



Findings and Results of Root Cause Analysis for Comprehensive Support and Improvement School

Harlem Park Elementary & Middle School

September, 2019



COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL
INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT



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This report was prepared by the University of Maryland College Park Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement at the College of Education and in partnership with the Bowie State University College of Education and the

Morgan State University School of Education & Urban Studies. The Root Cause Analysis process was facilitated by Dr. Christian Anderson and Iris Bond Gill, who also co-authored this report.

These resources developed with federal funds, i.e. Title I, are considered open source and made available for use or modification as users or other developers see fit.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to share to outcomes of a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) conducted to support Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School in identifying underlying causes of school performance problems. The report provides an overview of the RCA process, school profile, problem statement, root cause analysis and recommendations to address the root causes.

The Maryland Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plan requires schools that have been identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) engage in a root cause analysis process facilitated by a third party. CSI schools are the lowest achieving five percent of Title I schools; high schools that do not graduate one third or more of their students; or schools that have federal school improvement grants (SIG). Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School was identified as a CSI school due to low student achievement on Maryland state standardized test scores. Outcomes of the root cause analysis must be used to inform the development of intervention plans to improve school performance.

CSI schools that were identified in the 2018-2019 school year have three years to exit CSI status. CSI school leaders will receive a leadership coach to support the development and implementation of the intervention plan. CSI principals are also required to participate in the Leading for School Improvement Institute which provides customized professional learning experiences to support school improvement. CSI principals are also required to engage in monitoring visits by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to ensure that progress is being made toward school improvement goals.

The MSDE established a memorandum of understanding with the University of Maryland College Park to facilitate the RCA process. The University of Maryland College Park collaborated with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to develop RCA tools and train field teams. Field teams consisted of researchers, data analysts, and education practitioners from Morgan State University, Johns Hopkins University, Bowie State University, and other organizations. Field team members worked with all CSI schools to go through an RCA process. MSDE will support each school to engage in a long-term continuous improvement process that includes RCA analyses, recommended interventions, and evaluations of employed interventions. As part of this process, CSI schools were first required to go through a needs-assessment process that was used to drive the RCA work.

I. INTRODUCTION

RCA Process for CSI Schools

A Root Cause Analysis Facilitator Guide was developed to promote consistency in the root cause analysis process. The Facilitator Guide contains protocols designed to engage school leaders and stakeholders in identifying a specific problem and prioritizing root causes for the problem.

There was a four-step process used to facilitate the root cause analysis:

1. Craft a Problem Statement Based on Data
2. Brainstorm Causal Factors
3. Analyze Underlying Causes to Identify Root Causes
4. Prioritize Root Causes for Intervention

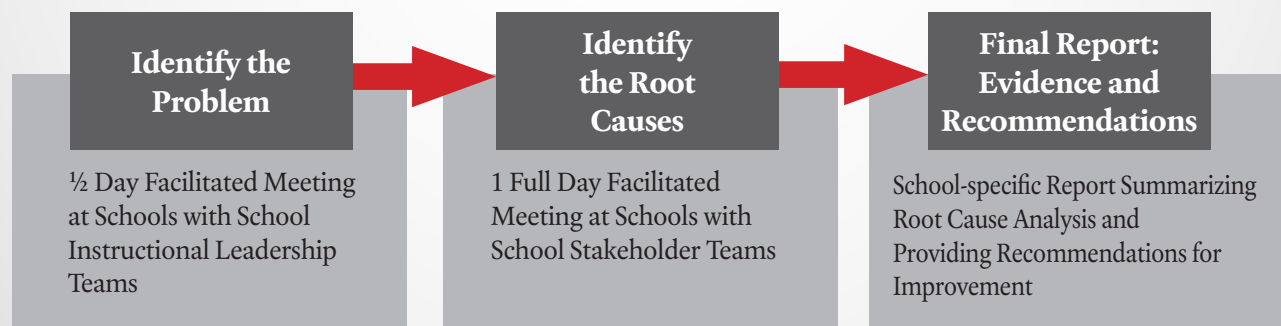
The root cause analysis process translates the successes and challenges identified through the CSI needs assessment into priorities to inform actionable improvement planning. The work with schools was staged in three steps: 1) identify

the problem; 2) identify the root causes; 3) draft a school report with recommendations for improvement.

First, the RCA team worked with school leadership teams to craft a problem statement in a half-day meeting. Using the available school, school system, and state data, the school team selected a problem that relates to their CSI status and provides a direction for the root cause analysis.

Second, the facilitators returned to the school for a full-day meeting with the school's stakeholder team to better understand the root causes of the problem. Once the stakeholders worked through the process of determining the root causes, they prioritized those root causes based on importance, feasibility, and alignment to CSI status.

As a third and final step, the RCA teams created these school-specific reports with recommendations for addressing the problem and root causes in improvement planning.



I. INTRODUCTION

An RCA starts with asking the question: What problem do we face that, if solved or mitigated, would most effectively lead to our desired outcomes (in this case significant improvement in student outcomes that would lead to the school being removed from CSI status)? This “Problem Statement” is then studied and interrogated by a team of stakeholders through the RCA process that answers questions such as:

- Why do we get these outcomes?
- Who are the people involved in this problem?
- What policies, procedures, or rules contribute to this problem?
- What resources are currently engaging with this problem?
- What environmental issues impact this problem?

This process led to a small number of “root causes” to the problem designed to help school stakeholders design strategies and programs that are more likely to lead to significant improvement for students. In addition, the process will include conducting research on the problem and prioritized root causes and recommending evidence-based strategies for improvement.

II. SCHOOL PROFILE

School Name: Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School
 1401 W. Lafayette Ave, Baltimore, MD 21217
 (410) 396-0632

Total Teachers: 21

Student Demographics

Total Students	Asian	Black African Americans	Hispanic/Latino	White	Other	% Economically Disadvantaged	% English Learners	% Students with Disabilities
334	<10	329	<10	<10	<10	87.23%	<5%	16.41%

Harlem Park Elementary School MSDE School Report Card Profile for Pre-kindergarten-5

Academic Progress		School Quality and Student Success		Academic Achievement		Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency	
Student Growth Percentile in Math	22.5	Students Not Chronically Absent	52.9%	% Proficient in Math	3.6%	% English Learners Making Progress Toward Learning English	N/A
Student Growth Percentile in ELA	33			Average Performance Math	1.5		
Credit for Well Rounded Curriculum N/A	0%	Access to Well Rounded Curriculum	4%	% Proficient in ELA	1.2%		
				Average Performance ELA	1.4		
Earned Points:	5/30	Earned Points:	1.4/25	Earned Points:	3.2/20	Earned Points:	N/A
Total Earned Percent:				18%			

To view this school's full report card, visit www.mdreportcard.org

II. SCHOOL PROFILE

Harlem Park Middle School MSDE School Report Card Profile for 6-8

Academic Progress		School Quality and Student Success		Academic Achievement		Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency	
Student Growth Percentile in Math	45	Students Not Chronically Absent	47.8%	% Proficient in Math	1%	% English Learners Making Progress Toward Learning English	N/A
Student Growth Percentile in ELA	36.5			Average Performance Math	1.5		
Credit for Well Rounded Curriculum N/A	83.3%	Access to Well Rounded Curriculum	0%	% Proficient in ELA	4%		
				Average Performance ELA	1.6		
Earned Points:	13/28	Earned Points:	1/25	Earned Points:	2.4/20		
Total Earned Percent:				18%			

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Description of the Process

The first step in the RCA process was to convene a half-day meeting that was facilitated by a two-member RCA team. Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School convened on April 26, 2019 for day one of the RCA process. The convening included the school leadership team, consisting of a local school system leader (i.e., principal supervisor, school improvement lead) and other key school staff. The primary goal of this meeting was to craft a “Problem Statement” that would drive the root cause analysis. A Problem Statement can be defined as a statement describing a situation, issue, barrier, impediment, or challenge that a school must address to significantly improve students outcomes related particularly to those outcomes that led to the school being placed on the CSI list.

The school’s goals of the first day were as follows: 1) to review and analyze school data related to key areas of performance leading to the school’s designation as a CSI school, and 2) to determine a problem statement to drive the RCA process. The school team used the following data for this process:

- MDSE CSI Needs Assessment Report, 2018-2019
- Maryland State School Report Card, 2017-2018
- Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) School Profile, Fall 2018
- BCPS School Parent School Survey, 2017-2018

Problem Statement Criteria

Participants arrived at a problem statement by examining how CSI schools were identified; by using data to understand why the school received CSI status; by organizing data trends into themes;

by evaluating the feasibility of addressing those themes; and by prioritizing addressable themes to identify the RCA area of focus. The problem statement was crafted based on the following criteria:

1. *How important is the problem to addressing our needs?*

Importance is determined by whether student outcomes will be improved, teacher efficacy is increased, and/or organizational systems will be improved.

2. *How feasible is it to address this problem?*

Feasibility is defined by the availability of adequate resources, staff, and capacity, and whether there is sufficient support and buy-in.

3. *How aligned is the problem to our needs?*

The problem statement should be related to the reason the school was identified as a CSI school. Also the school should be able to address the problem and its root causes by the effective selection and implementation of evidence-based practices.

Day One Summary

The first RCA meeting focused on identifying and prioritizing problems at Harlem Park. A diverse list of issues was raised by the school leadership team, including issues with curriculum, instruction, school-wide systems, testing culture, and socio-emotional challenges, among others. Although the group did not immediately coalesce around a specific problem, it quickly became clear that student achievement needed to be addressed during the second meeting. Almost all students in the school failed to meet proficiency benchmarks on Maryland statewide assessments.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Key Data Themes

Data Source	Key Takeaways
MDSE CSI Needs Assessment	Half of all teachers are new.
Maryland School Report Card	Fewer than half of students in kindergarten are coming in prepared for kindergarten.
MDSE CSI Needs Assessment	48.4 percent of students are chronically absent.
MDSE CSI Needs Assessment	42.9 percent of teachers have less than two years of teaching experience.
MDSE CSI Needs Assessment	Teacher attendance is unsatisfactory.

Themes Across Data Sources (Topics) (1 being highest priority)	Ranking
High number of new teachers (42 percent have under two years of experience)	1
Low teacher attendance	2
High chronic absenteeism	3
High student mobility	4
Enrollment decline	5

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Final Problem Statement

Low teacher attendance and inconsistency with planning and delivering high-quality instruction are resulting in low student achievement in ELA (5 percent) and mathematics (less than 5 percent) as measured on state assessments.

Evidence Base for Problem Statement

This section represents a brief research summary of the evidence related to the significance and/or impact of the problem statement identified above.

Analysis of the Civil Rights Data Collection from the US Department of Education supplies evidence that students in schools serving high proportions of African American or Hispanic students are disproportionately exposed to teacher absence (2015). Evidence shows that teacher absences may reduce student achievement. First, instructional intensity may be negatively impacted when the regularly

assigned teacher is absent (Capitan et al., 1980; Varlas, 2001). Additionally, high absence rates among regular teachers causes a disruption to the regular routines and procedures of the classroom, which may lead to more classroom interruptions (Rundall, 1986; Turbeville, 1987). Students may have difficulty forming meaningful relationships with multiple, mobile substitute teachers, and even if substitutes deliver high-quality lessons, they may be one-off episodic lessons and not part of the regular teacher's long-term instructional strategies. Furthermore, substitutes lack detailed knowledge of students' skill levels, which makes it difficult for them to provide differentiated instruction that addresses the needs of individual students. Teacher absences may also negatively impact student achievement in less direct ways. For example, teacher absences may inhibit attempts by school faculties to implement consistent instructional practices across classrooms and grades. Common planning time, during which teachers may collaborate on improving instruction, is often so scarce that even low rates of teacher absence could almost completely undermine its purpose (Miller,

IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Day Two Summary

Harlem Park Elementary/Middle School was convened on May 3, 2019 for day two of the RCA process. Day two was devoted to working with the school's stakeholder team (see Appendix A) to identify and prioritize the root causes of the problem so the causes could be addressed in the school's improvement planning efforts.

Stakeholders began the day by reviewing the problem statement developed by the instructional leadership team on day one. Following this review, they comprehensively brainstormed causal factors that contributed to the problem using a "Fishbone" activity. Individual causal factors were then organized into themes, and a causal factor statement was crafted for each theme. Using the "5 Whys Activity," stakeholders were encouraged to dig deeper into the causal factor statements by asking "why" questions in order to arrive at underlying causes.

Underlying causes were then collectively ranked in order to arrive at a prioritized list of root causes.

Specifically, the goals for day two included:

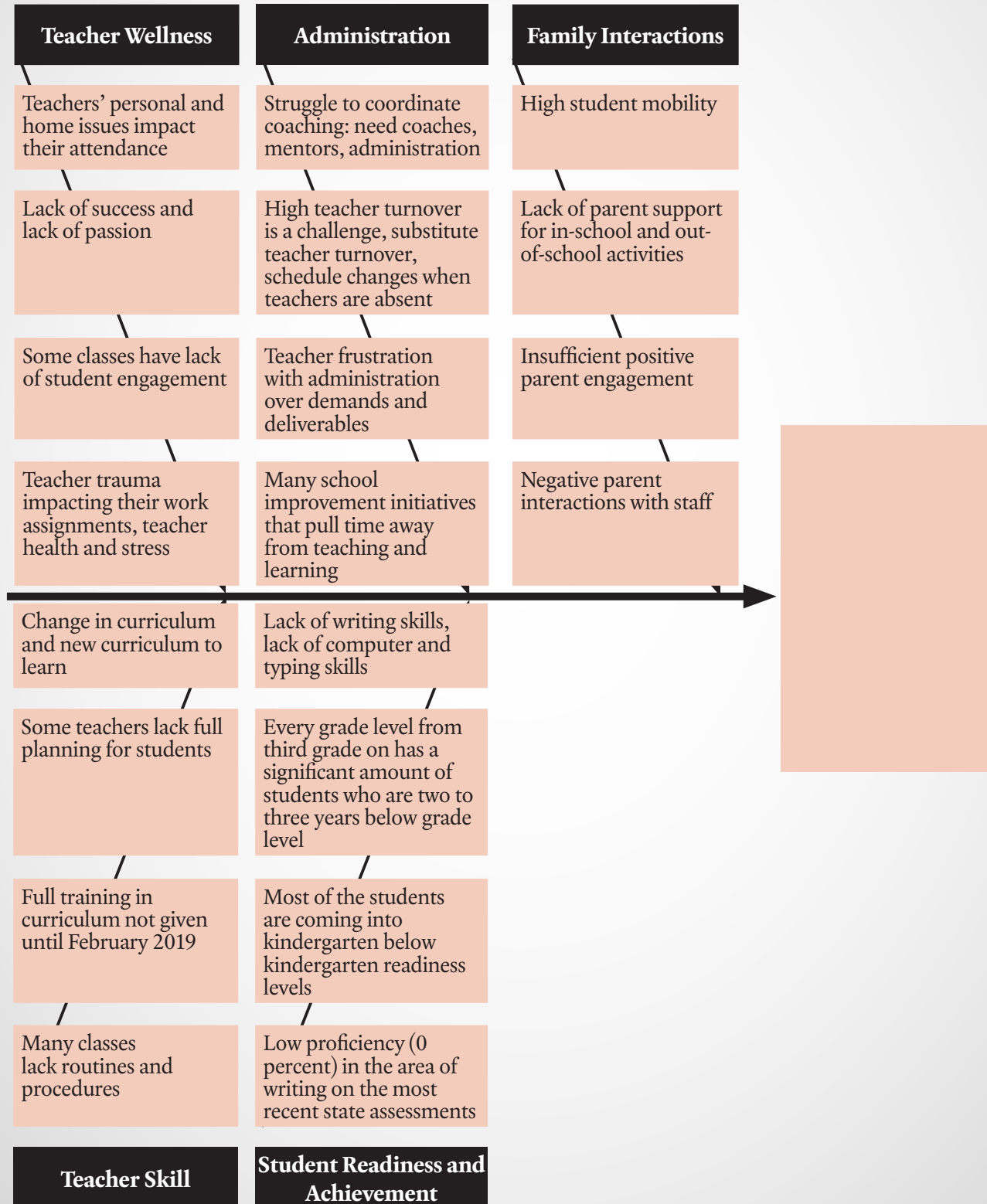
- Determine factors contributing to the problem statement.
- Identify underlying causes of the problem and determine which underlying causes are primary "root" causes.
- Prioritize the root causes for the importance of impacting student outcomes and the feasibility of implementing strategies to address them.

Casual Factors

The "Fishbone" diagram represents the stakeholder group's initial assessment of all of the individual factors contributing to the existence or recurrence of the problem statement.

IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Harlem Park Elementary and Middle School Casual Factors



IV. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Prioritized Root Causes

Following several group exercises, the stakeholder group came to consensus on the priority root causes. These are the causes most critical to addressing the problem based on the criteria of importance, feasibility, and alignment.

Final Output. Prioritized Root Causes:	Ranking
Insufficient support for teachers, especially new teachers leads to low teacher attendance.	1
Teacher skills are low in how to differentiate instruction.	2
Teachers have low expectations for student learning.	3
Poor relationship-building between the school and families is evident.	4

Evidence Base for Prioritized Root Causes

#1: Insufficient Support for Teachers, Especially New Teachers

A strong research base demonstrates the positive effects on student achievement of quality instruction. Harlem Park's lack of a robust instructional support system, identified by participating stakeholders as a root cause leading to low student achievement, is indeed backed by research as a critical piece of supporting student learning.

#2: Low Teacher Skill to Differentiate Instruction

Stakeholders noted the lack of individualized supports and differentiated instruction for students, which is well-documented by research as a hindrance to student achievement. Research shows that weak instructional quality negatively impacts student achievement (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2016).

#3: Low Teacher Expectations

Teacher mindset and student expectations impact student performance. African

American students are more likely to have negative referrals from teachers than white

students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Lack of cultural understanding has been found to be a contributor to low student expectations (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010).

#4: Poor Relationships Between School Staff and Families

Research shows that engaging families is important in supporting students' success (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004). Thus as Harlem Park begins to focus on addressing the root causes of low performance, they must see families as partners. Of the many different ways that families can support students, the highest predictor of academic performance is families supporting students' future visions of themselves and believing that school is important to achieving these visions (Jeynes, 2005).

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recommendations for Evidence-Based Improvement

Final recommendations for this report have been developed by the University of Maryland College Park in consultation with RCA facilitators and leaders at MSDE. Recommendations were developed using the following process:

- Reviewing the ideas, notes, and stakeholder perspectives gathered throughout the Root Cause Analysis process;
- Conducting a scan of the research literature related to the problem statement and prioritized root causes identified throughout the process. While a comprehensive research analysis was outside the scope of this

project, the team reviewed research using the standards of evidence model outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to offer research that had moderate or strong evidence of effectiveness (Level 2 or Level 1 on the ESSA framework);

- Compiling, organizing and categorizing over 150 recommendations submitted by UMD/RCA facilitators.

These recommendations are offered by the University of Maryland College Park in consultation with MSDE. They represent only a portion of the potential strategies and interventions that will become a part of the school's three-year improvement plan developed in concert with the MSDE Title I office.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION	Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement ¹
<p>Maximize professional learning focused on planning, instruction, and improving learning conditions for students.</p> <p>Establish or significantly strengthen a school-wide cycle of professional learning – coaching, observations, and team planning – that includes an aligned focus across core instructional activities. Several studies link teacher professional learning with improvements in instruction and quality of learning environments (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Professional learning opportunities are most effective when they are part of coherent school-wide efforts that link content, assessments, and reflection, rather than episodic professional workshops (Akiba & Liang, 2016). Two effective professional learning strategies include professional learning communities and job-embedded professional learning.</p> <p>Professional Learning Communities: Teachers need time spent planning and learning with colleagues in collaborative planning time and/or professional learning communities (PLCs) that are focused on teaching and learning not on administrative or organizational demands. Research shows that PLCs are most successful when they are designed and supported with specific attention to leadership, group dynamics, trust, and respect (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2017). PLCs can form around topics that teachers can explore together, plan for, and build upon together using peer observations and deeper capacity-building on areas of need, such as social emotional learning or trauma-informed teaching. Authentic PLCs include the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated time for the PLC • Teacher-led and based on specific needs of students • Supported by school leaders with training and development activities <p>Job Embedded Professional Learning: Research emphasizes the importance of professional learning that emphasizes explicit strategies for conducting active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than just abstract discussions (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).</p>	<p><i>Talent Development</i></p> <p><i>Instructional Transformation</i></p>

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION

Four Domains Domain of Rapid School Improvement¹

Provide high-quality differentiated instruction in all general education classes.

Instructional Transformation

Differentiated instruction serves one mechanism to serve a wide range of student abilities and needs in a single classroom. Studies suggest that differentiated classrooms produce similar or better results in reading compared to traditional classrooms (Connor et al., 2009; Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2011; Tieso, 2002).

Research suggests that high-quality differentiated instruction includes the following features: 1) identification of each students' learning needs based on student performance data; 2) whole group instruction with various levels of examples and explanations, and sub-group instruction targeted at individualized students' skill levels with different levels and kinds of explanation and practice; 3) regular (informal and formal) assessment of student learning to identify new needs and goals following initial adjustment of instruction; and 4) continuous responsive adjustment of both what is taught and how it is taught based on the latest student assessment data (Alsalamah, 2017; Prast, Van de Weijer-Bergsma, Kroesbergen, & Van Luit, 2015; van Geel et al., 2019).

Although much differentiation can occur through small and large group instruction in the regular classroom, some instruction may need to be more individualized based on student needs and will lead to pull-out interventions. Toward this end, randomized control trials on Computer Assisted Instruction programs, such as through TutorMate, have shown remarkably positive results on elementary students reading performance (Kortecamp, Harper, & Green, 2016).

¹The MSDE uses the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd's Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework as a framework for continuous improvement. The framework identifies four areas as central to rapid and significant improvement: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift. The recommendations in this report are aligned to the four domains as a way to organize and frame the improvement efforts. For more information: <https://centeronschoolturnaround.org>.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

RECOMMENDATION

Four Domains
Domain of Rapid
School Improvement¹

Enlist parents and families as academic partners in student learning.

Culture Shift

Research has proven that family engagement matters tremendously to student academic success across all populations. Family involvement has been shown to benefit children from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds in particular. For example, low-income African American children whose families maintained high rates of parent participation in elementary school were shown to be more likely to graduate from high school (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Kreider, 2006).

In order to enlist parents as academic partners, schools should start by providing information and training for families to support high expectations for their children's education. These shared academic expectations for children's education should be rooted in the recognition of the value of education. Therefore, schools that are effective in partnering with parents need to actively invite parents to team with teachers and other staff in communicating and reinforcing these shared values at home as well as in school (Flamboyan Foundation, 2018).

Evidence-based family engagement practices that support academic success and reinforce high academic expectations include parents reading regularly at home with their children, parents regularly communicating with their children about their school experiences, and parental participation in school activities and functions (Jeynes, 2005). Home visits can foster families' understandings of the importance of these supports. Efforts should also acknowledge and integrate the funds of knowledge of student's families into the school environment (Wilder, 2014; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

VI. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Collaboratively with the Local School System (LSS) and stakeholders, Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school teams will develop intervention plans that identify SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) intervention goals with measurable annual outcomes and progress indicators that will guide schools toward meeting annual targets and exit criteria in three years. The outcomes of the root cause analysis must be used to inform the development of the SMART intervention goals and identification of evidence-based

strategies included in the intervention plan. Any evidence-based strategy must meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence requirements (level 1, 2, or 3). Intervention Plans will be approved by the school, LSS, and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and monitored annually by staff from the LSS and the MSDE. Additional information and resources are available on the MSDE Resource Hub. <https://www.marylandresourcehub.com/>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of Stakeholders

	Name	Position
Day 1 April 26, 2019	Denisha Logan	<i>Principal</i>
	Alohaa Chin	<i>Literacy Coach</i>
	Molly Conne	<i>Individualized Education Plan/504 Chair</i>
	Melanie Everhart	<i>Mathematics Lead</i>
	Maurice McKoy	<i>Afterschool Director</i>
Day 2 May 3, 2019	Name	Position
	Denisha Logan	<i>Principal</i>
	Alohaa Chin	<i>Literacy Coach</i>
	Mack Jones	<i>School Turnaround Specialist</i>
	Danielle Harris	<i>Community School Coordinator</i>
	Melanie Hall	<i>Parent/Community Member</i>
	Melanie Everhart	<i>Mathematics Lead</i>
Maurice McKoy	<i>Afterschool Director</i>	

APPENDICES

Appendix B: Bios of Facilitators

Christian Anderson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development at Morgan State University. He is a mathematics educator with over twenty years of K-12 teaching and administrative experience. Prior to his appointment to the faculty at Morgan State, Anderson served as a teacher, mathematics department chairperson, and an administrator at the school-based and central office levels. Anderson's research interests include the following: supervision in urban mathematics classrooms, mathematical concept development in urban classrooms, and beliefs of teachers in urban mathematics classrooms.



Iris Bond Gill is a project coordinator for the Center for Educational Innovation and Improvement at UMD. She brings twenty years of education policy and management experience. Bond Gill led digital literacy implementation at the Mozilla Foundation. Prior to this position, she was Assistant Superintendent of Elementary and Secondary Education for the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education. Between 2002 and 2012, Iris worked in Washington, DC-based policy and advocacy organizations focused on secondary school reform, school improvement, and education and youth policy. Bond Gill has a Master's Degree from the H. John Heinz School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University and a Bachelor of Science degree from Arizona State University. She started her career as a teacher in urban New Orleans, LA, through Teach For America.



APPENDICES

Appendix C: Citations of research

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