



FourPoint
Education Partners

Preparing for Strategic Planning in Talbot County Public Schools:

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment:
Executive Summary

December 2024

OUTLINE

- **Review Framework and Methodology**
 - How did FourPoint conduct the review?
- **High-Level District Strengths**
 - What are the district and its schools doing particularly well?
- **High-Level District Weaknesses**
 - In what areas can the district and its schools improve?
- **High-Level District Opportunities**
 - What external factors can the district leverage to improve outcomes for students?
- **High-Level District Threats**
 - What external factors constrain or impose risks on the district?
- **Recommendations**
 - What does FourPoint recommend that TCPS address in strategic planning?

REVIEW FRAMEWORK

Working collaboratively with the leadership of Talbot County Public Schools, the FourPoint team conducted a review of the policies, systems, and structures of Talbot County Public Schools that impede or promote the success of all students by applying our strategic planning framework, which defines indicators across 8 categories.

This executive summary presents the methodology, high-level findings (in the form of SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), and recommendations from the review to support development of a new TCPS strategic plan.

A full report with detailed findings and supporting data was also submitted to TCPS in December 2024.



REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- The FourPoint team held interviews and focus groups with approximately 78 stakeholders virtually and during a site visit in September 2024. This included:
 - Board members
 - District administrators
 - Principals
 - Education foundation board members
 - Parents and community members
- The FourPoint team completed a review of available state and district data and reports.
- FourPoint also visited 8 schools and observed 58 classrooms using our Focused Classroom Walkthrough tool.
- FourPoint administered surveys to collected feedback from staff.
 - The school leader survey (principals and assistant principals) had 15 respondents
 - The educator survey had 184 respondents

HIGH-LEVEL DISTRICT STRENGTHS

Talbot County Public Schools have several important strengths, including:

- A strong leadership team.
- Recent implementation of a new ELA and math curricula with clear expectations on its use.
- A new data-based school improvement process and focus on instructional leadership of principals.
- A solid foundation for preparing students for college and careers, including a partnership with Chesapeake College and career counselors.
- Current (and needed) updates of its systems in human resources.
- Additional social workers and career counselors to address students' social-emotional needs and college and career planning.
- Early implementation of key structures, including professional learning communities (PLCs), multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and school improvement planning.

HIGH-LEVEL DISTRICT WEAKNESSES

Talbot County Public Schools have several important weaknesses, including:

- Low student achievement—particularly in math and among some student subgroups—that is not correlated to school-by-school, per-pupil spending.
- A history of absent curriculum and tiered interventions, and ineffective implementation of high-leverage strategies, including school improvement processes.
- A history of a system culture defined as fear-based and top-down.
- A history of ineffective HR systems.
- Lack of capacity to serve a growing population of students whose first language is not English.
- Inconsistent implementation of key structures, including PLCs and MTSS teams.
- A need for an integrated approach to grants management.

HIGH-LEVEL DISTRICT OPPORTUNITIES

Talbot County Public Schools face several important opportunities, including:

- Regional interest in collaboration to improve operational efficiencies and student outcomes.
- Multi-generational involvement among staff, students, and families.
- Strong partnerships with local agencies, organizations, and the education foundation.

HIGH-LEVEL DISTRICT THREATS

Talbot County Public Schools face several important threats, including:

- A local cap on the amount of revenue that the county can raise, and relatively little funding from the State.
- A large retirement community without children in the schools that values low taxes.
- Regional hiring challenges.
- The need for facility updates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider establishing students' college, career, and life readiness as TCPS' focal point by:
 - Developing a “Profile of a TCPS Graduate” that defines expected student outcomes – in areas such as academic preparedness, college and career readiness, civic engagement, and cultural competence – at key grade levels (see next slide for example).
 - Establishing the following as the overarching goal in the strategic plan: All students will graduate TCPS meeting xx% of all Profile of a Graduate indicators.
 - Creating a portal for students and families to enter goals, input relevant experiences, and track progress towards meeting indicators in the Profile of a Graduate.
 - Assigning career counselors responsibility for implementation and monitoring.
 - “Branding” TCPS as a district that educates the “whole child” to be prepared for success in life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Example of a Profile of a Graduate: Fayette County (KY) Public Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Refine and expand on TCPS' current priorities to include:

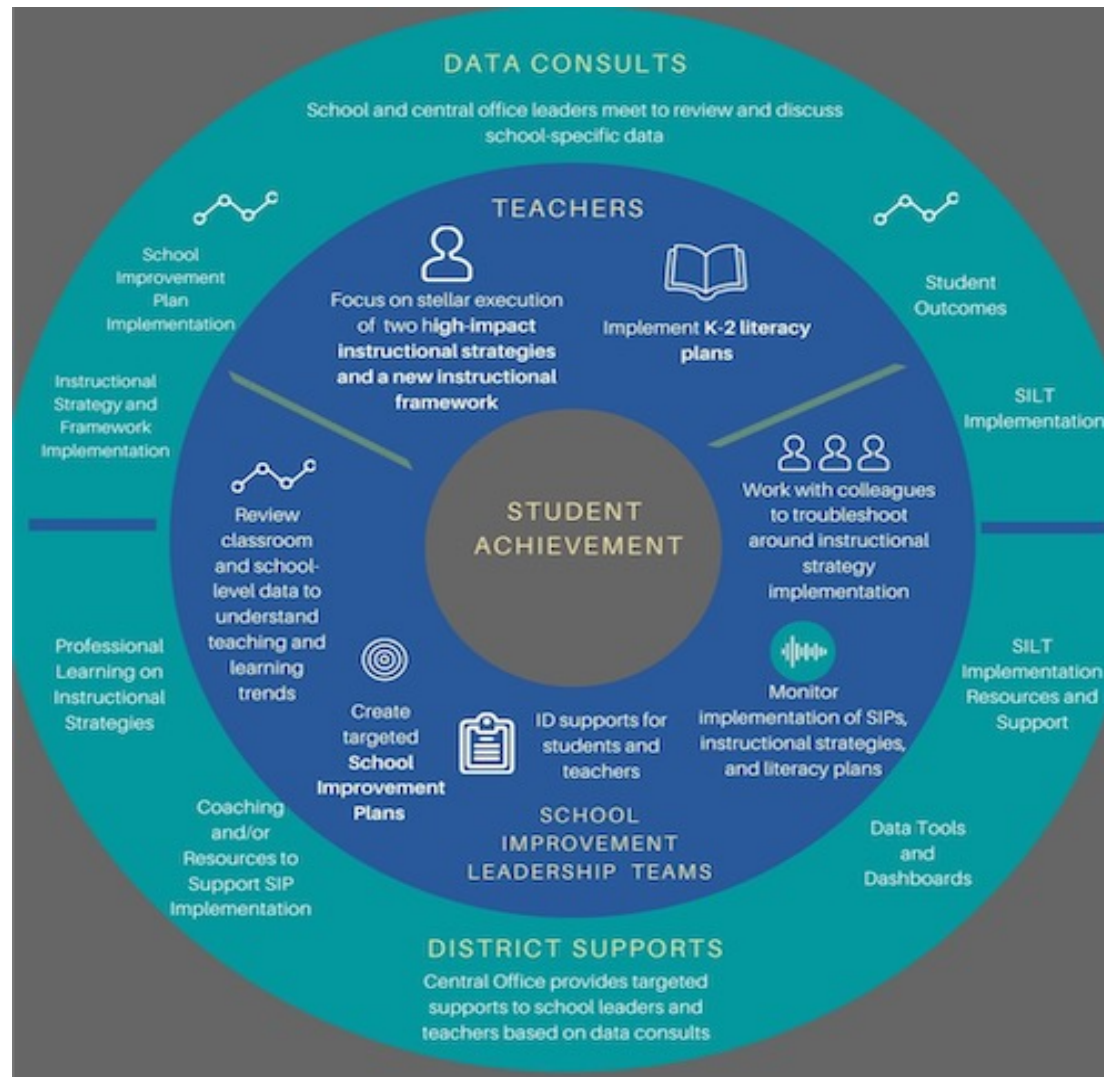
- Effectively implement math and ELA curriculum, tiered interventions, and specialized instruction and services using high-quality teaching practices (currently stated as “Math”)
- Recruit and retain high-quality and diverse teachers, administrators, and staff using best practices in human capital management (currently stated as “Hiring Practices”)
- Ensure that all students, families, and staff feel welcome, included, and engaged (currently stated as “School Environment/Student Engagement”)
- Develop and align systems to ensure that all students graduate college, career, and life ready (no current priority)
- Advocate for increasing the overall budget and use resources efficiently and equitably to improve student outcomes (no current priority)

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Continue to refine current school improvement processes to further develop leadership and improve student outcomes.
 - Create a graphic that illustrates the district's priorities (see next slide for example).
 - Set clear objectives for each district priority and incorporate these objectives into the school improvement plan template.
 - Create clear guidance related to implementation expectations for all objectives.
 - Develop and implement a data consult process in which school leadership teams meet regularly with the assistant superintendent of school leadership and student success to discuss implementation and impact of priorities.
 - Focus leadership development for principals on using data to effectively implement school improvement plans.
 - Clarify roles and expectations related to schools' improvement teams, PLCs, and MTSS teams.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Example of a Graphical Representation of a District's Priorities : Champaign (IL) Public Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Develop an instructional framework incorporating UDL principles and instructional strategies that increase student engagement and high-level thinking. Select 1-2 elements from the framework to focus professional learning for educators and administrators. Consider as a starting point strategies to:
 - Consistently ensure that students with disabilities and multilingual students have equitable access to the core curriculum.
 - Support literacy proficiency among students with disabilities, low-income students, and multilingual students. Set as the foundation The Science of Reading Pillars of vocabulary, comprehension, and written language.
 - Support classroom discourse that allows the teacher to facilitate, rather than lead, discussion. Well-designed discussions shift the talk ratio and the cognitive load from the teacher to the students and then from student to student.
 - When planning, consider how to differentiate the lessons for various learners and learning styles, such as using multiple levels of text from different cultural backgrounds, differentiating the way students show mastery and varying the ways topics are presented.
 - Provide high-quality tiered interventions for academics and behavior consistently across all classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Ensure that all TCPS partnerships incorporate FourPoint's six elements of effectiveness:
 - Strategic Alignment Around Educational Equity
 - Clear Expectations and Shared Accountability
 - Coordinated Services
 - Effective Communication
 - Regular Evaluation and Continuous Improvement
 - Sustainability

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Increase revenues and use resources more efficiently and equitably by:

- Working with neighboring districts to identify ways to strengthen shared purchasing and delivery of services through a cross-district review of high-dollar contracts and services, or by securing a procurement professional to work with districts on a shared basis.
- Creating a grants manager position and taking away grant management responsibilities from other staff to improve efficiency and impact of grant dollars.
- Leveraging partnerships to expand student supports and after-school and summer opportunities for students and families.
- Developing a three-year plan for mobilizing business stakeholders in support of revising Talbot County's real estate tax revenue cap. Building on TCPS' existing business partnerships, demonstrate how strong public schools directly enhance Talbot County's economic vitality and quality of life.
- Investing in data systems, supports for multilingual students, HR staff, Wi-Fi connectivity, and tech support.
- Continuing to analyze staff and resource allocations to school to ensure equity and alignment with the new school improvement planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue work towards developing an effective talent management system that includes FourPoint's components of an effective talent management system.

Component	Key Question
District's Vision and Stated Expectations for Student Achievement	Is a common vision and set of expectations for student achievement communicated to staff? In what ways?
Clear Definition of Performance Expectations	How are performance expectations communicated to district employees?
Preparation, Recruitment and Selection	How is the district strategically recruiting, selecting, and placing the highest quality staff?
Support and Development	To what extent are high quality induction, mentoring and on-the-job professional development structured to support staff in their roles?
Evaluation and Feedback	How are educators evaluated and how does regular, honest, and actionable feedback help them develop professionally?
Compensation, Rewards and Incentives	Is evaluation data used to inform compensation? How are recognition, rewards and incentives used to retain the most effective staff in the highest need roles?
Strategic Retention, Promotion and Exit	What practices enable the district to strategically retain and/or promote its highest performing staff? How does the district proactively support struggling staff and exit those who consistently underperform?
Human Capital Systems	Is district HR technology maximized for efficiency and accuracy? Is transaction processing aligned with talent management goals? Does HR customer service allow for smooth and efficient processing?

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Support principals in addressing operational challenges in:

- Human resources
- Processing of "late arrivals" (staff and students who start after the beginning of the year)
- Use of technology in the teaching and learning process
- Facilities (especially related to traffic safety and landscaping)
- Ensuring effective and equitable discipline policies and engagement strategies
- Student behavior on and parent questions about transportation

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Improve Maryland Blueprint implementation by:

- Improving fiscal monitoring and reporting aligned with Blueprint requirements and best practices.
- Creating a cross-team plan that outlines roles, responsibilities, and timelines for TCPS' efforts to expand Pre-K in its own facilities.
- Implementing feedback loops with educators and school leaders to gauge implementation progress and challenges regarding the new math curriculum and the Science of Reading training.
- Enhancing TCPS's data-driven recruitment and retention strategy by monitoring metrics that track the health of the pipeline (e.g., time to fill positions, vacancy rates by school/subject/grade), efficiency (interview to hire ratios), retention rates (turnover rates by school/grade/subject level/years of service), and employee satisfaction.
- Evaluating Blueprint implications for multilingual learners—focusing on resource allocation, staffing requirements, and student and family support services—to ensure TCPS's systems and structures effectively serve this growing population.
- Creating clear implementation plans to implement priority workstreams across Blueprint pillars.