Maryland School Review

Expert Review Team Report

Lansdowne Middle School

Maryland State Department of Education

Office of Teaching and Learning

December 13, 2023

Table of Contents

Overview of Maryland School Site Reviews

PURPOSE

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is committed to supporting school systems in improving student outcomes. MSDE conducts comprehensive school reviews to identify promising practices and opportunities for growth in curriculum, instruction, interventions, socio-emotional and mental health services, educator support, and school management. School reviews are a collaborative process among local education agencies (LEAs), schools, and MSDE aimed at accelerating student learning, supporting the whole child, and enhancing educator practice.

SCHOOL REVIEW PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

All school reviews are facilitated by an Expert Review Team (ERT) led by MSDE. ERT members consist of trained teachers, school leaders, and education experts with experience in improving student outcomes. Members participate in extensive training led by MSDE to calibrate the review process to ensure a consistent approach to school reviews. To identify effective practices and opportunities for growth in a school, the ERT analyzes school data, reviews documents submitted by the school, and conducts a one or two-day site visit that includes classroom observations, focus groups, and a principal interview.

The Expert Review Team uses a rubric (see Appendix B) to form a consensus rating for each measure based on student data, documents, observations, focus groups, and a principal interview. The rubric consists of three domains:

- **Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction** - High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices, and assessments are implemented to support student learning.

- **Domain 2: Student Support** - Schools use data to identify students and implement a multi-tiered approach to support all student groups.

- **Domain 3: Educator Support** - Educators at all levels are provided with support to improve results and shift instructional practice.

Each domain contains indicators and measures. Indicators specify criteria within the domain that will be reviewed. Measures identify the component that will be rated within the indicator. Each measure can earn one of three ratings:

- **Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement** - evidence reviewed demonstrates that a school fully addressed action(s) while implementing measures and attaining outcomes and demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement.

- **Accomplishing** - evidence reviewed demonstrates that a school fully addressed action(s) while implementing measures and attaining outcomes.

- **Developing** - a plan and/or process is observed; however, actions towards attaining measures and outcomes have not yet been implemented.

- **Not Evident** – a plan and/or process towards implementing measures or obtaining outcomes was not observed.

In cases where the measure and/or component does not apply, it will be marked as not applicable.

MSDE will collaborate with LEAs for any school that earns a rating of Developing or Not Evident for any measure to develop recommendations, a support plan, and a timeline for the school to make progress toward the Accomplishing or Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement rating.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The following report is organized into three different sections.

Executive Summary: In this section, you will find a summary of the school's review. This includes:

- Information about the school, with more detailed information, can be found online in the Maryland School Report Card.

- The summary of findings is a snapshot of the ratings the school received by each domain, with more detailed ratings of each measure embedded in the complete school rubric in Appendix B.

- Overall recommendations for the school to focus their school improvement work.

Findings and Recommendations by Domain: Each domain contains a section that outlines ERT findings, including strengths and areas for growth. For each domain, targeted recommendations are provided with evidence, action steps, and resources to address the recommendation. Resources are currently being reviewed for accessibility.

Appendices: Two appendices expand on information provided in the body of this report. They provide detailed information on the specific methods used by the ERT during the site visit and a deeper dive into the ratings the school received on the School Review Rubric.

Executive Summary

ABOUT LANSDOWNE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Lansdowne Middle School, located in Baltimore County, serves a total of 874 students in grades 6th – 8th. The enrolled population is made up 26% African American, 43% Hispanic, and 23% White. The school's population includes approximately 67% of students that receive free or reduced meals and 13% or less of the population includes either students with disabilities or students with 504 plans. More detailed information, including enrollment, attendance, demographics, and student outcome data, can be found in the Maryland School Report Card.

Schools identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Low Performing and/or CSI Not Exiting in the 2022-2023 school year and selected for an ERT visit, received a differentiated visit to avoid duplication of data requests and integrate into the school improvement process in collaboration with the Office of School Improvement and Transformation at MSDE.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following table summarizes the school's ratings on each domain. The school scored its highest rating of Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement in Assessment and Timing and its lowest rating of Accomplishing in Opportunities and Access. A comprehensive list of measures, indicators, and ratings can be found in the full School Review Rubric in Appendix B.

Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction		
Indicator	Percentage	Rating
Curriculum and Instructional Materials	81%	Accomplishing
Classroom Instruction	75%	Accomplishing
Assessment and Timing	85%	Accomplishing with Continuous Improvement

Domain 2: Student Support		
Indicator	Percentage	Rating
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	79%	Accomplishing
Community Schools	80%	Accomplishing
Opportunities and Access	71%	Accomplishing

Domain 3: Educator Support		
Indicator	Percentage	Rating
Observation and Feedback	75%	Accomplishing
Professional Learning	78%	Accomplishing
Career Growth	75%	Accomplishing

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions are recommended to support improvement in the areas identified as needing improvement through the School Review process. More detailed information about these recommendations, linking them to specific findings in each domain and providing action steps and resources to implement them, can be found in the following sections.

- Emphasize or provide professional learning on the facilitation of collaborative, student-driven learning and the use of higher-order questioning techniques such as probing, inquiring, and/or hypothesizing; strategies to encourage students to justify their answers, cite evidence in the text, or elaborate to answer questions; and on the use of informal checks for understanding throughout the learning process.

- Provide job-embedded professional learning on data-driven instruction & Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): Leverage data-driven instructional cycles to guide professional learning and collaborative planning with a focus on providing timely, targeted, and research-validated best practices/high-yield instructional strategies (academic and behavioral).

- Leverage current schoolwide structures like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to develop and establish a clear set of expectations for student behavior across the school so that there is a clear and consistent set of norms from classroom to classroom.

- Review current structures to ensure there are systems of communication that will engage the Community Schools Coordinator in the academic and behavioral functioning of the school.

Domain 1: Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and Instruction	High-quality curriculum, instructional materials, teaching practices, and assessment are implemented to support student learning.

Findings and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

The Local Education Agency (LEA) provided documentation supporting the high-quality curricula aligned with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards (MCCRS). The school documentation is aligned with the LEA documents provided to MSDE.

The school engages teachers in academic and social-emotional job-embedded training to support the effective use of high-quality instructional materials.

- During focus group discussions with teachers, mathematics teachers spoke of the regular training they were currently engaged in as a part of the new math curriculum pilot program. The principal interview confirmed there is a specific focus on mathematics and special education with two specialists dedicated to co-planning, by meeting with department chairs and admin weekly to build special development opportunities for faculty.

- The teachers in the focus groups discussed how using assessment data generated from the mathematics curriculum offers student-level data on specific skills and knowledge mastery, misconceptions, and areas for development. They also acknowledged that district screening assessments are used for the "New Comer" student population.

- Teachers also expressed that there is regular training for the Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model and restorative practices to support instruction which is delivered during daily advisory class sessions.

- During the teacher focus groups, 100% of the teachers reported conducting frequent formative and summative assessments. Data is used at grade—level and department team meetings to identify student trends.

Evidence of explicit instruction with current evidence-based best practices was in use in the majority of the classrooms reviewed.

- During the review, six out of six classrooms employed a variety of instructional materials and resources to modify and support instruction (i.e., incorporating technology, calculators, and content-specific manipulative tools).

- In at least half of the classes reviewed, there was evidence of scaffolded instruction being provided to students in small groups and one-to-one interactions for customized support.

- Questioning techniques were captured by reviewers in four out of six classes as students were asked to extend their thinking by expanding on their claims and ideas.

- In three out of six classes, students were asked higher-order questions that probed or inquired about the next steps. An example of the student-teacher interaction was, "If you could lessen gang violence, what impact would it have on the future of those impacted?"

- Also, students were asked to justify or elaborate on their responses with a series of "WH" (who, what, when, where, and how) and open-ended questions.

- In two of the three English Language Arts (ELA) classes, evidence of explicit teaching of vocabulary, like "hook" and "treated" supported learners at various learning stages, consequently supporting all students.

- In one classroom, students received explicit writing instruction, specifically about the structure of a five-paragraph essay and the introductory paragraph. Additionally, students in another classroom participated in literary analysis as they were asked to identify an author's claim and find the evidence to support the claim. The structure of this class provided a significant amount of independent time for students to finish reading the story.

Some collaborative learning opportunities were evident toward building student-directed learning.

- In four out of the six classes visited, reviewers noted students collaborating in groups or pairs to solve problems or work on an assignment evidenced by, "Talk to your table groups about why you think your topic is important."

- In another instance, there was evidence of student collaboration with other students. An example of this interaction was one student presenting at the board called on another student to answer a question and stated whether or not they agreed with the answer. Another example of collaboration in a different classroom, a teacher assigned a student to help another student with a math problem, which the student did and helped their classmate understand a concept.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

While there are structures to specifically address the social and emotional needs of students, there is a need to address culturally responsive pedagogies by teachers and administrators.

- Focus group participants did not mention the culturally responsive pedagogies by teachers or administrators.

Explicit instruction components were used in less than half of the classrooms visited.

- Although reviewers saw evidence of a gradual release model in two out of six classrooms with a visible agenda that included questioning, quick writes, and peer-to-peer modeling; and in two more classes instances of similarity and contrast were used to build conceptual understanding around ways to find common ways to solve real-world problems, the school would benefit student critical thinking if these were shared practices in all classrooms.

Increase collaborative learning opportunities to ensure these are common practices schoolwide at every grade level.

- In one out of the six classes visited, reviewers noted students had a specific role or task in an assigned group, and in a different classroom, students were asked to stand in a circle, where they each had an opportunity to share their responses to three specific questions and all students had equal airtime.

- In five out of six of the classrooms, students were configured in group seating, however, specific roles were not identified for students to engage with the task, and the time structure to ensure equal voice was not evident.

- Additionally, in five of the six classrooms, support was not provided to students to help them meet behavioral expectations. Specifically, in several classrooms, students were seen sleeping, on the phone, or not completing an assignment and these students were not encouraged to do their work.

Provide timely, specific, and structured feedback to support students with strategies to improve their learning.

- Reviewers noted in one of the classrooms, there was evidence of students decoding and attending to the structures of words and feedback was given toward the pronunciation and word choice. Also, reviewers noted that students received writing instruction for writing an introduction to a paragraph. In two other classrooms students did not attempt decoding or attend to structures of words, nor did they receive writing instructions. An example of this was when students were given a writing prompt and were not provided with a model or scaffolds.

- There was no evidence of students receiving comprehension instruction in any of the classrooms reviewed.

Structures for developing and implementing student-driven learning opportunities would benefit student achievement outcomes and teacher instructional practices.

- In four of six classes, students did not provide helpful responses about an assignment, product, or answer to each other.

- None of the six classes reviewed involved students leading group discussions. In one classroom, students were instructed to work collaboratively on the problem; however, with no roles assigned or specific collaborative structures in place, the students worked independently and did not discuss how they solved the problem with their peers.

- While there was evidence of differentiation and scaffolding from teacher support, the school should begin to increase opportunities for students to share their learning with peers through cooperative learning or close reading strategies as this was seen in one out of the six classes reviewed.

- In two out of the six classes, scholars were provided options for sharing their learning by pairing independently and during whole group learning with modification of the gradual release model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under "Areas for Growth," and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements. Domain-specific ratings can be found in Appendix B.

FOCUS AREA 1

Provide professional learning on the facilitation of collaborative, student-driven learning and the use of higher-order questioning techniques such as probing, inquiring, and/or hypothesizing; strategies to encourage students to justify their answers, cite evidence in the text, or elaborate to answer questions; and on the use of informal checks for understanding throughout the learning process.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Give students regular opportunities to learn together in physical spaces to talk through complex problems.

RESOURCES:

1. Making Cooperative Learning Work Better
2. Creating a Path Instructional Rounds: What? Why? How?

FOCUS AREA 2

Implement a schoolwide improvement process that includes peer-to-peer learning models to learn and share "best practices" for instructional delivery that exist within the current teaching staff.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Implement a school-wide improvement model that builds and fosters collaboration and promotes improving and sharing teacher practices.

RESOURCES:

1. Data Wise Improvement Process
2. Learning from Instructional Rounds

FOCUS AREA 3

Provide teachers with learning opportunities to ensure students receive quality feedback that advances their learning with specific and actionable steps toward improving.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Provide job-embedded professional learning on distinguishing between feedback and praise to help students learn how to receive and apply suggestions to improve outcomes.

RESOURCES:

1. Getting Great at Feedback
2. Quality Feedback

Domain 2: Student Support

Student Support	**Schools use data to identify students and implement a multi-tiered approach to support all student groups.**

Findings and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

The school has evidence of structures that are supportive toward an integrated system of multi-tiered student support (MTSS) in all three tiers. Evidence of current evidence-based best practices was in use in the majority of the classrooms reviewed.

- During the review, six out of six classrooms employed a variety of instructional materials and resources to modify and support instruction (i.e. incorporating technology, calculators, and content-specific manipulative tools).

- In at least half of the classes reviewed, there was evidence of scaffolded instruction being provided to students in small groups and one-to-one interactions for customized support.

- Questioning techniques were captured by reviewers in four out of six classes as students were asked to extend their thinking by expanding on their claims and ideas.

- In three out of six classes, students were asked higher-order questions that probed or inquired about the next steps. An example of the student-teacher interaction was, "If you could lessen gang violence, what impact would it have on the future of those impacted?"

- Students were asked to justify or elaborate on their responses with a series of "WH" (who, what, when, where, and how) and open-ended questions.

Specific evidence that supports multi-tiered student support (MTSS) was captured during focus group sessions.

- Students, teachers, and administrators spoke to the community/restorative circles that are used daily to promote social-emotional learning (SEL) for all students (Tier 1) for example positive behavior and intervention system/SEL "PBIS".

- Tier 2 includes mentoring, SEL classroom, check-ins with the social worker (SW) or counselor, and communication is sent out to the entire team. For students in need of Tier 3, an outside therapist may need to be involved.

- One of the ten administrators spoke about receiving SEL training at a conference on Trauma Informed Care around resources and tiers for mental health.

- During the principal interview, information was corroborated about the MTSS teacher, SEL teacher, and Lion Loot earned for students completing work. Tier 2 consists of multiple groups such as a black boy group, and Girls on the Run. The International Greek Service Organization, Alpha Kappa

Alpha (AKA) Inc. partners with the school and mentor's girls. Tier 3 consists of check-ins and a counselor.

The seventh and eighth grade students are aware of the school's progress monitoring system that supports students with college and career readiness.

- Three out of the seven students in the focus group are aware of the college and career readiness focus.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

Develop a system for peer-to-peer informal observations to share instructional best practices.

- While there was evidence of differentiation and scaffolding from teacher support, the school should begin to increase opportunities for students to share their learning with peers through cooperative learning or close reading strategies as this was seen in one out of the six classes reviewed.

- In two out of the six classes, scholars were provided options for sharing their learning by pairing, independent work, and during whole group learning with modification of the gradual release model.

Provide resources to address barriers that affect marginalized students and wraparound services to students and families.

- Participants in the focus groups spoke about the services provided by community school partners for food and health related items. Teachers characterized the community school program as something "outside" of the school that "provides a lot of resources".

- The teachers and leadership did not articulate how the community school and the school works together to provide an integrated program. It was unclear if the community school coordinator participated in student support teams or offered interventions.

Ensure all students have access to advanced and rigorous coursework.

- During the school leader's focus group, one of the ten leaders spoke about all students having access to gifted and talented courses and that there are strategies to ensure equity and diversity for an inclusive model in place. However, this statement was not corroborated by the other school leaders.

Most participants in the student, school leader, and teacher focus groups could not speak to the equitable support of all students in the advanced courses.

- All seven of the teachers reported that due to block scheduling, not all students have access to a diverse course load. None of the teachers made references to gifted and talented content, classes, or students.

- One of the seven students shared that if a student just came from a country and doesn't know English, they get put in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes instead of an extra course.

- Also, one of the seven teachers shared that students with identified needs are not assigned to highly effective teachers saying, "A lot of the teachers are conditional."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under "Areas for Growth," and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements. Domain-specific ratings can be found in Appendix B.

FOCUS AREA 1

Data-driven Instruction & Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Leverage data-driven instructional cycles to guide professional learning and collaborative planning with a focus providing timely, targeted, and identify research-validated best practices/high-yield instructional strategies (academic and behavioral).

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Develop a year-at-a-glance data cycle calendar using aligned assessments; create professional development opportunities for teachers on how to use informal and formal assessment data to modify instruction; and embed data-driven lesson planning during collaborative planning sessions.

- Create peer-to-peer informal observation schedules to ensure teachers are learning from one another's data-driven practices used when delivering instruction; use the data gathered to create meaningful student grouping to leverage the power of cooperative learning and content-specific feedback.

RESOURCES:

1. What is MTSS
2. A Comprehensive Guide to MTSS

Domain 3: Educator Support

Educators Support	**Educators at all levels are provided with support to improve results and shift instructional practice.**

Findings and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

The structures for observing teachers and providing feedback are regular and provide actionable steps toward supporting professional growth.

- Eight out of eight teachers identified weekly feedback meetings and department chair visits once a week to give non-evaluative feedback. Also, all reported that professional development is ongoing and grounded in data.

- About half of the teachers in the focus group shared district-wide training is offered quarterly and about the same reported that informal observations are performed by multiple staff (i.e. department chair, administrator CTE staff, etc.)

- Teachers in the focus group stated that "Team Tuesdays" is a collaborative weekly all-team planning period.

- Two out of eight staff reported that new instructors receive four formal evaluations a year.

New teachers are provided with job-embedded induction and support.

- Focus group participants shared that new teachers have the opportunity to participate in formal mentoring programs through the LEA.

- In addition to district content lead support, there is a robust leadership pipeline within the school that includes department chairs, grade-level leads, and administrators that provide evaluation and support for all teachers including weekly informal classroom visits.

- Teachers are given opportunities to move into leadership roles. One teacher described how when the principal found out she had a specific certification, she was encouraged to do some work in that area.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

All instructional staff needs are not being met through the current structures and schedule for collaborative professional development.

- Teachers stated that collaborative planning and data analysis time takes away individual planning time.

- Specialty teachers, such as World Language Teachers, do not have the same opportunities for collaborative planning or data review as English Language Arts (ELA) and math teachers.

Mentoring/Coaching and Career Ladder should be more intentional and targeted for the advancement of teachers and leaders.

- The career ladder described did not seem formal or have criteria for moving up the ladder. Some staff reported requesting additional roles, while others were asked by administration or department heads. A formal description of the ladder with criteria for moving along should be provided.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to support school leadership in improving in the areas that were identified as needing growth. Each is closely connected to the evidence presented above under "Areas for Growth," and includes specific action steps and resources to support the implementation of these improvements. Domain-specific ratings can be found in Appendix B.

FOCUS AREA 1

Create peer-to-peer informal observation schedules to ensure teachers are learning from one another's data-driven practices used when delivering instruction.

ACTION STEPS:

As a result of this school review:

- Provide opportunities for safe practice among teachers. Leverage teachers who do well with collaborative learning and higher-order questioning. Set up peer observations.
- Create structures to conduct ongoing learning walks for teacher-cohorts focusing on collaborative learning and identifying strengths and areas of growth for each teacher.

RESOURCES:

1. Learning From Instructional Rounds
2. UMD School Improvement Leadership Certificate

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF EXPERT REVIEW TEAM ACTIVITIES

Expert Review Team Members

1. Dr. Stefan Lallinger, Executive Director, Next 100

2. Dr. Jazmine Rhone, Academic Content Liaison, Baltimore City Public Schools

3. Zahara Valentine, Pipelines and Induction, Baltimore City Public Schools

4. Dr. Martha James, Associate Professor/ Accreditation Coordinator, Morgan State University

5. Tonya Montgomery, Principal, Department of Juvenile Services Education Program

6. Dr. David Stone, Assistant Vice President of Operations, Kennedy Krieger Schools

Site Visit Day 1

Thursday, December 13, 2023

Number of Classroom Reviewed

Six

Description of Classroom Visited

December 13, 2023
• Math 6 • ELA 6 • ESOL • Math 7 • Math 8 • Reading 8

Number of Interviews

One (1)

- Principal

Number of Focus Groups

Four

- 7 students

- 10 school leaders

- 8 teachers

- 5 parents

Documents Analyzed

- Site visit documentation submitted by the school and LEA.

Appendix B

MARYLAND SCHOOL REVIEW RUBRIC

Ratings for Lansdowne Middle School

The Expert Review Team Rubric is used by the review team to form a consensus on a rating for each measure based on all collected evidence. Collected evidence includes documents submitted by the school prior to the on-site review; outcomes of classroom observations; answers to focus group questions from teachers, administrators, students, and parents; and student data. Items checked were reviewed through data documentation or during the on-site school review.