

Open Work Session

Quarterly Work Session with Board of Education

October 18, 2022

Dr. Micah Stauffer, Superintendent; Mr. Gene Malone, Chair of the Board of Education; Ms. Kimberly Miles, Assistant Superintendent with Student and Family Services; and Dr. Brian Raygor, Chief Finance and Operations Officer, came before Council. Dr. Stauffer introduced Jesse Reid, Comptroller, who was in the audience. After passing out his agenda, Dr. Stauffer said the first three items are items the Council asked for and requested be included on the agenda.

Grant Writer Position

Dr. Stauffer said he will briefly give a summary of their Grant Writer, or what they call Grant Specialist position, for the Board of Education, which has been in place for the Board of Education for about 15 years. He said their current Grant Specialist has been there for about 12 years, and she previously worked in a finance-related department for Wicomico County Public Schools. He said she has an Associates of Art degree and finance business administration in those areas, and she has done a number of trainings, such as Microsoft Word. He said she basically is a coordinator in a sense where she works with Department Heads regarding grants specifically and is the point person for all grants coming into the Board of Education. He said she advertises those and makes sure they get to the Department Heads and then she coordinates meetings with those Department Heads and works with them to fill in the information for the grant, and then also helps a lot in the areas of submitting that grant and then following up with the grant provider themselves.

Mr. Holloway asked if she also administers the grants, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, she is the coordinator for that, but the Department Heads themselves are who maintain those funds and also work to provide any data or information back to the grant provider. Mr. Holloway said a Grant Administrator oversees all the grants that go out. He said the Council was told by their Finance Director at the last meeting that they have to have a Grant Administrator and a Grant Writer. Mr. McCain said it almost sounds like that is what this person actually is. He said the term says Grant Writer, but they are really the one who is coordinating it with the Department Heads. Mr. Holloway said she writes the grants too, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, she coordinates the writing and the filling in of the grants, but a lot of the Department Heads themselves, depending on what the grant is for, do a lot of the body of the grant. Mr. Dodd said she is the point person, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, she is the point person and specialist, which would probably be more closely related to what they are talking about.

Mr. Dodd said they had a heavy discussion on this at the last meeting, and, being a former Board Member, he always brags about her and talks about how she would always come to the Board meetings and give an update on all the grants that were written and update all the grants received, and there has always been discussion that the County probably should get a Grant Writer. He said then the discussion came up about the difference in a Grants Writer and a Grant Administrator, and someone said the grant person should be in the Department of Finance, and another said it should be in a different position, so the Council is kind of getting an idea on how the Board of Education does it. Dr. Stauffer responded, their Grant Specialist is actually in the Department of the Office of School Improvement, so she works very closely with teachers, school administrators, and also central office staff, as well as Department

Heads, and is very familiar with the grant providers locally and also at the State level. Mr. Dodd said the terminology Grant Specialist seems to go a long way.

Inclement Weather Process

Ms. Miles said the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) approved a 2022-2023 virtual day instruction plan, and she will give the details as to what is involved in that. She said this had to get their Board approval, which occurred at their August 9th Board meeting, and it was submitted and approved at the State level just a few days after that. She said MSDE provided the opportunity for the use of virtual days with some very specific parameters. She said they can have up to eight, and they can be used for areas that could include but are not limited to inclement weather days, i.e. snow days, staff professional learning days, high school graduation days to enable teachers to assist with and attend the graduations, or other similar circumstances, such as an election day, SAT administration day when they have a large number coming in and perhaps not all students in the school by grade level are taking part. She said the specific parameter is that, of the eight days permitted maximum as virtual school days, no more than three of those eight may be used as asynchronous. She said she knows they have heard the term asynchronous from many other times they have been before the Council from different people in different roles, but they are looking at asynchronous as the time the student is not engaged with the teacher through electronic transmission, but is working independently.

Ms. Miles said a question that has come up with regard to planning is what happens when they have a snow day and they have to make an announcement. She said, first of all, it will be communicated to families in advance as they are not looking at a single-day weather incident as being the prompt for a virtual day. She said there is still such a thing as a possible snow day where there is a school cancellation, but, if they get a large storm and they know by road and sidewalk conditions and other conditions that they are not going to be able to transport students to school in the manner they need to for multiple days, then they would meet and concur on the use of virtual days and announce to families in advance to let them know that this will be occurring.

Ms. Miles said that is where they are on the plan at this point, and they do not want anyone to think if it is snowy on a Tuesday that they are going to come on the air at 5:30 when the news media begins announcing that it is a virtual day as there will be more of a lead way for families before that. She said of course they are going to encourage, as always, for their students to take their technology home with them when that is appropriate so they are prepared. She said they have what has been identified as a well-developed plan, and, again, their plan has been approved by their Board as well as by MSDE.

Mr. Cannon said he applauds them for being ready as an educational agency. He then asked, if all of a sudden it is a snow day, how are the families really effectively going to be prepared for that? He further asked if everything is already in place with computers in the homes and internet access, and have they through COVID managed to establish such a program that is still in existence now so they can cut the light switch on and off and go virtual, to which Ms. Miles responded, they have continued much of what was put in place for preparation. She said part of that is routine, such as having the students take their technology with them as appropriate at the end of the day so they are transporting it, but they are also very realistic. She clarified, they know there are spots across the County that may have difficulty with internet access, and they also have provisions within the plan for attendance and acceptance of student work for grading at a date after the date assigned if there is difficulty with technology. She clarified, it is not a perfect setup, but they have tried to consider through what they have learned over the past two

years what is needed to support their families and their students, and they have that in place. She said their administrators have messages to share with families just as reminders of what this could look like moving forward, and, again, that routine of having their materials. She said she is not going to ask any of the Councilmembers to think back, but perhaps when she was in middle school she might have had a routine and she might have forgotten it a couple of days, and they are going to work with those families as well. She said it was probably more than a couple of days on her part, but she will own that there may be other students who forget on an occasion, and they are going to work with them.

Mr. Cannon asked if the students are still in possession of all the computers that were handed out for virtual learning, to which Ms. Miles responded, every student still has a computer, and it is not only for virtual learning, it is also a learning tool used in the classrooms.

Mr. Dodd said he remembers during COVID when that was brought up and he asked if this was going to be the way of the future with buying more laptops for every student, and they were told yes. He then asked if they are buying new laptops every year, to which Ms. Miles responded, there is a timeline process in place for the replacement, just as home laptops may need to be replaced or repaired after a period of time. She said there is a preestablished schedule, and there is also a response team for repairs that may be needed, and she would hope they would always look at the laptops as a tool for learning and not the only platform for learning. Mr. Dodd asked if new freshmen are getting laptops, to which Ms. Miles responded, all students in all grade levels have laptops.

Dr. Stauffer said, just for understanding and for the general public, if it were to snow and schools needed to be cancelled, most likely that would still be a snow day as it has been in the past. He said they have options from that point, as they are allowed through the State to have three asynchronous days that could be made up in a different way prior to the end of the school year. He said it could be a professional development day that they already have on their calendar, but students could be assigned work to do while they are out of school that day and then that would be counted as a day of school, or it could be something where, if it snowed and they know they are going to be out of school for several days, they could say on day three, for instance, they will have a virtual learning day, and they can plan that in advance, and that could also count as a day of school as well. He said they do have some flexibility, as the State has provided that this year, and they are trying to take advantage of that.

Mr. Dodd said kids love snow days, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they will still be around.

Capital Improvement Projects Update

Dr. Raygor said they have some exciting things going on in some of their buildings, and, if they have been around the County, they have seen two major projects - one wrapping up, and one that is well underway. He said the one wrapping up is Beaver Run Elementary that opened to staff in June and to students in September. He said right now there is some ongoing work with the site in terms of bus loop and parking, but the phase 2 site work is done. He said the bus loop and canopy is in place out front, and there is also some temporary parking, and as they continue through phase 2 and phase 3, they will add permanent visitor and staff parking, and, finally, phase 4 will be to remove the temporary parking and use that for P.E. playground space and have the parent drop off on the east side of the building completed. He said that should all be in place through this school year and into the summer, but the inside of the school is 100 percent done and students are there today, and it is a beautiful school.

Dr. Raygor said Mardela got underway right at the very end of school in June, and a lot of work was completed over the summer. He said there used to be a house on the corner of Delmar and Sharptown Road, but they acquired that property and that is now additional parking, and will eventually be where the buses come into the building for drop off. He said there are a number of portables out front, and they have two large multi-classroom portables and a number of the smaller traditional single classroom portables that have much of the instruction now because the northside of the building and classrooms along the back of the building closer to the athletic fields has been completely demolished and a lot of work is underway now. He said concrete has been put in place and steel is now being erected for the new classrooms. He said a lot of work out front has been done also with stormwater, and he thinks there are four stormwater management ponds that are not the traditional open water ponds, but they will fill after a rain event and then drain after about a day similar to what they see at Bennett Middle. He said the front parking lot has been moved closer to the road because what was the parking lot is now home to the portables, and existing utilities have been rerouted to facilitate the use of the portables. He said they have about 85 percent of the concrete footings done, about 50 percent of the slabs done, and steel is going up and major mechanical equipment is starting to arrive on site. He said there are certainly concerns with supply chain issues, and they are seeing that with all purchases they are making, so they are getting those items on site as they can and storing them on site. He said there is a new mechanical room that is going to be on the northeast corner of the building, so they are getting that equipment, and as soon as that is up they can begin populating that equipment into that new mechanical room.

Mr. McCain said he was going to ask if anything on the supply side is holding them up, or is everything still staying on target with scheduling, to which Dr. Raygor responded, the timeline is still on, and the big concern is through next summer to have the north side of the building completed where they have the high school classroom wing under construction now. He said, for the cafeteria and fine art rooms, the plan is to have those done by the end of summer and then during the summer they can actually remove some of the portables out front as they will be moving some of the instruction back into the building.

Dr. Raygor said phase 2 next summer will be looking at doing the gymnasium and lockers, and phase 3 starting next summer going into the school year will be additional classrooms, mostly specials, tech ed, foreign language, business education, as well as the middle school classrooms that will be towards the front of the building on the left. He said, finally, phase 4 takes them into August 2025, which would be administration, media center, and the final site work and bus loop.

Mr. Cannon asked if the next school on the agenda is Fruitland Primary, to which Dr. Raygor responded, yes. He said Fruitland Primary had the ed specs approved at the last Board meeting, and they have a meeting tomorrow with their planning construction folks, and they are coming back here to meet with folks at the County Office to begin looking at the capital improvement plan and how they will move forward with that.

Mr. Cannon said, looking at their CIP, he appreciates getting that, and he was literally shocked at Wicomico High costing over \$6.7 million as far as roof renovations, to which Dr. Raygor responded, it is a large building, actually multiple buildings, are all single story, so they have a lot of square footage over multiple buildings, so it is a pretty extensive project. Mr. Cannon said this is something he hates to say, but maybe instead of the \$6.7 million they should be looking at doing more heavy renovations or replacement as opposed to investing \$6.7 million in the school, to which Dr. Raygor responded, it is a new roof system, so it is a pretty heavy renovation, and along with that they are able to use a lot of the

CARES funding to take care of the HVAC at the same time. Mr. Cannon asked if the HVAC is included in the \$6.7, to which Dr. Raygor responded, no, that is separate and is CARES funding.

Dr. Stauffer said Ms. Ashby and Ms. Campbell are doing a great job of threading money and funding sources together so that, not only is there a complete roof renovation on all of those buildings of that campus style school, but also the HVAC system that are uni-vents that he believes are back from the mid-90s that they have been relying on for the heating and cooling of Wi High will all be replaced in conjunction with this roof project. He said they are also looking at lighting and doing a number of other things and trying to thread some things together for the overall project itself.

Mr. Cannon asked what the age of that school is, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it was built in the 1950s. Mr. Cannon said it just seems like a lot of money, to which Mr. McCain responded, it is a lot of square feet with the one-story concept as opposed to traditional schools with two stories, so the roof area is probably half at other schools compared to the one-story campus style of Wi High.

Mr. Malone said the cost of construction is certainly not getting any cheaper either, so that adds to it.

Mr. Cannon said this is all County funding going for the roof, and they know it is going to be at least \$7 million, so when the County spends \$7 million on a roof, should the County maybe look at what their investment is on a renovation or replacement? He clarified, they know it is going to be multiples more, but he is just wondering about what might be better for the long-term, so he is just throwing that out there, but he is one person, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they definitely look at those kinds of things when they look at the systems of the school. He said they have engineers who come through and make recommendations, and the School Building Commission certainly reviews those very closely, and then makes recommendations from there. He said obviously a project like Mardela they know is north of \$72 million dollars and a much smaller school and what is being done there, and Wi High is definitely a larger school and this is a large project, but he is excited about the fact that they are able to take a number of funding sources to re-do some things, not only just the roof, but other things within the school as well.

Mr. Reid, speaking from the audience, said Wi High was last renovated in 1996.

Mr. Dodd asked when they think the next renovation will happen on that particular school, to which Dr. Raygor responded, the renovation schedule is driven in large part by the Educational Facilities Master Plan and, as their staff looks at the condition of various systems in the building, they are then ranked, scored, and the CIP is then developed based upon those rankings.

Dr. Stauffer explained, as they do projects, the rankings change all the time because it is based off of the facility condition, and it is also based off of the quality of the facility, how large the enrollment is, what types of programs each school has or may need, and it depends on whether it is an elementary, middle, or high school. He said from there, as they look at all the systems within the school, that will determine what the condition of the school is and then they also look at all the programs and what the quality of the school is, and then all of that is combined, and that is how their priorities are ranked in the CIP.

Mr. Dodd said he was going to ask what the next two or three schools would be on the priority list, but that always changes, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it always changes as they are doing all of these projects, whether they be HVAC projects at a number of schools, or roofing projects, but that is going to change the priority.

Mr. Malone added, it is a mammoth job for these guys because then they also have to try to project where the enrollment is going to grow, and there are pockets of growth in the enrollment. He said, looking at Delmar, for example, that whole area has grown by leaps and bounds. He said that is the County's biggest elementary school, and he does not know where the property is that they could expand that any further, but they are constantly looking at that.

Mr. Dodd said he saw that school discussed on social media last week and there was discussion about what should be done between both Counties, to which Mr. Malone responded, for Delmar that is always a topic because of the bi-State agreement.

Mr. Holloway said he serves on the Planning and Zoning Commission, and three or four months ago they were talking about the development that is going behind Vernon Powell between there and Brown Road, and he asked a question about whether they got in touch with the School Board and if they had any issues as that is a lot of growth with 370-some homes. He said then something came up at the meeting before that about a large development. He then asked if the Board expressed any concerns to the Planning and Zoning Commission when these large developments come along? He said he just heard a concern about Delmar, to which Mr. Malone responded, he definitely has a concern. He said they are not usually asked, but that is a great idea, and maybe they should be. Mr. Holloway said they have been asked because they asked the Board about that one, and they asked the Board about the next one because they said the School Board had no problem with it, so they were asked about those two. He said they are talking about large developments coming in.

Dr. Stauffer clarified, he does not know that he has been involved in any of those conversations, to which Mr. Holloway responded, he is talking about the School Board, not administration, that is who he asked. Mr. Malone said, as for the School Board, he cannot recall anybody asking them about where the next development is going to go and what it is going to do to the schools, not since he has been on the Board. He clarified that no one has asked him. Dr. Stauffer said many times communication occurs after the fact in saying that this is coming, and they find out and then they inquire of Planning and Zoning what kind of community it is going to be, or how many homes or units it will be, but that is the kind of information they inquire about. Mr. Holloway said he guesses they are getting mixed messages because they are saying the school has no problem with it.

Mr. Dodd asked if it is Parsons Lake, to which Mr. Holloway responded, yes. Mr. Dodd said that should have been approved many years ago for development. Mr. Holloway said it just came in front of Planning and Zoning, to which Mr. Dodd responded, this is the second burst of development there.

Dr. Stauffer said they would certainly be open to any kind of communication, to which Mr. Holloway responded, he just thought the school system should be concerned about this. Dr. Stauffer clarified, they are concerned, but the information is not getting to them. Mr. Holloway said someone building 300 homes in a development is a lot different than someone building a home in the country on one lot, to which Dr. Stauffer agreed. Mr. Cannon asked if that is on Planning and Zoning's checklist because that is where it should start, to which Mr. Holloway responded, until he brought it up it was not.

Mr. Hastings said there are multiple counties that have adequate public facility ordinances (APFO), which are basically meant to do exactly that, to make sure they have adequate public facilities. He said it is kind of a different process the way they have handled things here, but maybe that should be better interplay because obviously they want to grow. He clarified, he does not want an APFO.

Mr. Mitchell said he could offer from the City perspective, since he represents Fruitland. He said Fruitland does not have anything to do with the schools, so when a developer comes in it really does not come up to their Planning Commission, and they do not have that ordinance on adequate facilities.

Mr. Malone said it sounds like they could do better with the dialogue between all, and, to Mr. Holloway's point, they should have those conversations. Mr. Cannon said they have to have something in place, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, there should be a process. Mr. Cannon said he thinks, from what Mr. Holloway says, they have that in place, but he does not know who their contact is, whether it is the superintendent or the Board, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it would go through Planning Construction with Ms. Ashby and Ms. Campbell.

Maryland Blueprint Update

Dr. Stauffer said Dr. Briggs sends his regards as he has been under the weather and is on the mend from that, but he provided some information to review with the Council regarding Blueprint. He said it is definitely changing and changing rapidly as they are gaining more information from not only MSDE, but, more importantly, the new Accountability and Implementation Board from the Governor's Office regarding Blueprint and the things that are coming from that. He said, having provided this information in the past to the Council, they will remember there are five main pillars of the Blueprint, which are early childhood education, high quality and diverse teachers and leaders or workforce, college and career readiness including CTE, ensuring that they have the resources they need to help all students be successful, and lastly, governance and accountability.

Dr. Stauffer said, regarding early childhood education, that is now coming with more information as they are expanding pre-K. He said they have been working on that in Wicomico County now for a number of years under the previous Superintendent, Dr. Hanlin, and they are continuing to do that. He said that is now going even further into pre-K3 students. He said he feels like, as far as their County, they are in the lead close to the top around the State regarding what they provide for pre-K4 students, but that is also now expanding into pre-K3 students. He said they have almost 800 pre-K students with close to 700 being pre-K4 students and then a little over 100 pre-K3 students. He said that is definitely an expanding area here in Wicomico County.

Mr. McCain asked if they have to qualify to be in pre-K3, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they are prioritized according to the household income. Mr. Cannon asked, what about pre-K4, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, pre-K4 is more what they would call universal. He clarified, it is still prioritized, but they are pretty much able to meet the needs of their community for pre-K4. He said pre-K3 is different, and that will be a growing area as they move forward. Mr. McCain asked if the Blueprint calls for universal pre-K4, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, yes.

Mr. Dodd asked when Dr. Stauffer thinks the County will be ready, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, at this point they are definitely meeting the needs of where they are for enrollment with pre-K4 students and offering that to their four year olds around the community. He said, as far as pre-K3, they have a little over 100 students currently in the pre-K3 program, and most of those students are coming from households of poverty, or they may be English language learners, or they may have some other area of need and support, but, as they grow that, the scale for the household income continues to increase. He said currently it is at what they call 300 percent poverty level or below, and that will go to 600 percent.

He said there is a whole scale where that will continue to grow the numbers of pre-K3 students as they move forward over the next ten years of the Blueprint Implementation Plan.

Dr. Stauffer said, as far as high quality and diverse teachers and leaders, they have already met the 10 percent increase in pay for teachers over the course of the last few years, and then over the course of the next few years they have to get to a level of a minimum starting salary of \$60,000. He said also the State is providing for increased rigor of education licensure and teacher prep programs, so that is along those same lines, and then it is looking to establish new Statewide education career ladders to continually improve the professional development and professional practice of teachers. He clarified, even though those salaries are increasing, the requirements for teachers as they move forward will continue to increase.

Mr. Dodd asked what would determine a higher starting salary than the \$60,000 base, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, national board certification is one area that will come with an increase in salary, and then continued education, and also continued roles and responsibilities as far as if a teacher is a leader among teachers and providing some professional development as that can help them continue to go up the ladder. Mr. Dodd asked how the Board knows that teacher is a leader before they offer a starting salary, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they first have to have that national board certification and then once they get on the career ladder they would have to meet additional requirements that put them in those positions. Mr. Dodd said that is not a bad starting salary, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it is definitely very competitive.

Mr. Holloway asked how their bonus program is coming along, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it went well. He said it was very well received, and that was a part of the Grow Your Own initiative from the State with the grant they were able to provide their teachers to help in recruiting and also retaining. He said that will go through three installments with one at the beginning of the school year for those coming on board, one in the middle of the year for those who are staying, and one at the end of the year. Mr. Holloway said he thought it went all the way through the system, not just to the teachers, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it did. He clarified, it is for all fulltime employees. Mr. Holloway clarified, except for bus drivers, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, all fulltime employees.

Mr. Dodd asked if they had to sign a contract to take this bonus, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, yes they signed a year contract.

Dr. Stauffer said, regarding college and career readiness, as they know, they have a great CTE program, so that will be additional funding and requirements to expand CTE as well as dual enrollment.

Mr. Cannon said he thinks that is really so important. He then asked if there are any improvements on public-private partnerships, especially through CTE. He said he knows they are finally building a house again, which they have not done in a while. He said they were building dog houses as opposed to real houses, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they are building a house, and they continue that partnership, and also they are always looking for industry partners. He said the State of Maryland is looking towards not only CTE with their on-the-job training that they currently do, but also expanding in the area of what they call apprenticeships where they can gain additional work experience. He said they do have some requirements that the employer would have to meet in order to be able to come on board with that, but they are always working through Brian Ashby in the community to expand those.

Mr. Holloway said he noticed one of the automobile dealerships have set up their own kind of CTE program for training. He then asked if that is saying that the school CTE was not advanced enough, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, no. He said he is not completely familiar, so does not want to misspeak, but he would say that what they are able to provide at Pohanka for adult learners is very similar to what they are providing for students in 11th and 12th grade at CTE. Mr. McCain clarified, that is a nonprofit program mainly targeted at, as Dr. Stauffer said, adults who have been incarcerated, and then they can get into the training program to be an auto mechanic, to which Mr. Holloway responded, that is not what it said in the paper, and he figured it was for anybody who was interested, but he did not know it was just for inmates or whatever. Dr. Stauffer said he does not know that, but he knows it is mostly geared towards those who are out of high school. Mr. Cannon said he thinks Mr. McCain is correct that it is for inmates, to which Mr. McCain responded, Vehicles for Change is the name of the nonprofit.

Mr. Dodd asked if Wicomico is doing dual enrollment with Wor-Wic, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they have three partners – Wor-Wic, Salisbury University, and UMES. Mr. Dodd said that is good because he saw one of the schools in Worcester County was partnering with Salisbury University, so he was going to ask about Wicomico, but that is good. Dr. Stauffer said they have that partnership as well, and they are continuing to grow the dual enrollment program. He said it is the goal of Blueprint over the course of the next ten years that every student graduate college and/or career ready, which means that they should be either through some type of advanced high school program like dual enrollment or in a career technology education program.

Mr. Dodd asked if the students still have to take a separate test than the high school test to get the college credit, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, there are advanced placement courses in the high schools that some universities or colleges will accept the scores for in lieu of credit, and then with dual enrollment they are actually getting the college credits at the institution, whether it be Wor-Wic, Salisbury University, or UMES. He clarified, they are completing those courses and getting those credits. Mr. Dodd asked if they have to attend in-person, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, yes. Mr. Dodd asked if the advanced placement students just take the class and then have to take a college test, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, that is correct, the college board AP test, and those classes are right in their high schools. Mr. Dodd said it makes good sense for a student to take those courses for the credit.

Dr. Stauffer said, regarding ensuring resources for all students, Ms. Miles will touch on this with the next agenda item, but they are continuing to grow in the areas of English language learners here in Wicomico County and students of poverty, which percentage is continuing to maintain and grow as well, and also special education as those needs continue to grow. He said Blueprint provides for each of those different populations and the needs they have. He clarified, they have not always been funded as a school system to meet the needs of those students, but this is additional funding that goes directly towards those students in meeting their unique learning needs.

Dr. Stauffer said, regarding the timeline, they have a steering committee for Blueprint in Wicomico County Public Schools that is currently meeting and they also have work groups for each of the areas – early childhood education, high performing workforce, college and career readiness, CTE, and then additional resources for students. He said they have a work group for each of those areas of Blueprint, and they are currently meeting and developing a plan. He said they are waiting on the final template from the Accountability and Implementation Board, and they are expecting that in the next couple of weeks. He said then over the course between now and March they will be creating their own local

implementation plan through those work groups. He said those work groups have stakeholders from the community; for instance, some of their pre-K providers and daycares are on the early childhood education workgroup, and those work groups will be helping them to write that plan that they ultimately will submit to the State later this spring.

Mr. McCain said he thought he read something in the past few days where some of the time tables had been pushed back, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, without getting into too much detail, he will say that the time tables for some of Blueprint have been pushed back, so the plan they will submit to the State will not be the full comprehensive ten-year plan, it will be a plan that they will be looking at locally in the next one to two years. He said they have taken that large scope of what they call Blueprint and the implementation of that over ten years and narrowed the focus a little bit so they are going to first focus on turning into the State what they have to accomplish in the next one to two years.

Enrollment Update

Ms. Miles said all they have been talking about and hearing about are their facilities, staffing, and amazing programs, which is all based on and supportive of their students, and that boils down to enrollment. She said she can share with Council that as of today they have 15,037 students in Wicomico County Public Schools, which is a continued return and surpassing the most recent years. She said she can go back to the school year 2019-2020 where they had 15,203, and in 2020-2021 they dipped to 14,354, but they started to come back a bit last year with 14,664. She said she had to update this number to add 27 more students from last week when she presented the numbers to the Board of Education, but, again, as of today, 15,037 students. She said, as Dr. Stauffer mentioned earlier when he was speaking of priority four, special service groups, their English language learners currently as of today are 1,546 students being served, roughly 10 percent of their student body. She said they have 1,522 students being served for special education keeping in mind that if she came before Council in a week, those numbers would probably be different and would very possibly be increasing. She said their schools are filling in a good way that is inclusive of all students in pre-K3 through 12th grade, and they are seeing the increases across the board in terms of which grade levels have students coming and/or returning.

Mr. Cannon asked if the 15,000 is all fulltime enrollment (FTE), to which Ms. Miles responded, these are students who are currently attending their fulltime programs. Mr. Cannon asked if pre-K is considered fulltime, to which Ms. Miles responded, they are counted in FTE. Dr. Stauffer clarified, the pre-K programs are full day programs. Mr. Cannon asked what the number is for pre-K, to which Ms. Miles responded, 118 as of yesterday in pre-K3, and pre-K4 has 672, which is where they come up with the roughly 800 in their pre-K program because those two components together form their pre-K program.


Mr. Holloway said his concerns about development are founded due to the fact that the enrollment is going down, to which Ms. Miles responded, no, enrollment is going up. She said their number currently is higher than pre-COVID. She clarified, she does not want to always use COVID as a measuring stick, but timewise she thinks they can all relate to that. She said they have a higher enrollment now than they did before the pandemic. Dr. Stauffer clarified, they knew that COVID was a concern for both the school system as well as the community and parents, and also the Council, and obviously, due to COVID, enrollment numbers went down. Mr. Dodd said they lost a lot of students, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they did, but they are here to let the Council know that they have gotten those students back now and then some as they are above the enrollment numbers of where they used to be.

Mr. Dodd said, with that number of students, it makes him wonder what the list of employees looks like including teachers and other staff. He said he knows that hiring is difficult, so how many employees does the Board have, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, they currently have close to 1,400 classroom teachers and then overall including bus drivers, contractual employees, and substitutes, around 3,000 total employees. Mr. Dodd said he always knew the number was around 1,400 teachers, but he did not realize it was up to 3,000. Dr. Stauffer clarified, again, that includes everyone – custodians, all contractual employees, fulltime employees, support staff, clerical staff, etc.


Mr. Cannon said the Council appreciates them always being so willing to come in for the quarterly meetings. He said it means a lot to the Council to be able to get these kind of updates. He said he thinks Dr. Stauffer is always so well prepared, to which Dr. Stauffer responded, it is his team, honestly, and the support they get from the Board. Mr. Cannon said he believes that is true, and it instills so much more confidence in the community as far as the job they are all doing, so the Council appreciates them taking the time to come in and the great work they are all doing.

Dr. Stauffer said, for Council's information, he has a job description for their Grant Specialist and their grant procedure manual, which is posted online, just for Council's reference.


There was no further discussion.



John T. Cannon, President, At-Large




Ernest F. Davis, Vice President, District 1



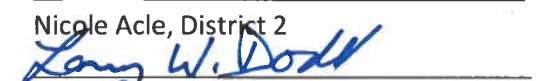
William R. McCain, At-Large

absent


Nicole Acle, District 2




Larry W. Dodd, District 3



Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator