was a call for more support and resources to address students' mental health concerns effectively.

Relevant Quotes: Meeting Students' Needs Equitably	
"I'm concerned about my English Language Learners and special education students. It seems like legal is in charge."	-Principal
"Everyone calls us the 'Route 40 schools.' We all know what that means and it's undermining. I wish they would call us Bayside schools or something else instead."	-Principal
"My building battles isolation and my building battles [low] expectations."	-Principal
"ELL students don't get to experience much dual enrollment because of labels assigned to them. I don't think they are working with school counselors in the same ways that	-Central Office staff

native speakers are working with counselors. Parent meetings are not geared toward ELL families. It's very hard to see some have opportunities and others not. We have parent information nights – are we inviting or are we just advertising? When we register students, we don't make the connections that we should when we first meet families."	
"We need more pathways for the 40% that aren't remedial. More non-credit pathways for kids. We haven't quite figured out how to help kids become an electrician when they aren't in the tech school."	-Central Office staff
"Our real focus has been on students getting into college courses as quickly as possible, but I don't know that we are targeting more students – we're just furthering students who would already be CCR ready in the first place. We are doing a better job for the 60%."	-Community member
"Why do we get 500 students in HCC from [one high school] and only 20 from [another high school]?	-Community member

OVERALL PROGRESS

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Key Findings

- The vision for Pillar 3 and the North Star is universally valued.
- There is an appreciation for current effort and an optimism that implementation will be a positive, yet iterative process.

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Because the purpose of this listening tour and subsequent report was to identify opportunities for implementation improvement, the reader may note an emphasis on challenges, concerns, and even frustrations. This should not eclipse the overall enthusiasm for HCPS's progress toward implementing Pillar 3 of the Blueprint and the North Star initiative. Despite acknowledging that the impact of the Blueprint may still be evolving, there is a strong sense of optimism and recognition of the positive changes already taking place.

There is a strong endorsement of the superintendent's vision for education and the initiatives being implemented. The support and leadership from central office staff are seen as critical drivers of positive change. Participants agreed that the multi-tracked initiatives of Pillar 3 have the potential to positively impact students' lives and change their lifelong trajectories. These opportunities are seen as particularly transformative for first-generation students and others who are traditionally underserved.

There is a recognition of a cultural shift within the school district, with a move away from traditional models and a greater emphasis on innovative approaches and collaboration. Schools are working with partners, with principals fully on board, to support students in new ways. The overarching theme is a commitment to student success and providing them with diverse opportunities and support systems. This includes middle school innovation, bolstering specialized programs, and ensuring open lines of leadership to support these initiatives.

Lastly, there is an acknowledgement of the need to challenge the status quo in our educational systems and embrace different viewpoints to drive positive change. This openness to innovation and collaboration is seen as essential for addressing the diverse needs of students effectively. Overall, participant reflections indicate a proactive and forward-thinking approach to education, with a focus on student-centered initiatives, collaboration, and continuous improvement to better serve the needs of all students.

Relevant Quotes: Enthusiasm for Progress	
"I feel like I can see the impact of the Blueprint. It's slow and not as in depth yet as it likely will be, but you can already see the impact."	-Central Office staff
"We have a great system. There are lots of positive things happening for kids. We challenge the status quo often. Different viewpoints matter and are listened to. We reach common ground often."	-Central Office staff
"The early warning indicator dashboard was a major success."	-Central Office staff
"Middle school innovation is going to be a game changer as we start to implement next year. Some of the work at the elementary schools is also going well – we are working to bolster specialists and articulation components."	-Central Office staff
"The focus on career coaching and apprenticeships is incredibly valuable."	-Principal
"We need more of this for our kids."	-Principal
"The options that we are providing right now are big."	-Principal

VISIONING FOR THE FUTURE

> **Key Findings**
>
> - Students and families need effective communication to understand the universe of opportunities available to them.
> - Career-readiness should remain an emphasis, with a focus on expanding the breadth of work-based learning opportunities for more students.
> - Vertical alignment of K-12 Pillar 3 efforts will improve student experiences.
> - Additional staffing would accelerate Blueprint outcomes for students, but financial limitations are widely understood.

Participants offered many suggestions for improvements to Pillar 3 implementation. There was an emphasis on pushing college and career readiness activities into earlier grade levels, starting as early as kindergarten. Similarly, bridging the gap between middle and high schools was seen as a priority. There was a call for more fluidity and alignment between the two levels to ensure a seamless transition for students.

The importance of engaging parents and providing them with resources to understand the educational options available to their children was emphasized by participants. Proactive communication strategies were suggested to ensure parents remain informed.

There was a desire for more flexible pathways for students, allowing for individualized learning experiences based on their interests and goals. This includes offering diverse courses, career tracks, and experiential learning opportunities. The need to expand opportunities for students, particularly CTE programs, was highlighted. Suggestions included offering more certifications and noncredit courses, integrating CTE into the curriculum from an early age, and providing access to both dual enrollment and CTE courses.

The importance of dedicated counseling support for Pillar 3 initiatives was recognized. Counselors are seen as essential in guiding students toward their educational and career goals. Some participants suggested securing more grant funding to enhance or expand supportive resources for students. Participants' visions for the future reflected a desire for educational experiences that are more responsive to the evolving needs of students,

focused on preparing them for success in both college and careers, and grounded in collaboration, innovation, and equity.

Relevant Quotes: Visioning for the Future	
"We need to keep working to describe to families and kids their options – and give them the advice to keep their options open."	-Principal
"In the future, school would look more like a college campus where students have more choice in what they are focusing their education on. They'd already come to high school with basic skills, begin the process of true critical thinking and an opportunity to explore their interests. More open campus, less structure. Students have time throughout the day to meet in study circles with more time between classes. We have a multi-faceted approach to evaluating learning – a way that uses other measurements. Students demonstrate that they can work with other people."	-Community member
"I would like to see that we go to HCC graduation in 2026 and we have every high school represented with someone graduating with an AA or a certificate that puts them to work at a livable wage for a single person in Harford County."	-Community member
"We need more clear opportunities for kids at earlier grades to dream about their lives with the requisite knowledge and skills to do so. We could have a reimagined high school campus with different partners coming in and out, more non-credit classes that are on par with credit bearing options. More flexibility and better transportation. This is about building your life and community, not working on a treadmill. More joy and excitement."	-Central Office staff
"I want to see as many programs that align to certifications as possible, where all students get some type of credential or certification. Maryland's goal is 10% of seniors participate in apprenticeships. I'd like us to be at 50% in 5 years. Those who are college-bound would start college with workplace skills."	-Central Office staff

DECISION POINTS & POTENTIAL ACTIONS

This listening tour provided a valuable snapshot into Blueprint implementation at this moment in time. Although still in the early days of this decade-long initiative, there are several decision points that could facilitate greater operational efficiency, availability of opportunities, and ultimately, success for students. The table below outlines big picture themes with respective decision points, and potential actions. The potential actions are offered as options and should not limit other innovations that serve these decision points. Additional potential actions will be developed through the next phase of implementation mapping.

Themes	Decision Points	Potential Actions
Communication	Clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure a smoother implementation process Add communication with families	• Identify the department who is specifically accountable for the success of each subtask; responsibility matrices such as RACI are useful tools for this purpose (only one individual should be assigned with accountability and final decision-making authority for each subtask) • Create a cohesive, vertical and horizontal understanding of the philosophy of the support pathway and post-CCR pathways • Explore report card enhancements (e.g., CCR readiness indicators and/or North Star outcomes)
Sustainability	Identify sustainable resources to continue and enhance student opportunities Study the return on investment for Pillar 3 initiatives to ensure resources are being managed efficiently	• Compare the number of HCPS personnel whose primary job is to support work-based learning experiences with the number of personnel whose primary job is to support college access – are these numbers proportional to the current and anticipated student demand for each? • Consider whether the business community might be willing to support a subscription model for access to HCPS interns and apprentices • Consider whether HCC might provide a further discounted rate for dual enrollment for courses taught by qualified HCPS instructional staff (i.e., equivalent cost savings to what HCC would normally pay for general and administrative expenses) • Conduct a developmental program evaluation on the impact of the most resource-intensive components of Pillar 3, including career coaching, the student support pathway, and apprenticeships
School Culture	Test the hypothesis that schools will become less attractive to students and their families if large numbers of upperclassmen leave campus	• Prioritize student voice to design the future of school culture and how a sense of belonging can be sustained for the student body; consider convening a student task force charged with leading the necessary cultural transformation that will come with full implementation
Access to Opportunities	Develop a cross-agency, comprehensive, yet dynamic tool to connect	• Develop an app that students and families can use in real time to map all the available pathways through both HCPS and HCC, including magnets, signature programs,

	students with the full breadth of available opportunities. Ensure that students who are CCR eligible, based on state criteria, are also prepared to be successful within available pathways Explore using alternative education as an incubator for innovative programming (Swan Creek) Address transportation challenges to ensure equitable access to off-campus opportunities Continue to strive toward scaling work-based learning opportunities Improve access to college and career readiness opportunities to vulnerable student populations such as English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities	internship opportunities, non-credit credentials, AA degrees, etc. • Consider sequencing and communicating pathways based on student aspirations for postsecondary life • Investigate the feasibility of support programs like AVID and AP English 10 seminar to prepare students for success in college and workforce experiences • Create dedicated college liaison positions for each high school where the person teaches on-site entry-level courses such as College Success Skills, Public Speaking, or Business Fundamentals, serves as a bridge between the college, school, student, and families, and provides college advisor services • Consider opportunities to expand collaboration with local transportation authorities to provide services to students who need transportation • Survey business partners to learn more about what incentives would encourage them to expand opportunities for students (e.g., recognition awards, networking events, tax credits, etc.); dedicate outreach efforts to businesses outside of the local community that engage telework • Broaden work-based learning opportunities to align with student interests that may fall outside of DOL areas • Extend project-based learning to high school students • Explore innovative designs for working students (e.g., evening school) • Reframe language around "the 40%" and "the route 40 schools" to promote specificity and neutrality; Strive to understand the nuances of what the ~4,000 students who are not CCR need to be successful, rather than refer to them as one unit; use "Bayside schools" or some other moniker to reset community expectations
Expansion of Opportunities	Bring the supply of dual enrollment courses in line with demand Bring the supply of work-based learning opportunities in line with demand	• Move as many graduation requirements and credit-bearing courses (including dual enrollment) to lower grades as is feasible and prudent to provide more flexibility in student schedules (e.g., all middle school students earn at least one high school credit) • Consider expanding AP classes, possibly even through on-site instruction where dual enrollment and AP are taught within the same classroom – students have the option of taking the AP exam • Visit other school districts to understand the logistics, advantages, and disadvantages of innovative models such as AP/DC, wall-to-wall early college in comprehensive high schools, etc.

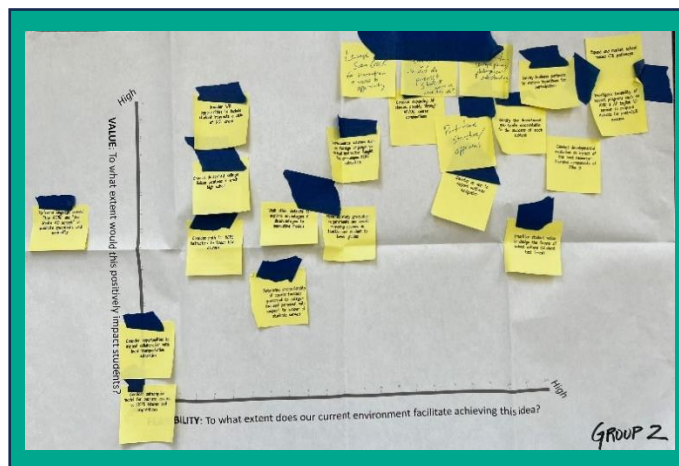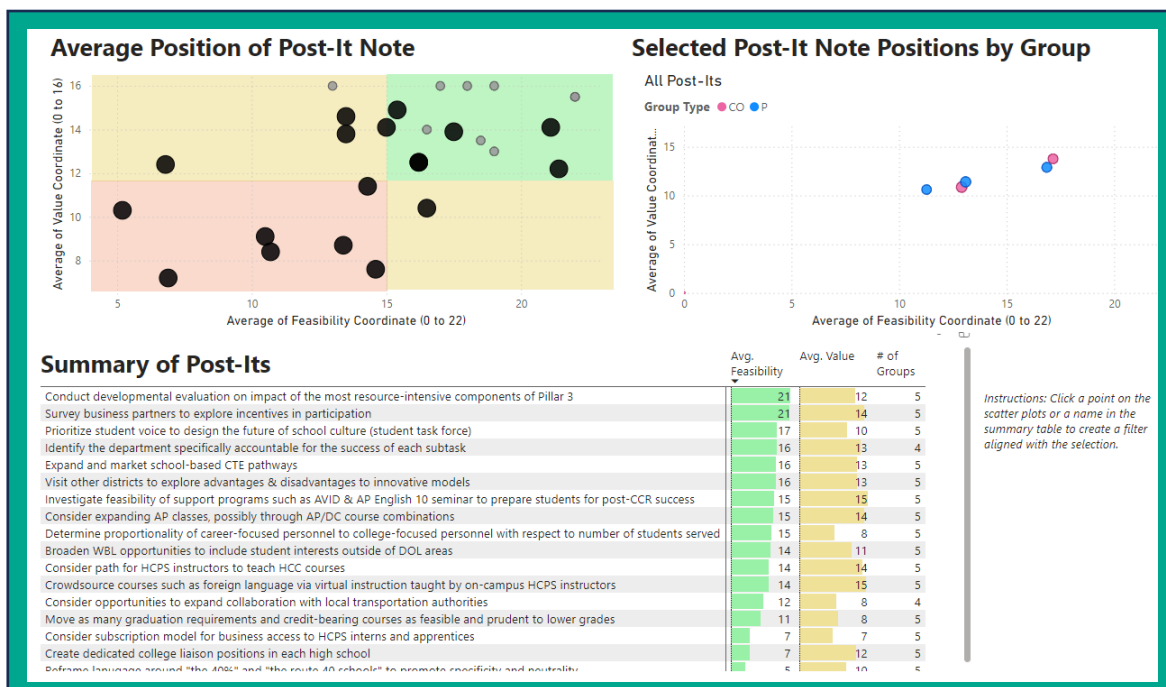|		
		• Determine a viable route for HCPS staff to serve as HCC adjunct instructors during the school day • Expand and market school-based CTE pathways • Crowdsource courses such as foreign language via virtual instruction taught by on-campus HCPS instructors • Scale successful programs in place at some high schools such as student mentoring, peer tutoring, and Habits of Success

POTENTIAL ACTIONS: VALUE & FEASIBILITY

To triangulate the viability of this report and its identified potential actions, five small groups of stakeholders were convened on June 17-18, 2024. Two groups consisted of Central Office staff, and three groups consisted of high school principals. Groups were asked to discuss each potential action through two framing questions:

1. To what extent would this action positively impact students (VALUE)?
2. To what extent does our current environment facilitate achieving this action (FEASIBILITY)?

In addition, participants were asked to identify any new potential actions for consideration. These were collected and added to the initially identified potential actions. Participants worked together to discuss and chart each potential action on a prioritization grid:

Cumulative responses were then mapped through Microsoft Power BI to understand participants' overall recommendations from all five groups:

Summary of Post-Its

Summary of Post-Its	Avg. Feasibility	Avg. Value	# of Groups
Conduct developmental evaluation on impact of the most resource-intensive components of Pillar 3	21	12	5
Survey business partners to explore incentives in participation	21	14	5
Prioritize student voice to design the future of school culture (student task force)	17	10	5
Identify the department specifically accountable for the success of each subtask	16	13	4
Expand and market school-based CTE pathways	16	13	5
Visit other districts to explore advantages & disadvantages to innovative models	16	13	5
Investigate feasibility of support programs such as AVID & AP English 10 seminar to prepare students for post-CCR success	15	15	5
Consider expanding AP classes, possibly through AP/DC course combinations	15	14	5
Determine proportionality of career-focused personnel to college-focused personnel with respect to number of students served	15	8	5
Broaden WBL opportunities to include student interests outside of DOL areas	14	11	5
Consider path for HCPS instructors to teach HCC courses	14	14	5
Crowdsource courses such as foreign language via virtual instruction taught by on-campus HCPS instructors	14	15	5
Consider opportunities to expand collaboration with local transportation authorities	12	8	4
Move as many graduation requirements and credit-bearing courses as feasible and prudent to lower grades	11	8	5
Consider subscription model for business access to HCPS interns and apprentices	7	7	5
Create dedicated college liaison positions in each high school	7	12	5
Reframe language around "the 40%" and "the route 40 schools" to promote specificity and neutrality	5	10	5

These data are publicly available for review in an interactive format, accessible through this QR code:

After careful consideration, the six most feasible actions identified by participants were selected for Blueprint implementation prioritization in 2024-2025:

PRIORITY 1
Conduct developmental evaluation on impact of the most resource-intensive components of Pillar 3

PRIORITY 4
Identify the department specifically accountable for the success of each subtask

PRIORITY 2
Survey business partners to explore incentives in participation

PRIORITY 5
Expand and market school-based CTE pathways

PRIORITY 3
Prioritize student voice to design the future of school culture (student task force)

PRIORITY 6
Visit other districts to explore advantages & disadvantages to innovative models

The next phase of Pillar 3 implementation will establish strategies and resources to achieve these priorities as HCPS continues to engage in this transformational process to provide all students with high quality and equitable outcomes.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Central Office Staff Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been with Harford County Public Schools?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. What is something you're proud of since you've been in your current position?
4. What has been your role in implementing the Blueprint (Pillar 3)?
5. How would you describe how the Blueprint fits within the HCPS North Star initiative?
6. What initiatives stand out to you as the most valuable? Least valuable?
7. How has the district supported schools regarding these initiatives?
8. What district supports or resources are missing?
9. Could you describe the impact that the following have on the system and/or schools? Dual enrollment?
10. The workforce investment program (at HCC)?
11. Apprenticeship programs?
12. Career coaching?
13. The student support pathway for students not meeting CCR?
14. Other college and career readiness programs?
15. How have schools changed with the Blueprint requirements?
16. What successes have you seen? How do you know?
17. What challenges or barriers are there?
18. In five years, what should high school look like with the Blueprint initiatives more fully implemented?
19. In five years, do you believe students will be more college and career ready? Why or why not?
20. What are changes you would like to see systematically or at schools regarding attaining North Star goals and the Blueprint implementation?
21. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

Principal Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been with Harford County Public Schools?
2. How long have you been in your current role?
3. How would you describe how Pillar 3 of the Blueprint fits within the HCPS North Star initiative?
4. What initiatives stand out to you as the most valuable? Least valuable?
5. How has the district supported schools regarding these initiatives?
6. What district resources are missing?
7. Could you describe the impact that dual enrollment has had on school operations and student experiences?
8. The workforce investment program (at HCC)?
9. Apprenticeship programs?
10. Career coaching?
11. The student support pathway for students not meeting CCR?
12. Other college and career readiness programs?
13. How has your school changed with the Pillar 3 requirements?
14. What successes have you had? How do you know?
15. What challenges or barriers have you faced?
16. In five years, what should high school look like with the Pillar 3 initiatives more fully implemented?
17. Do you believe students will be more college and career ready? Why or why not?
18. What changes would you like to see at your school regarding attaining North Star goals and the Blueprint implementation?
19. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

Community Member Interview Protocols

Harford Community College Staff

1. How long have you been with HCC?
2. How would you describe HCC's relationship with HCPS?
3. What are HCC's goals for dual enrollment and working with HCPS?
4. As a higher education partner, how do you experience dual enrollment?
5. What challenges or pain points exist for HCC in terms of successful dual enrollment implementation?
6. How would you describe the ideal future for dual enrollment?
7. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

HCPS Staff (Non-Administrators)

20. How long have you been with Harford County Public Schools?
21. How long have you been in your current role?
22. How would you describe how Pillar 3 of the Blueprint fits within the HCPS North Star initiative?
23. What initiatives stand out to you as the most valuable? Least valuable?
24. How has the district supported schools regarding these initiatives?
25. What district resources are missing?
26. Could you describe the impact that dual enrollment has had on school operations and student experiences?
27. The workforce investment program (at HCC)?
28. Apprenticeship programs?
29. Career coaching?
30. The student support pathway for students not meeting CCR?
31. Other college and career readiness programs?
32. How has your school changed with the Pillar 3 requirements?
33. What successes have you had? How do you know?
34. What challenges or barriers have you faced?
35. In five years, what should high school look like with the Pillar 3 initiatives more fully implemented?
36. Do you believe students will be more college and career ready? Why or why not?
37. What changes would you like to see at your school regarding attaining North Star goals and the Blueprint implementation?
38. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

HCPS Students

1. Tell me about your experiences as a high school student?
2. How have you experienced dual enrollment as a student?
3. What do you know or what have you heard about the apprenticeship program?
4. Career coaching?
5. Do you think the push to get more students college and career ready is working? Why or why not?
6. One of the challenges we are working on is learning how we might get more students CCR eligible. How would you say your peers think about CCR eligibility?

7. If you could make changes to what high school looks like in terms of college and career readiness for students, what would they be? What would you start? What would you stop?
8. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

Susquehanna Workforce Network Staff

1. How long have you been with SWN?
2. How would you describe SWN's involvement with implementation of Pillar 3 of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future?
3. How would you describe SWN's relationship with HCPS?
4. What are SWN's goals for working with HCPS to advance workforce development?
5. What challenges or pain points exist for SWN in terms of successful dual enrollment implementation?
6. What is going well?
7. How would you describe the ideal future for workforce development as it pertains to students in HCPS?
8. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you would like to share?