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Baltimore City Public Schools: Implementing Bounded Autonomy

We choose to give people autonomy within a frame, with full understanding that some people are going to struggle to use that autonomy well.

— Baltimore City Public Schools CEO Andres Alonso

On a sunny afternoon in the spring of 2010, Principal Bill Murphy looked over the most recent 4th grade science exams and nodded with approval. Two years before, his staff had developed a mission and vision that included providing deep science education in the early grades. In order to meet that goal, the school community had decided to eliminate the guidance counselor position and hire 1.5 additional science teaching staff with the freed funds. It now appeared that this shift was leading to the student achievement Murphy and his staff had hoped for.

Realistically, Murphy did not have much time to dwell on the students' success. After a cursory review of the scores, he set them aside and returned to putting the finishing touches on the school's proposed budget for SY11.[1] In order to give parents plenty of time to e-mail feedback on the plan, he needed to post it before the end of the day.

Murphy, a graduate of the New Leaders for New Schools' principal development program, had been a principal in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) since 2006.[2] When he first arrived, he was eager to take on the challenges of increasing student achievement in his K-8 school. Although district leaders had emphasized the importance of student performance and principal accountability, Murphy discovered that he had few options for how to provide professional development to his teachers and little say in determining priorities. Although some of his staff had approached him soon after his arrival about developing a stronger science program, the district's staffing model would not

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[1] SY is a PELP term denoting the school year. For example, SY11 refers to the 2010-2011 school year.

[2] New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) is a national nonprofit organization. Founded in 2000, NLNS uses a combination of coursework and the practical application of learning to train principals in the effective leadership of urban public schools.

allow him to hire new science teachers. Frustrated, Murphy soon decided that he would stay just long enough to fulfill the remainder of his New Leaders six-year commitment before moving on.

However, things began to change once Dr. Andres Alonso arrived as the district's CEO in 2007. Alonso emphasized school autonomy and gave principals discretion over how to spend most of the money that was allocated to their schools. Murphy would now be directly responsible for his school's $4.3 million dollar budget and would have control over staffing, curriculum, and programs. This shift had allowed his school to implement the new science program, along with several other changes to improve student performance. Murphy was enthusiastic about his additional responsibilities and the possibilities for school improvement. He and his wife now expected to stay in Baltimore at least five more years and had recently bought a house.

Murphy glanced at the clock and sighed. It was five minutes before the final bell, which meant he had lost most of another day to managing finances. Observing his new sixth grade teacher would have to wait another day.

Background and Context

In 2007, BCPS served over 80,000 students in nearly 200 schools. The district had seen a steady decline in enrollment, losing approximately 30,000 students since 1995. Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) took effect in 2002,[3] the district had been identified for improvement and then placed under corrective action. Despite the district's longtime school improvement status, no grade band had ever made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).[4] Even before NCLB, since the 1990s, BCPS had been in state corrective action under the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. In 2007, 48% of students in grades 3 - 8 were proficient in math, and 57% were proficient in reading. The graduation rate was 60%.[5] (See **Exhibits 1a** and **1b** for student achievement data.)

Under corrective action, the district received extra oversight from the state. "Because we were one of the most challenging and dysfunctional districts in the state, lots of people were telling us what to do," recalled one central office staff member. For example, "for any school that had student enrollment below 60% of its capacity, we needed to look at a closure option. So we were in communities closing schools with a very narrow view of what that should look like – you could close high performing schools if they were under-enrolled."

The district budget had increased by over $300 million since 2002, though it was difficult to determine how the money was spent. One district staffer remembered that when Maryland approved charter legislation in 2003, "there was a mad dash in BCPS to figure out what the funding formula for charters would be. We had no idea how much we were spending per pupil, because of

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[3] Under NCLB, a state was required to identify for *improvement* any local education agency (such as a district) that, for two consecutive years, failed to make adequate progress according to the state's accountability system. If, after two years of improvement status, the district still failed to make adequate progress, the state was then required to take *corrective action*: a set of steps designed to directly respond to instructional, organizational, and managerial problems in the district.

[4] Under NCLB, every state was required to establish a statewide definition of AYP that included annual targets for academic achievement, participation in assessments, graduation rates for high schools, and at least one other academic indicator for elementary and middle schools.

[5] Maryland uses an estimated cohort rate. It is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates by the sum of the dropouts for grades 9 through 12, respectively, in consecutive years, plus the number of high school graduates.

the way cost centers were set up and the way budgets were doled out." (See **Exhibits 2a** and **2b** for financial data.)

Despite declining enrollment, the number of district employees had increased by nearly 2,000 since 1995. In addition, turnover at the highest levels of the district had become increasingly routine: in July 2007, the Board of School Commissioners appointed Andres Alonso as the seventh superintendent in 10 years.

Up until the late 1990s, the school district had been under the mayor's control. In exchange for increased state funding, some control was shifted to the state. The superintendent reported directly to a nine-member board whose members were all jointly appointed by the Baltimore mayor and the governor of Maryland.

Learning about BCPS

Alonso, who had emigrated from Cuba to the United States at age 12, briefly practiced law in New York City before becoming an educator. He began his education career in 1987 as a teacher in Newark, NJ, working for over 10 years with English language learners and adolescents with special needs. After attending the Urban Superintendents Program at Harvard's Graduate School of Education and completing an internship with the superintendent in Springfield, MA, Alonso took on central office positions in New York City. There, he served as a deputy chancellor for several years before accepting the CEO position in BCPS.

In his first year as CEO, Alonso made himself available to the community and all levels of the district. One principal was struck by the fact that Alonso gave out his e-mail address at every opportunity: "Alonso said, 'You don't have to go through channels. E-mail me; I'll fix it.' For close to a year, everyone I talked to – parents, teachers, everyone – was writing to him. He was right in there with the details of people's problems. He wasn't providing system solutions; he needed to know what the issues were."

Alonso acknowledged that there was some discomfort with his initial approach to the district. "For the first month, people kept waiting for my blueprint," he recalled. "I refused to give them one." Instead, he said, "I went to five citywide community meetings where parents vented. They said, 'Central office is too big, we don't get the support and schools don't listen to us.' I listened for a month and a half."

One community member recalled: "There wasn't a 'here's where we're going' document until March 2008. There was a tremendous amount of conversation, a tremendous amount of listening, and then there was this constant drumbeat of 'what's best for kids?' By the time they sent a letter home saying 'here's the program,' there was credibility that what's best for kids was actually the conversation." One principal agreed that district priorities seemed to shift early on: "Alonso told us if he heard of any school, principal or office staff member turning away people who asked for assistance, there would be hell to pay. It was really clear: your job is to serve families, even if they're not in your attendance area. Take the time to help them out."

In addition, Alonso had a goal in mind from the beginning. "Five years from now, the goal is to have 200 really smart schools going, where there is great leadership, there's a sense of ownership about what they do, and parents are embracing those schools as places they want their children to go because there's good learning. Learning is not defined by AYP, but by communities at some level

saying 'this is the program we want to have.'" An early challenge for Alonso was to understand why this was not already the case.

What Alonso Found at BCPS

In his first months as CEO, Alonso observed what he viewed as unequal opportunities among charter and traditional district schools. "Our district was bipolar," he said. "One-sixth of our schools were charters that had tremendous flexibility and buy-in from the community and politicians. Then we had 150 other schools that were perceived to be the dregs of the universe and had no buy-in, a fortress mentality, and no flexibility whatsoever." The results of these different opportunities seemed clear: "You put me in a room with charter school principals, and you put me in a room with traditional school principals, and it's night and day," explained Alonso. "One of these groups has a vision and feels like they're in charge of their schools, and one of those groups is all about compliance and waiting for central office to tell them what to do."

Karen Webber, who became a district school principal in SY07, agreed. She recalled that before Alonso joined the district:

> I was just dumbfounded at what my job really was. I was basically a middle manager, and a paper-pusher. The district was more concerned about what things looked like on paper, and I was supposed to be the person who made things look good. That's not what I signed up for, so, right away, I was not obeying. I was not responding to senseless e-mails from the district. My name was on delinquency lists because I was doing my job as I saw it, which was to turn around the culture in my school.

Murphy agreed that the input from central office staff was not always productive: "My supervisor yelled at one of my teachers until she cried, and he reprimanded me in front of a group of students. It was very, very stressful."

Many principals struggled with what they saw as central office endorsement of low expectations. "People would always say I had a good school, and really what that meant was we had a middle school population that wasn't killing anybody," recalled Murphy. "It didn't seem to matter that starting in 6th grade we saw this precipitous decline in achievement." Another principal remembered calling central office to clean up errors in a data report: "The lady just chuckled and said, 'Yeah, things like that happen, don't worry about it. You're not as bad as some other schools I have.' So basically, not being perfect, just being okay, was good," he said.

Some principals trying to improve their schools were frustrated by the constraints on their work. "I didn't even know what my total budget was, but what I could see and control was only about $14,000," recalled Murphy. "So, textbooks wouldn't arrive and teachers would be angry with me, but all I could do was call somebody in central office and beg them to deliver. Then they would maybe call the company, maybe not, depending on my relationship with the person I called."

Charter school principal Matt Hornbeck recalled the budgeting process: "We had phantom students because schools would create them to get additional staff," he said. "There were a lot of back-room deals, too. It used to be all about whether you could get somebody's cell phone number who could help you get what you needed, so squeaky wheels got the oil. It was very inequitable and inefficient, and it was not transparent."

Alonso was not surprised at what he heard and observed. "This was similar to many other places, which are all about control, control, control, with no real accountability. People in schools often feel

that they're confronting dilemmas daily, with a bureaucracy getting in the way as opposed to helping facilitate solutions."

Having observed the problem, Alonso developed a plan. "What we did was to say, we will make the conditions such that every school will have the opportunity to win," he explained. "The theory of action is very simple: The action is in the schools. The resources should be in the schools, and the community should be involved in decisions at the school level. With guidance and support from the district, our expectation is that schools are going to make better decisions about teaching and learning." One of the cornerstone initiatives that emerged from this belief was Fair Student Funding (FSF).

Fair Student Funding

Fair Student Funding was a response to what Alonso had heard in his listening tour as well as recognition that recent budget increases were coming to a standstill. "As we began to think of cutting," explained Alonso, "I wanted to have a rational system that would allow me to make good decisions about resources." In addition, he said, "across the district there was a sense of unfairness about how schools got money, so FSF was about making things fair and transparent."

Michael Frist, chief finance officer of BCPS, explained how FSF was different: "It was a shift in philosophy that said we need to fund the child, not the school. Regardless of where that child goes, whether it's a large school or small school, the money follows the child." Under FSF, every student was assigned a base amount of funding, and additional funding was allocated for some students based on their state test scores (see **Exhibit 3**). Students who scored basic and needed extra instruction were given extra funding; in addition, students who scored as advanced or gifted also received that extra amount.

Once the district leaders agreed that FSF was a necessary step, Alonso pushed them to move quickly. "He decided to do something in four months that we thought would take years," said one central office staffer. Another observed: "Dr. Alonso is very comfortable with messy. It won't be perfect the first time, and that's okay. It will be better than what we have and it will be better the next time we do it." Alonso explained his tolerance for an imperfect process: "We felt that we were setting off a current and, in the long run, that current would generate more light rather than less."

The SY09 budgeting process, which began in the spring of SY08, was the first implementation of FSF. Several aspects of the budget were unlocked to school control, including staffing and custodial services. The following year, special education funds were also unlocked. At the same time, central office staff worked to modify the formula as challenges arose. "What we put on this page and what schools experience are different," explained one staffer. For instance, the FSF team wrestled with how best to align funding with test scores, since strong weight on that component of the formula made budgets highly volatile. In addition, the formula was seen as complex and therefore not transparent enough, something the FSF team worked to improve even as more funds were unlocked.

In the span of just two years, principals shifted from controlling 3% of their budgets to controlling roughly 80%. "Instead of saying where the restrictions are," explained one district employee, "you say everything is on the table. It was hard for us here in central office because that's not the way we had thought about the work."

Reframing the Work at Central Office

As Alonso anticipated, the process of "getting it right" with FSF was challenging at all levels. "It was top-down at the beginning, with a lot of buy-in from individual sectors," he said. "The central office was almost being dragged."

One of the primary challenges facing central office staff was creating a new understanding of their work. "My goal for the system is not for everybody to be doing the same thing," explained Alonso. "For example, I want the whole system to move towards integrated learning and using authentic texts, but I'm not going to mandate that. I've tried to redefine the work as *knowing* what the schools are doing, rather than *telling* schools what they should do."

Some principals noticed a difference almost immediately. "Central office and schools used to have a tumultuous and standoffish relationship," said one principal. "Now we're forced, but in a good way, to understand how we work together." Another principal agreed: "When you call up central now, there's a different air. There's respect, and more attention to what you're asking for." Murphy sensed a new attitude, too: "For the most part there's a service leader mentality from central office now; we're lateral colleagues."

At the same time, there were parameters as to what schools were allowed to do. In order to help principals stay aligned with district expectations and legal requirements, Alonso directed his staff to develop what came to be known as guidance documents. "You have control over your budget," he explained, "but there are certain essentials that we need to see in these budgets."

Central office staff found it challenging to develop appropriate guidance documents. "The issue of bounded autonomy is a real struggle for us," said Tisha Edwards, chief of staff for BCPS. "We have to be willing to defer to schools, get counsel from schools, get guidance from schools, but we also have to have a guidepost for those conversations. When schools do their budgets with their communities, they should know where the stake's in the ground at central."

Guidance

BCPS developed a number of guidance documents to set the basic expectations for principals as they developed their budgets. "We have a list of about 30 guidance items," said Edwards. "The art of the guidance documents is not for them to be another set of rules that people follow, but to be guideposts. There are rules that put us within the four corners of this paper, but principals get to decide how they move around in that space." (See **Exhibit 4** for a list of guidance documents.)

One guidance document, for example, described enrichment programs. "Every school must have an enrichment program," explained Edwards, "but we don't have a centralized enrichment model. We include five best practices around enrichment, and a school could use those, or they could do enrichment in a very different way as long as it meets certain criteria." (See **Exhibit 5** for a sample guidance document.)

Other guidance documents described non-negotiable components of the school budget. The guidance document for library and media services, for example, simply described the Maryland state requirements for school media programs. Explained one principal: "I know unequivocally, there's no substitute – you've got to have a fully certified librarian. There are some rules you just can't break."

Aside from legal and state requirements, Alonso wanted the field to define practice as much as possible. "I trust the schools more than I trust central office," he explained. "I trust that in every

school there's a great teacher, and often many more than one. In central offices, it's usually one person, who might not be the most informed person, making rules that everyone else must follow."

 Developing guidance was a constant balancing act. Alonso explained:

> There's a tendency to go to the extremes. Either you tell everyone what to do or you let everybody do whatever they want. I think the goal is constantly figuring out the point in the middle, and in order to do that, you have to have very nimble people. Certain things are tight, but still intentionally undefined, and other things are tremendously loose – and the work of the central office is engaging in that tension. What's the guidance that has to be in place for people to be able to exercise autonomy with comfort, as opposed to constantly having to guess?

In practice, some principals questioned how well central office had found that balance. Despite Alonso's expectation that schools be allowed and encouraged to propose alternatives to recommended programs, one principal explained, "I think sometimes the people that are just under Dr. Alonso don't always understand his vision, so principals still get pushed. Everyone is encouraging us to go with one of the five choices given in a guidance document, and clearly there are one or two that are the favorites."

The struggle at central office to develop appropriate guidance also affected the flow of information to principals. At times, guidance wasn't timely enough for principals to use it well. Other times, a document would be sent out and then recalled a few hours later, making some principals wonder how well organized the budget process really was.

In addition, while principals welcomed the guidance that explained the schools' legal obligations for something like special education compliance, many questioned guidance that was specific to the district. For example, starting in SY11, every school was expected to have a webpage that complied with specific criteria. "I already have a webpage," said Murphy. "We teach our middle schoolers web design, and they design our webpage. So it doesn't look super professional, but it's a huge recruiting tool for us because people see kids designing a webpage. And the district is going to take that from me."

Other principals found the documents overwhelming. "Most principals are so overwhelmed with the day-to-day work of being a principal, they don't have time to look at the guidance," said one. "There are too many guidance documents, and too many pages." Sometimes the documents' wording presented challenges. In the first year of FSF, "there was some confusion about what the guidance said about custodial services," explained one principal. "Because I interpreted it a certain way, I ended up taking a significant hit on my budget, which left me with limited funds for supplies."

Overall, however, Hornbeck felt the system was a step in the right direction. "It's certainly better than having a closed conversation in central and retroactively informing the field of whatever policy has come up," he said. "The guidance is not a silver bullet, but we've got a bunch of principals who push back if they get unworkable ideas, so that's a good tension." Another principal agreed: "Now they're walking us through the guidance documents to be sure we understand them. As long as those types of supports and information are put in place, I think this is good."

Some principals found the guidance documents to be valuable. "Before FSF, there was no guidance," said one. "Now I read the guidance documents before I get started with the budget. It's not an easy read – it's not a love story – but it makes your life a lot easier. I can see the parameters I'm working with."

Central office staff agreed that the challenge of developing good guidance was met with varying degrees of success. Edwards explained: "Sometimes guidance documents are not created by the people who have bought into it," which resulted in some departments creating overly directive mandates. "It's a new belief system," said one staff member. "You don't want to give up what you have control over." For example, after a series of major snowstorms hit BCPS in the winter of SY10, a new guidance document required every school to buy a snow blower, an expectation that was questioned by some principals and quickly returned to central office for modification. "Sometimes we get it right and other times we don't," said Edwards. "If there are 10 levels of getting people to understand this shift in philosophy, even in central office, we're at level 2."

Engaging the Community

One aspect of FSF that was clear was the requirement to include communities in the process. It was mandatory for principals to consult with parents in developing their proposed budgets before submitting them to the CEO. "In order to get it approved," explained Principal Hornbeck, "you have to include the names and phone numbers of five parents who have been briefed. The district can call them and ask, 'Do you know anything about the budget?'"

In addition, the district surveyed each School Family Council, which included three elected parent representatives and two community members, to ensure that budget meetings took place, that the process was transparent, and that parents were satisfied with the process. In the first year of FSF, remembered Alonso, "there were six schools where the School Family Council said it wasn't kosher, so we went back and the principals had to rethink and resubmit."

Several principals struggled with this requirement. "At first," said one, "I thought, come on, I know what my priorities are, and those are the priorities of the parents, so why do I need to go put on some kind of show?" Other principals felt parent involvement was important, but found it challenging to bring parents in. "My parents are working, and I think that in high school in general, it's an area of weakness," explained Webber. "One of the things we've tried to do to ensure parent voices are in the school is have an open-door policy." Shaylin Todd, another principal, agreed. "In the beginning, the district said 'You've got to have parents,' and we said, 'We're holding these meetings and they're not coming.' And when parents did come, they said, 'What are you talking about? You're the leader – you make the decision.'"

Other principals were frustrated by the district's guidelines for parent involvement. Murphy explained:

> Instead of holding our budget session one night, I held a series of open office hours and we sent out invitations to parents to meet with me. We talked about the budget one-on-one or one-on-three, which got a lot of meaningful involvement from over 60 parents – but it didn't meet the district criteria for family engagement because I wasn't in the gym with a PowerPoint and an agenda. I've made adjustments to comply with the expectation, and parents say, "I worked all day, I don't want to come to school at 6:30 at night – can't I just shoot you an e-mail?" And I have to say, "No, I need you to come in here." So parent engagement this year has dropped significantly.

Other principals found it easier to collaborate with parents over time, as evidence of parent importance grew. "After the first year, parents said, 'they called me to check to make sure I was a part of this,' and I think that really upped the ante," said Todd. "Parents observed that we are listening, and they can make decisions."

As a result of this increased involvement, said another principal, "Even the parents who aren't at the table when we make the budget don't complain when something they wanted isn't in it. They understand that they had the opportunity, and they're supporting us." Todd agreed: "Educating parents around how decisions are made at the school level, how dollars are allocated, has fostered relationships of working together, because I'm not hiding anything. You're getting a chance to get to know me, and that means I get you to buy into our program."

Support Networks

In the first year of FSF, it was not immediately clear that principals embraced the new autonomy. Alonso recalled, "We knew there were going to be people who were going to see this challenge as 'what the hell are they doing to us?' not as, 'we have this extraordinary opportunity now to create schools from scratch.'" One central office staffer remembered the initial impact of the new system: "For the majority of principals, their goal was 'Can I replicate what I had last year without making any drastic changes?'" The spending patterns, for the most part, were very similar to what they had been before.

One administrator questioned the wisdom of giving principals this new task. "Principals were getting additional responsibilities, and it was overwhelming to them. You can't just come in day one and know how to do this. At the end of the year, some principals had no money because they were not managing it right and were not taught how to do this." Another principal agreed: "There's a lot on the plate. You can't be manager, administrator and instructional leader all at once – it's just impossible to do it all."

District leaders acknowledged that many principals saw their new responsibilities as challenging and even overwhelming at times. Alonso, however, did not see this as a reason to scale back FSF. "My expectation is that capacity will improve," he explained. "Where it doesn't, that signifies the need to have accountability conversations, not return to the control mentality that had been at work."

Central office staff realized that principals needed more support to be successful. "One of the things we didn't do well at first was training," remembered one district staffer. "We didn't train our principals well to be able to accept the responsibility." To help address this gap, school support networks were introduced in SY10, the second year of FSF. The purpose of these networks was to support principals with the managerial and operational aspects of their work so that the principals could focus on instructional leadership.

BCPS established 14 network teams, each with five members, including the team lead, an academic liaison, a student support and special education liaison, a business liaison, and a caseworker provided by the Department of Social Services (see **Exhibit 6**). A network team supported anywhere from 10 to 18 schools, with fewer schools in the elementary clusters, and more in the high school clusters. Every school in BCPS, including charter schools, was assigned to a network, though schools were not required to actively participate. Principals were directed to contact their network teams as a first line of support. "I don't expect a principal to call central office three times to get a mound of snow removed," explained Alonso. "I expect a principal to make a call to the network team, and then the team calls central three times if needed – the principal makes one call."

Another function of the networks was providing central office with insights into what was happening in the field. "You cannot treat every school the same way," explained Alonso. "You cannot create policy without understanding what the conditions are on the ground. Because the

network teams are interacting with schools at a granular level, they're bringing an enormous amount of data to the table at central office."

It was made clear from the beginning that the networks were not to be evaluative, a factor that was key in building initial relationships with principals. "It was great just to know their whole role is to support," said one principal. "Their role is not to dictate or to tell you what's wrong – it's really comfortable because it's not evaluative, and it's really honest." Of course, noted Alonso, "There's no such thing as non-evaluative once I have the information. It's not a clean line."

While ideally making the problem-solving process simpler, networks also required more initiative on the part of principals. "The teams introduced themselves to us, and explained how they could work with us," remembered one principal. "It's up to us to recognize where we need help and to take advantage of the support that's out there."

Networks in Action

Improving network quality was an ongoing focus for central office staff. The Office of School Support Networks was responsible for evaluating the teams, a process that included gathering feedback from principals on individual team members and on the effectiveness of the network structure more generally.

Several principals were initially concerned that the networks were a barrier rather than a support. "I have relationships established already with a group of people at central," said one principal. "So why do I need to go through a middle person when I can go directly to the person who can help me?" A central office staffer noted that the challenge ran in both directions: "We had to push our staff in central to say, 'I would love to help, but you should contact the folks in the networks.'"

Principal Hornbeck explained one of his concerns: "If they're servicing 15 schools with a team of 5 people, you're talking about extraordinary limits on what they're actually able to do," he said. "It's stimulating when they come to school – but because we're a high-performing school, they're going to go to other schools first."

Other principals disliked the approach taken by some network teams. "Many of them are people who have been displaced from other jobs in central office," observed one principal. "Some of the liaisons operate basically as a 'gotcha' mechanism, so I think they're still growing." In some cases, principals felt unsure of the best use of their networks. "I love my network," said one. "I'm with them all the time – but I'm not sure how the academic specialist fits in. We still have to learn to work together, because I use that piece the least."

Some principals were more satisfied with the support they received. "When there was a glitch with my budget tool, I contacted my business liaison, and he was sitting in my office the next morning at 7:30," said one principal. "So for me they have been really customer service driven."

Adapting to a New Reality

Even with the addition of school support networks, some principals struggled with the new expectations. Principal Webber explained: "When you've accepted a job as middle manager, your responsibility is getting your paperwork in on time. Some people were comfortable with the old system and don't want responsibility for this new one. Which is not to say these same people wouldn't sit at their desks for hours and toil away on meaningless e-mails. It's not that they won't work; it's the type of work they're being asked to do."

"When we're given that budget money," explained one principal, "it makes us have to be just that much smarter. It's a tremendous amount of responsibility. Never before have we been able to decide how our staff would look, the size of the classroom, what the schedule looks like, the kinds of partnerships we want to have."

With FSF, explained Murphy, "We are essentially the CEOs of our schools, and so we manage the direction of the building. For example, we voted as a school to become an unzoned school, and to get one of the advanced academic programs here, which meant we could have a more stable population. The old structure said no to that." Another principal felt empowered by the new structures: "Now I can create the kind of school environment I've always envisioned," she said. "As long as it's about the kids, it supports achievement, and you have parent and teacher backing, you can go ahead."

The principals who embraced the new system most quickly, according to some central staff members, were those who had previously worked on the fringes of the system, outside the established expectations. "Before, they were the pariahs because they weren't compliant," said one staffer. "They were successful principals, but they were seen as the worst because what we rewarded was compliance." Hornbeck, who welcomed the autonomy he gained with FSF, had what he called "a thick file of reprimands" before the new system came into place.

Several principals found that autonomy over curriculum had a direct impact on the classroom. "The upper grade teachers told me our reading program wasn't really working for them, though it was phenomenal for the lower grades" explained one principal.

> We have the ability now to choose something else for our upper grades. The reality is, if you want teachers to buy into something, they have to feel like they're a part of it. Before, the district would say everybody has to use a certain program, and sometimes I had to convince teachers to do something that I didn't even think was right. Now, with this autonomy, our leadership team can choose what we think is right for our students.

Other principals noted how their day-to-day tasks had changed under FSF. "Principals don't make decisions in isolation," said one principal. Webber agreed: "You're not supposed to be the expert in everything. You're supposed to have experts around you and work together collaboratively. I saw immediately I could get the data guy to do one piece and someone else to do another piece – you start building your team. Before, that kind of collaboration was all just talk."

In some cases, principals welcomed the increased control over staffing and curriculum but questioned other new duties. "I don't want to be in charge of my custodians," explained one. "When everybody was centrally staffed, I could call and ask for a replacement if one of my custodians was out. Now that they're assigned to specific schools, I have nowhere to go to get an extra person." Some principals welcomed rumors that SY11 would shift cafeterias under their control, while others felt that would add unnecessary responsibilities to an already full day. "I get needed for a lot more things than I did before," explained one principal. "So it takes away from instruction."

Over the first two years of implementing FSF, Alonso felt he saw a change in how principals thought about their work. "We've seen that they tend to make good decisions in terms of personnel," he explained. "For example, the number of administrators and aides has declined. In many places there had been an attempt to maintain what was there before, and the outcry was 'We can't keep our staff,' but the conversation over time has begun to shift toward 'What should our program be?' which I think is good for a system moving forward."

Edwards agreed: "This is very much an evolving process, switching over from principals who were trained to fill out budget documents that already told them how everything was going to be spent, to principals who see the need to make a budget document a statement of priorities about their school."

Holding Schools Accountable

There was widespread agreement in the district that many principals were uncertain when first faced with budgets. While Alonso saw it as his job to build capacity, he also recognized the need to move forward quickly. "I don't give people too much time, because I think that has been the bane of school systems: the extraordinary acceptance of mediocrity," he explained. "I'm very tolerant of mistakes, but I expect people to learn from them. If you don't acquire the capacity, then my job becomes to get rid of you."

Since 2005, the district had used a performance-based evaluation for principals. Principals submitted an annual school improvement plan along with personal and professional goals, and central office monitored progress on those goals throughout the year. At the end of each year, principals were evaluated as satisfactory or unsatisfactory on 14 criteria measures; 3 unsatisfactory criteria indicated an unsatisfactory evaluation. (See **Exhibit 7** for the evaluation rubric.)

Although Alonso did not change the evaluation framework, central office created data tools to support the evaluation process and to make it more objective. By the end of SY 09, the district had replaced approximately 40% of principals, which did not go unnoticed in the district. "There was a sense of fear from a lot of principals," said Murphy. "There was a really consistent message that the kids are going to come first, so you might be a great person, but if you're getting in the way of student performance, you're not great at your job. And we're going to work to make you better, but if you're not willing to do that, you're going to leave."

While principals were enthusiastic about the district's renewed dedication to putting student achievement first, many were uncertain how that achievement could be accurately measured under the current system. One principal explained: "On the state test, you've only got basic, proficient, and advanced, so it's either you fail, you pass, or you're really smart," he said. "You can make huge gains in basic, but that's still failing – you can't see that progress. I don't think we have the measures right now, and that's really the crux of it all: how do you judge a school, and what is the principal being held accountable for?"

Moving Forward

Alonso acknowledged the anxiety some principals felt. "Some principals have asked me, 'How can I be an instructional leader and a business manager?'" he said. "But in my mind, how can you possibly be an instructional leader when somebody's telling you how many teachers you need to have? If you're an instructional leader, you're figuring out the best way to serve the needs of your kids."

Over time, Alonso thought that the quality of the district was improving at many levels. "This has been a learning experience for them and for me," he said. "But there are so many principals now who feel free. So many teachers who feel there's something to this, and parents who feel they're now part of the game." In addition, the conversations at central office were evolving to what Alonso believed was a deeper level. One staffer explained, "We've been asking ourselves, what are the

systemic forces that could make a school chronically low-performing? As we study these schools, we need to learn: What are *we* doing? What do we need to do internally and reform organizationally so that we don't engineer schools for failure?"

Despite the progress he saw in the district, Alonso felt that there were many challenges still to be addressed. He had recently hired new staff to build a more systemic approach to the problems of weak evaluation systems, staff recruitment and retention challenges, and to address siloed work structures. In addition, questions remained about the strategies already in place. Was the FSF formula for distributing funds as fair as possible, or did it need further revision? How could central office make the FSF formula more transparent? What changes needed to be made to ensure that the networks were effectively tailoring support to each school? On a broader scale, what other changes were needed to keep pushing the culture of BCPS beyond the status quo? What should the district be doing to ensure that student performance continued to improve?

As principals adjusted to new expectations and central office wrestled with how best to support them, Alonso recognized the tensions. "Our most coherent strength," he said, "is our awareness of how messy we are."

Exhibit 1a   Performance of BCPS Students Grades 3 - 8 on the Maryland School Assessment (2004-2009)
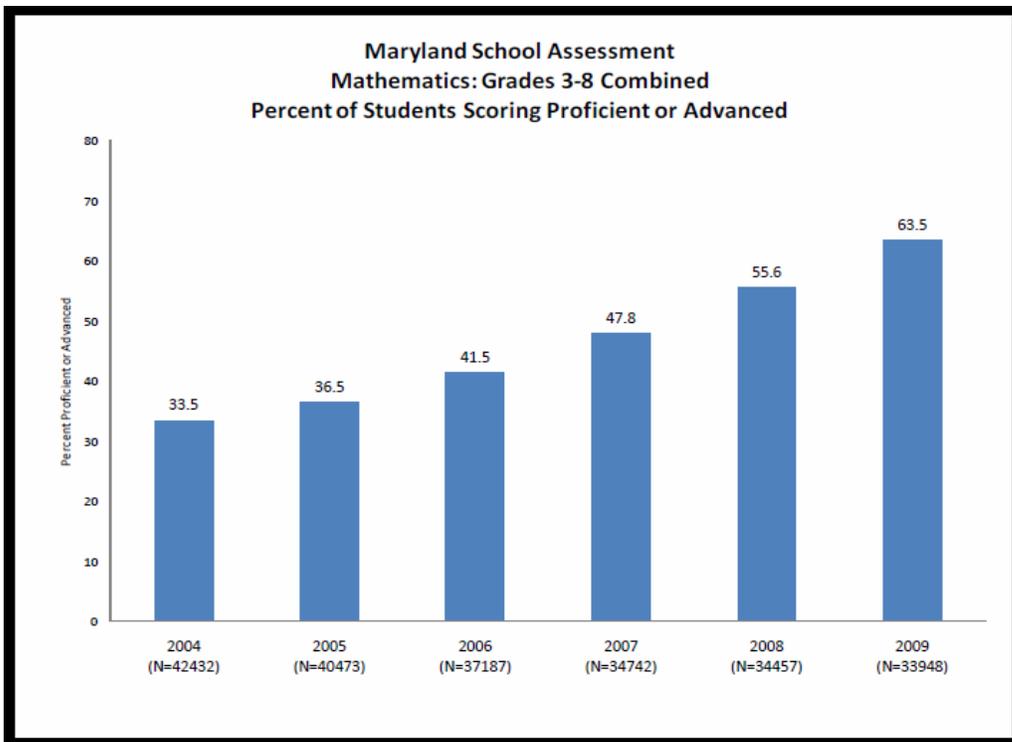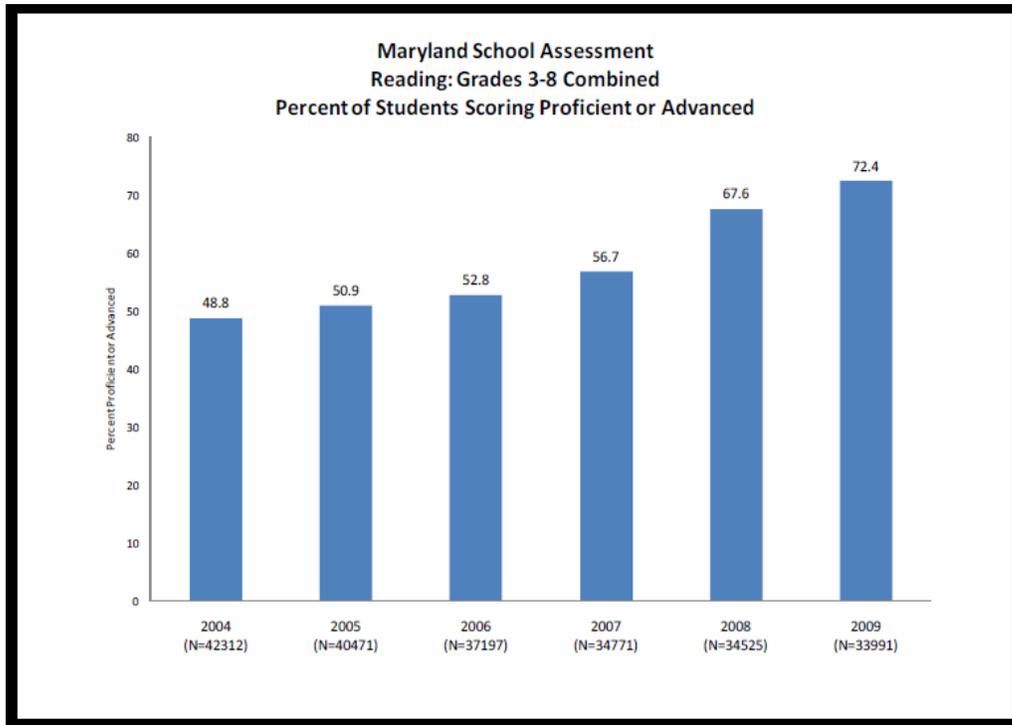
Source: School district document.

Exhibit 1b Percent of BCPS Students Scoring Proficient or Higher on the Maryland School Assessment (2004-2009)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Elementary Schools (4th grade)					
Reading (4th grade total)	65%	65%	73%	81%	78%
White	76%	71%	81%	83%	82%
Asian/Pacific Islander	76%	80%	89%	83%	96%
African-American	64%	65%	72%	80%	77%
Hispanic	51%	70%	73%	77%	79%
Math (4th grade total)	54%	63%	73%	80%	83%
White	68%	69%	83%	86%	89%
Asian/Pacific Islander	76%	90%	91%	93%	96%
African-American	52%	62%	72%	79%	83%
Hispanic	46%	69%	77%	82%	89%
Middle Schools (8th grade)					
Reading (8th grade total)	40%	39%	44%	49%	62%
White	58%	55%	62%	66%	76%
Asian/Pacific Islander	47%	71%	74%	78%	85%
African-American	38%	38%	43%	48%	60%
Hispanic	36%	35%	34%	45%	43%
Math (8th grade total)	20%	22%	24%	28%	39%
White	35%	36%	38%	45%	59%
Asian/Pacific Islander	39%	68%	67%	70%	82%
African-American	18%	20%	23%	27%	37%
Hispanic	18%	23%	25%	38%	50%
High Schools[a]					
English assessment (total)				65%	68%
White				83%	80%
Asian/Pacific Islander				70%	71%
African-American				63%	67%
Hispanic				69%	75%
Algebra assessment (total)				64%	66%
White				81%	80%
Asian/Pacific Islander				85%	83%
African-American				63%	65%
Hispanic				68%	67%
Graduation rate	59%	61%	60%	63%	63%

Source: Casewriter, based on data from the Maryland Report Card website http://www.mdreportcard.org, accessed on May 13, 2010.

[a]New Maryland State Assessments were implemented for English and Algebra in 2008.

Exhibit 2a   BCPS Revenue and Expenditures, 2008 – 2010 (in dollars)

	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
	Actual Budget	**Adopted Budget**	**Proposed Budget**
Revenue			
General Funds	1,034,686,706	1,055,574,282	1,062,219,415
Special revenue fund	171,796,232	144,639,278	202,931,245
Total Revenue	**1,206,482,938**	**1,200,213,560**	**1,265,150,660**
Expenditures			
General fund	1,019,644,052	1,055,574,282	1,062,219,415
Special revenue fund	171,755,753	144,639,278	202,931,245
Total Expenditures	**1,191,399,805**	**1,200,213,560**	**1,265,150,660**
Average per-pupil expenditures	**14,650**	**14,590**	**15,270**

Source: School district document.

Exhibit 2b   Budget Expenditures by Category, 2008 – 2010 (in dollars)

	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
	Actual Budget	**Adopted Budget**	**Proposed Budget**
Permanent Salaries	624,718,774	617,812,279	614,777,699
Other Wages	44,138,672	27,314,049	52,063,364
Contractual Services	155,334,298	158,970,093	180,917,674
Fringe	181,436,494	185,660,593	194,531,590
Materials	49,516,421	71,764,399	30,880,941
Utilities	32,599,326	32,706,462	32,966,059
Other Charges	9,416,228	7,928,969	53,228,729
Equipment	11,385,378	8,960,670	12,627,713
Transfers	65,423,733	64,426,354	71,473,970
Principal & Interest	17,430,481	19,669,692	16,682,921
Contingency Reserve	-	5,000,000	5,000,000
Total Operating	**1,191,399,805**	**1,200,213,560**	**1,265,150,660**

Source: School district document.

Exhibit 3   Explanation of Fair Student Funding Allocations (SY09)

Base funding for all students except self-contained special ed. pupils	**$3,940 per pupil**
Base funding for self-contained special ed. pupils	**$1282 per self-contained pupil** (not including devolved $)
Dollars devolved from central office	**$1,000 per pupil**
Drop-out prevention weight	**$900 per high school student eligible for free or reduced-price lunch**
Gifted weights	**$2,200 per advanced pupil, defined as…**
ES	Students scoring advanced on BOTH reading and math Grade 1 Stanford 10 tests, extrapolated to school population
MS	Students scoring advanced on AT LEAST ONE reading or math MSA tests; incoming 6th grade scores from prior year extrapolated to school population
HS	Students scoring advanced on AT LEAST ONE reading or math MSA tests; incoming 9th grade scores from prior year extrapolated to school population
K-8	Treat the K-5 grades as ES and the 6-8 grades as MS
Low-performance weights	**$2,200 per low-performing pupil, defined as…**
ES	% scoring "not ready" on the K-Readiness test
MS	% scoring basic on both reading and math MSA tests
HS	% scoring basic on both reading and math MSA tests
K-8	Treat the K-5 grades as ES and the 6-8 grades as MS
Hold harmless caps	
Loss cap	Losses capped at 15% of the current year budget, for year 1
Gain cap	Gains capped at 10% of the current year budget, for year 1
Locked dollars	**Unique to each school** (principals, vocational/ESOL/JROTC teachers, etc.)
Special revenue	Special ed. and grant dollars allocated out per school given guidelines

Source: School district document.

Exhibit 4   BCPS List of Guidance Documents (SY10)

CITY SCHOOLS FAIR STUDENT FUNDING III BUDGETING CHECKLIST

UPDATED MARCH 12, 2010

Use this document as a guide prior to budget submission to ensure that all items necessary were budgeted for at the school level. Reference appropriate guidance documents for more detailed information.

Budget Approval

- Interim Submission to FSF Budget Approvers (5 business days after on-site team visit)
- Final Submission to CEO (by May 14, 2010)

School Leadership, Values and Direction – Developed in Community Conversations

- School Mission and Vision
- SY 2009-2010Priorities (based on data)

Essential 1: Curriculum & Instruction that Supports High Achievement for Every Student

Enrichment Programming

- Algebra in 8th grade
- Comprehensive School Counseling & Guidance
- Library and Media Services
- Fine Arts
- Textbooks & Instructional Materials
- Learning to Work
- Summer Learning (Elementary-Middle and High School)
- Health Education
- Physical Education
- World Languages in Middle Grades
- Enrichment Programming
- Extended Learning
- IEP Team Chair and Case Management
- Summer IEP Team Process
- Special Education Teachers
- Special Education Para-professionals

Essential 2: Transformational Leadership that Promotes High Achievement for Every Student

- Collaborative Planning
- Professional Development Plan
- New Teacher Mentoring

GREAT KIDS
GREAT SCHOOLS

Essential 3: Family & Community Engagement that Promotes High Achievement for Every Student

- School Community Input Into Budget

Essential 4: Safe, Supportive Learning Environment that Promotes High Achievement for Every Student School Safety

- School Health Services
- School Social Workers
- Student Support Teams
- School Safety and Behavior Plans
- Youth Development

Essential 5: Resources that Promote High Achievement for Every Student

- Staffing Reference Guide (including instructional, administrative, substitutes, and temporary employees)
- Title I School Wide
- Title I Targeted Assistance
- Title II, Part A
- Custodial Duties and Contracts
- Stimulus School Facility Improvements

**GREAT KIDS
GREAT SCHOOLS**

Source: School district document.

Exhibit 5   BCPS Guidance Document

GREAT KIDS GREAT SCHOOLS	**BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CITY SCHOOLS) 203** **DIVISION: CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER OFFICE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING** **SUBJECT: NEW TEACHER MENTORING ALL SCHOOLS**

I.   **PURPOSE**: Explain the expectation that all schools must provide mentoring for new teachers to improve achievement for all of students.

II.   **ESSENTIAL**: *Transformational Leadership That Promotes Achievement for Every Student*

III.   **GOVERNING POLICY/REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS**: COMAR 13A.07.01Teacher Mentoring Programs; Education Article, §§2-205(c), 5-206-1, and 6-202(b), Annotated Code of Maryland

IV. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES:

A. All schools with new teachers must develop a school-based mentoring plan to support teachers during their first two (2) years of teaching.

1. New teacher is defined as any teacher who is (1) new to the profession or (2) new to the district.

2. Schools may choose from the options listed below and the budgeting associated with each option.

3. A mentor, or anyone acting in that capacity, must not be assigned to perform school-level administrative duties on a regular basis.

4. A mentor, or anyone acting in that capacity, must not participate in the formal evaluation of a mentee.

5. A mentor, or anyone acting in that capacity, should attend ongoing professional development and training, provided by the Office of Teaching and Learning, to address the specific and varied performance needs of mentees.

6. The maximum ratio of a full time mentor to mentee should be 1 mentor to 15 mentees.

   a. Any school with more than 15 new teachers should consider additional mentors.

7. The maximum ratio for schools choosing mentor options other than a full time or part time mentor should be 1 mentor to 5 mentees.

8. Each school must select from the models below, and the costs of the mentoring option selected must be included in the Budget Tool.

Option	Components	Description	Budgeting
A This option is recommended for schools with over 20% first or second year teachers.	Full Time Mentor 10 or 12 month After school professional development	A position is funded for the purpose of mentoring teachers in their first and second year. After school professional development is also provided to teachers at the school site for a minimum of 30 hours for the year.	10 month Mentor or 12 month Mentor $30 per hour +FICA for stipends to teachers and school based staff to provide after school professional development.
B	Shared Mentor 10 month or 12 month After school professional development	A position is shared between school sites for the purpose of mentoring teachers. Maximum of two (2) schools can share a mentor. After school professional development is also provided to teachers at the school site for a minimum of 30 hours for the year.	.5 - 10 month Mentor .5 - 12 month Mentor $30 per hour +FICA for stipends to teachers and school based staff to provide after school professional development.
C	Experienced Classroom Teacher provides mentoring support After school professional development	Support to new teachers is provided by an experienced classroom teacher who can be released from classroom instruction at intervals to mentor new teachers. After school professional development is also provided to teachers at the school site for a minimum of 30 hours for the year.	Substitutes for release of classroom teacher. Up to $100 per day + FICA Minimum $1,000 stipend +FICA for Experienced Teacher to act in the role of mentor. $30 per hour +FICA for stipends to teachers and school based staff to provide after school professional development.

D	Staff Developer / Department Head provides mentoring support After school professional	Support to new teachers is provided by a School Based Staff Developer or Department Head who can mentor new teachers. After school professional development is also provided to teachers at the school site for a minimum of 30 hours for the year.	$30 per hour +FICA for stipends to teachers and school based staff to provide after school professional development.
E	Site-Based After-Hours PD	A minimum of 30 hours of Site-Based Professional Development is provided to new teachers beyond the instructional day.	$30 per hour + FICA for each participant and instructor.

B. Mentoring support should include, but not be limited to support such as

1. Providing demonstration lessons
2. Classroom inter-visitations
3. Co-teaching activities
4. Coaching conferences
5. Co-planning lessons
6. Analyzing student data for instruction

C. Schools should select a mentor who possesses the following attributes:

1. Holds an advanced professional certificate;
2. Demonstrates knowledge of adult learning theory and peer coaching techniques;
3. Demonstrates a knowledge base and skills to address the performance evaluation criteria as outcomes to be met by each mentee

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Name of Contact Person: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, Coordinator, New Teacher Support

                              ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, Executive Director, Office of Teaching and Learning

Phone Number: ▮▮▮▮▮▮

Contact Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Source: School district document.

Exhibit 6   School Support Networks

What We Are:

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) launched School Support Networks July 1, 2009 to continue the work of putting kids first, and schools at the center of all that it, as a school system, does.

With increased school autonomy, the central office role has become one of guidance, support and accountability. It is to give schools the tools they need to succeed and, in exchange, hold schools accountable for student achievement.

The foundation for this new central office role is a system of School Support Networks that allows central office staff to redeploy resources to better deliver services to schools. By offering guidance and support in the areas of instruction, achievement, business and student support services, these networks are a resource for the instructional and operational needs of schools so that students, in turn, have what they need to achieve.

What We Do:

School Support Networks provide a streamlined model for problem-solving, communication and central office collaboration and support to schools. They work to ensure that schools are satisfied with the quantity, quality and type of support they receive; that schools' capacity increases as a result of that support; and that schools are equipped to meet their students' needs, as well as the district's and larger community's high expectations. School Support Networks share responsibility for ensuring that: schools meet their federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets; meet or exceed their previous year's performance, according to the School Accountability Baseline Tool; and make progress towards their own school-wide objectives.

Network Team Members:

Team Lead – responsible for supervising, coordinating, and managing the work of the team.

Academic Liaison – works with the Office of Teaching and Learning to help principals access the resources that are available to support academic programs and instruction. No authority to do formal observations, but can informally support instruction at the school level.

Student Support / Special Education liaison – work with the Student Support and Special Education offices as conduits between principals and the experts on compliance issues.

Business Liaison – Responsible for interacting with multiple departments at the central office in order to provide managerial, operational, and technical support to schools.

Department of Social Services Caseworker (not a BCPS employee) – works with the Student Support Office and outside agencies to provide social services support to schools.

Source: Compiled from school district documents.

Exhibit 7   Principals' Annual Evaluation Report

Criteria	S	U	Comments
1. Facilitates the development of a school vision.			
2. Aligns all aspects of a school culture to student and adult learning.			
3. Monitors the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.			
4. Improves instructional practices through the purposeful observation and evaluation of teachers.			
5. Ensures the regular integration of appropriate assessment into daily classroom instruction.			
6. Uses multiple sources of data to improve classroom instruction.			
7. Provides staff with focused, sustained, research-based professional development.			
8. Engages community stakeholders in a shared responsibility for student and school success.			
9. Promotes increased student attendance.			

Criteria	S	U	Comments
10. Provides a safe, orderly school environment.			
11. Secures services from appropriate divisions, departments, and offices that effectively support the educational program and non-instructional services in the building.			
12. Ensures compliance with laws, regulations, statutes, rules and policies affecting the Baltimore City Public School System with a special focus on the Special Education Implementation Plan.			
13. Handles Level I grievance actions effectively and appropriately.			
14. Maintains appropriate standards of professionalism, including completing and submitting all requests for information in a timely manner.			

Dispersal Legend: Personnel – White; Evaluatee – Canary; Evaluator – Pink

Source: School district document.