

Priority Schools

Fairfax County Public Schools

September 1, 2010

As part of Fairfax County Public Schools' (FCPS) major commitment to closing the achievement gap, the district has designated thirty (30) elementary and middle schools as Priority Schools. The Priority Schools' designation will provide schools with additional support in order to meet their benchmarks for student achievement. This support will be provided to the principal and school staff through the Priority School Support Team, composed of staff members from various FCPS departments, and the FCPS Leadership Team. Working in the collaborative culture of a Professional Learning Community, the Priority School's principal, school staff, Leadership Team, and department staff will focus on the following results:

- Continuous improvement in student performance on the SOL tests,
- Adequate Yearly Progress as designated by Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and
- Progress in closing the achievement gaps as measured by FCPS' School Support Composite Index (SSCI).

The initial selection of Priority Schools in May 2010 was based on one of two criteria:

1. Title I Elementary Schools identified for School Improvement Grants, based on not making Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); or
2. The FCPS School Support Composite Index (SSCI) ranking. SSCI is a method of ranking schools based on a three-year average of two factors:
 - Number of students not passing SOL Reading and Mathematics tests;
 - Percentage achievement gap between White/Asian subgroup and Black/Hispanic subgroups.

The FCPS School Board allocated \$4.3 million in funding for FY11 for the Priority Schools Initiative (PSI) as part of a three-year pilot project. The intent of the PSI is to provide additional support for a three-year period (through the 2012-13 school year). At the end of this three year period, each school's improvement will be analyzed and determination of the future course of action will be made. A new SSCI ranking will be compiled each fall by FCPS, and additional schools may be identified for Title I School Improvement, therefore additional Priority Schools could be designated in subsequent years of the three-year pilot.

Informed by national and local research on best practices in closing the gap, key components of the FCPS Priority Schools were developed. Each school will have a cross-functional team known as the Priority School Support Team (PSST). Since the classroom teacher is of primary importance to student achievement, Priority Schools will receive preferential consideration in hiring new staff, as well as priority in the assignment of instructional resources.

Principals in Level 1 Priority Schools will participate in the School Turnaround Specialist Program, a partnership of the Darden School (Business) and Curry School (Education) at the University of Virginia. The School Turnaround Specialist Program is a two-year program designed to address the leadership needs of principals charged with making the changes necessary to have an immediate impact on student achievement. It includes coursework, case studies, and discussions to share information and practical experience in proven business and education turnaround strategies. Content areas include assessment of personal leadership qualifications, skills to lead change, data analysis, decision-making, setting targets, and creating action plans. School Turnaround Specialist Program participants also study business management strategies, organizational behavior and communication, restructuring and renewal of organizations. In addition, all Priority Schools will receive assistance to develop effective partnerships with parents and community agencies.

Support to Priority Schools:

1. Division Leadership Team

FCPS Leadership Team will serve both as a funding and support mechanism for each Priority School. Leadership Team members will monitor research-based indicators of each school's progress each quarter, and approve allocation of resources as recommended by the Priority School Support Team. In addition, a member of the Leadership Team will serve as the liaison ("shepherd") with the UVA Darden/Curry School Turnaround Specialist Program.

2. Priority School Support Team

A cross-functional team with up to six members will be assigned to each Priority School. The Cluster Assistant Superintendent or Cluster Director will chair a Priority School Support Team, which contains 4-6 representatives from the following departments: Instructional Services, Human Resources, Special Services, Professional Learning and Accountability, Communications and Community Outreach, Financial Services, Facilities and Transportation, and Information Technology.

The Priority School Support Team will meet on a regular basis throughout the school year to review the school's current data and planning processes, then leverage any additional resources from FCPS departments and Leadership Team. The focus of the School Support Team is to work with CAS and the principal as an advocate for the school's needs, to provide perspective on current processes, and to make suggestions to improve effectiveness. In conjunction with the principal, the School Support Team will advocate for the school, and make

recommendations to Leadership Team for additional resources that are needed to ensure continuous improvement in student achievement.

3. Priority staffing

Priority schools will receive assistance and support to recruit experienced and highly qualified teachers, such as first preference for early hires and assistance with teacher professional development. For 2010-11, the following options will be offered to priority schools:

- Early access to early hires
- No limit on the number of early hires placed in a priority school
- Principals can select destaffs, but they will not be required to accept destaffs in instructional positions from other schools

The Priority School Support Team also may leverage assistance with staff training, and reassignment if needed, however no involuntarily transfers will be made for the 2010-11 school year. FCPS Human Resources Department will develop a process to determine how to better support Priority School principals using the current evaluation process to both strengthen teacher capacity and support the removal of teachers who are unable to meet the needs of priority school students.

4. Instructional Priority

Priority Schools are expected to develop high-functioning Professional Learning Communities, implement FCPS best practices in teaching and learning, and work toward accomplishing the district's Student Achievement Goals. To that end, Cluster Assistant Superintendents and School Support Team members from the departments will advocate for the Priority School and broker resources from the various departmental budgets. In addition to some dedicated funding for priority schools available through the FCPS Leadership Team, it is expected that resources will be redirected to Priority Schools from the various departmental budgets.

Some examples of additional resources might include:

- Funding for an instructional coach to ensure a high degree of implementation of Professional Learning Communities.
- Funding for extended teacher contracts to provide intervention for students who are not meeting standards;
- Funding for additional time for teacher learning with respect to best practices in teaching and learning, data analysis or other components of professional learning communities;
- Funding for additional FECEP/Head Start classes to serve eligible four-year olds in the priority school attendance area

5. Principal Leadership Training

Principals at the twenty (20) Level 1 Priority Schools will participate in a structured interview process based on *School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success* developed by Public Impact Group. This research-based interview technique is a formative assessment of principals in the following areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic achievement,• Initiative and persistence,• Monitoring and directiveness,• Planning,• Impact and influence,	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team leadership,• Developing others,• Analytical thinking,• Conceptual thinking• Self-confidence.
---	---

Following this assessment, each Level 1 principal will then participate in the School Turnaround Specialist leadership development program through the Darden/Curry Partnership for a two-year period. The Turnaround Specialist program includes a summer leadership institute developed jointly by FCPS and UVA, as well as a mid-year retreat for the principal and selected school staff members, including assistance with change management, data analysis and monitoring.

For Title I schools that are in Title I School Improvement, the Priority Schools Initiative and Turnaround Specialist program will be used to meet the requirements of the Virginia Department of Education School Improvement Grant Program. The FCPS Leadership Team liaison (shepherd) and other members of Level 1 School Support Teams will participate in the summer leadership institute as well as other components of the Turnaround Specialist training.

6. Partnership Assistance

Assistance in developing parent and community partnerships will be provided as requested by the principals and School Support Teams to ensure that these resources are mobilized to accomplish student learning goals. In addition, partnerships will be pursued with institutions of Higher Education as well as other agencies of Fairfax County government.