

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

0119
Policy No.

BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY

BASIC COMMITMENTS

Theory of Action

Preamble

We, the Board of Education for Prince George's County Public Schools, do hereby set forth in this document our theory of action to effectuate the commitments in our statement of Core Beliefs and Commitments, namely, to create a high performing school district that educates all children to high standards and eliminates the achievement gap. This theory of action will provide a framework to drive forward and align goals, strategic plans, policies, budget, administrative actions, and The Bridge to Excellence Master Plan. Over time, we believe it will transform the culture of Prince George's County Public Schools to one of high performance rather than compliance.

Our theory of action builds on our beliefs about how children learn, the conditions that best promote learning, and the policies, management systems, and culture that best promote the commitment and high performance of adults. It also rests on our knowledge of the history and current state of urban education in the United States and the unique circumstances in Prince George's County Public Schools and the communities it serves. Finally, our theory of action springs from our commitment to American democracy and our beliefs about how democratic institutions should interact with and serve the people who own them.

Managed Performance/Empowerment

Our theory of action is managed performance/empowerment. Managed performance/empowerment is a comprehensive theory of action that embraces many partial theories of action, including adequate resources distributed through an equitable system, effective management, small learning communities, highly qualified teachers, pre-Kindergarten, and more. At its heart is our belief that Prince George's County Public Schools must be redesigned to manage for performance. This means that the central administration must accept responsibility for directly managing the district's core business, teaching and learning, within flexible parameters that balance accountability with empowerment according to the needs and performance of individual schools.

To further clarify our intent, we wish to expand our description of managed performance/empowerment under the following headings: standards, instructional management, flexibility, accountability, empowerment, and capacity, and equity-based funding.

Standards

Managed performance/empowerment begins with standards: academic content and performance standards, graduation and promotion standards, business process standards, safety standards, student conduct standards, ethical standards, parent and community satisfaction standards, etc. It is the Board's intent that Prince George's County Public Schools sets standards by board policy or administrative regulation, as appropriate, for all important outcomes and processes. Where higher standards will promote excellence, we wish for Prince George's County Public Schools standards to go beyond federal and the state of Maryland minimum requirements.

Instructional Management

Building on academic content and performance standards, Prince George's County Public Schools must create a comprehensive instructional management system. Essential elements include a comprehensive and aligned district curriculum, professional development around the curriculum, a comprehensive student information management system, formative and summative assessments, and carefully calibrated and appropriate interventions – by child, by teacher, by subject, and by school. As schools demonstrate the ability of their students to master the district curriculum, management of instruction should be pushed out to the schools in measured steps. However, because of the importance of some subjects – elementary school reading and math, for example – and high student mobility, even high performing schools must manage instruction within fairly narrow district parameters.

Flexibility

Managed instruction does not necessarily mean managed pedagogy. Our intention is that teachers be given maximum freedom to teach according to their teaching style and best professional judgment, consistent with high levels of student mastery of the district curriculum. Building on this, it is also our intent to give maximum freedom to schools, consistent with school performance and student mobility patterns. We recognize that all schools are not the same: the needs of children, the capacity of the workforce, and the demands of parents vary from one school community to another. Furthermore, we wish to create a performance rather than compliance work culture and unleash innovation to continuously improve teaching and learning and all school operations. The key to doing this is balancing accountability for performance with empowerment based on the needs of children and school performance.

Accountability

Managed performance/empowerment requires accountability: holding people responsible for meeting standards. Without accountability, standards are not really standards, they are just goals. Accountability means accountability systems, for schools and all other functional units within the County's school system, that identify important performance indicators, measure performance using these indicators, collect and distribute performance data, and apply pre-determined consequences (rankings, rewards, sanctions, and/or interventions) for achieving pre-defined outcomes. The universal use of well-constructed balanced scorecards and data dashboards are expected to facilitate this work. Accountability also means individual accountability for all district employees and students. Accountability implies consequences, both positive and negative, for without consequences there is no accountability. One does not measure just to obtain information. One measures to change behavior.

Empowerment

Principals and teachers cannot fairly be held accountable for student achievement if they do not have significant control over their work. Accountability, therefore, requires empowerment. By empowerment, we mean placing decision-making authority at the lowest possible level consistent with effectiveness and efficiency. Some decisions belong in central office, some in regional offices, some in the principal's office, and some in the classroom. Some decisions belong with educators, some with parents and students. Striking the right balance between accountability and empowerment is an on-going responsibility of the board/superintendent team. But maximum empowerment for school communities, principals, teachers, and parents, within the boundaries of effective and efficient operations, is the goal; for empowerment builds ownership and stimulates innovation, and balanced with accountability for results, it creates a performance culture. Building on the foundation of an instructional management system, schools should be given, more or less, maximum control over school operations and instruction, based on student needs and school performance as measured by the district's accountability system.

The starting point for school empowerment is school operations. Except where principals are not yet ready to accept this responsibility – and they should be trained as rapidly as possible – schools should be given wide latitude to manage budgets, procurement, hiring, the configuration of the workforce, schedules, student affairs, extracurricular activities, parent and community relations, etc. It is important to emphasize that school empowerment does not mean that school communities or teachers assume responsibility for campus decision-making. Principals should listen to their customers and involve their employees, but because they are accountable for school performance they must exercise executive power and have the authority to hold others accountable. The relative degrees of empowerment given over to schools and/or the relative degrees of empowerment assumed by the central administration should be guided by clear and publicly understood measures of student and school performance.

Capacity

Standards, accountability, and empowerment are not enough. They establish goals, provide incentives, and build ownership. But high performance also requires capacity. For Prince George's County Public Schools, this means facilities, resources, management systems, technology, training, etc. In short, to meet high standards, all involved in our educational enterprise need knowledge, skills, and tools appropriate to the task. Building this capacity is the responsibility of the board/superintendent team. We know that high performance is not inexpensive. Therefore, broad public support for our core beliefs and commitments and theory of action will be required.

In summary, we believe that managed performance/empowerment combines the efficacy of an instructional management system with the dynamics of a performance culture. It balances performance with empowerment, but empowerment follows performance, and performance is not left to chance: it is managed. Striking the right balance between accountability and empowerment is an on-going responsibility of the board/superintendent team.

Change Management

The superintendent is responsible for designing Prince George's County Public Schools' managed performance/empowerment system. Pursuant to this, we expect him to bring forward policy recommendations, resource distribution system model proposals, and budget proposals for Board consideration. Also, in order to align all district systems around the principles of managed performance/empowerment, significant district redesign may be required. We expect notification when this is necessary and determined by the superintendent.

Managed performance/empowerment is a fundamental change from the traditional school district model, where central office tightly manages school operations but largely ignores what goes on in classrooms. Our goal is the opposite: a system in which central office tightly manages instruction but loosely manages school operations. Managed performance/empowerment, because it empowers principals to manage school operations and flexibly manage instruction based on student needs and school performance, will require major changes in the roles and responsibilities of administrators, teachers, and other district employees. Parents and students will have more choices but also have greater responsibility for results. Accordingly, effective change management leadership by the superintendent, supported by a comprehensive internal and external communication system, will be required.

It is the intention of the Board that managed performance/empowerment as a theory of action for change provides a stable, long-term framework for improving student achievement in Prince George's County Public Schools. However, we recognize that from time to time, based on research and experience, this theory of action will need to be revised. We welcome opportunities to continuously improve our theory of action, but are committed to managed performance/empowerment as a broad path for improving student achievement. We pledge our best efforts to educate the workforce and the public and mentor new board members so that subsequent boards will hold constant to this vision.

Policy Adopted
3/26/08