

Fairmont Heights High School Case Study

Prepared for
The Maryland State Department of Education
Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in the State of Maryland

By
Kathleen Mulvaney Hoyer

Activate Research, Inc. and Maryland Equity Project

Under supervision of Picus Odden & Associates.

Case study developed as a part of the firm's
Evidence-based adequacy study for Maryland
The work was a subcontract from APA Consulting.

See Policy Impact 2016 and Resources/Cases of Improving Schools at
www.PicusOdden.com

October 2015



Executive Summary

Fairmont High School is an example of the third category of schools – significant improvement in the performance of student subgroups.

Fairmont Heights High School is one of 30 high schools in the Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) district. Fairmont Heights is divided into three academies that focus on general studies, information technology, or environmental studies.

In 2014, 86.3 percent of Fairmont Heights’ students were African American, and 11.5 percent of the school’s students were Latino. Nearly two-thirds (65.3 percent) of students were eligible for free or reduce-priced meals (FRPM), and 15.6 percent of the students were served in special education programs.

In recent years, performance of certain subgroups of students at Fairmont Heights has improved significantly. Specifically, from 2008 to 2013, the percentage of students who were proficient or advanced on the reading, mathematics, and science High School Assessments (HSAs) increased:

- 31 percentage points for students who were eligible for FRPM (42.3 percent to 73.6 percent);
- 31 percentage points for students in special education (4.5 percent to 35.6 percent); and
- 30 percentage points for non-white and non-Asian students (48.5 percent to 78.6 percent).¹

Educators at Fairmont Heights work toward improving student performance in an environment marked by a focus on core subjects, the use of assessment and other student data to drive decision making, multiple academic supports for students, multiple behavioral supports for students, and supports for teachers’ engagement in professional development. Specifically:

1. Focus on core subjects. The school’s high proportion of core subject teachers indicates a commitment to these subjects and also contributes to a low average core class size.
2. Use of assessment and other student data to drive decision making. PGCPS has supported the school’s adoption of the Data Wise system, which promotes in-depth use of student performance results to inform decisions about staffing, personnel organization, curriculum, and instruction.
3. Multiple academic supports for students. The school provides many types academic assistance to help students succeed. For instance, Fairmont Heights provides targeted supports to grade nine students in an effort to help them navigate the transition from middle school to high school. Across grades, students who have failed the English or mathematics state assessments can enroll in intervention courses to prepare them to take

¹ Differences were calculated using unrounded numbers.

the exams again. The school also has a partnership with the Hillside after-school program so that participating students have access to tutoring and academic enrichment activities.

4. Multiple health and behavioral supports for students. Prince George's County Public Schools has initiated programs aimed at improving the quality of life for district residents, and Fairmont Heights has received support from these initiatives. As a community school under the district's Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative,² Fairmont Heights receives social work assistance from a community resource coordinator. The school is also the site of one of four district School-Based Wellness Centers; the on-site location of the wellness center allows Fairmont Heights students easy access to physical and mental healthcare.
5. Supports for teachers to engage in professional development. The district supports teachers' engagement in professional development by offering professional development opportunities, providing substitute teachers for educators who seek out their own forms of professional development, and setting aside professional development release days so that teachers can engage in ongoing learning without having to plan for an absence from their class.

² Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2014). *School-community partnerships: A typology for guiding systemic educational reform*. College Park, MD: Maryland Equity Project, The University of Maryland.

Introduction

Fairmont Heights is one of 30 high schools in the Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) district. Currently many students travel to school by bus. However, PGCPS is building a new facility for the school, and when the school moves into the new facility, many students will be able to walk to school. Parents of students at Fairmont Heights work for the government (federal, District of Columbia, or Prince George's district), the Metro, or in the retail or service sectors.

The school has a long history in the area. School staff members explain that it was among the first African American high schools in the Prince George's district, and it has an active alumni association that has over 10,000 members. According to staff, the alumni association works to raise funds for the school, provide scholarships to students, and support the school and students at school events.

Fairmont Heights High School is divided into academies: Hornet's Academy (a program of general studies), the Academy of Information Technology, and the Academy of Environmental Studies. Currently, the school also has a Biotechnology Academy; this academy no longer accepts new students and will cease to exist once current sophomores graduate. While it is not a formal program of study, the school also has what school staff call a "ninth grade academy" to provide extra support for students as they transition from middle school to high school.

In addition to these general education academies, the school also houses a Community Referenced Instruction (CRI) program. In the CRI program, students with severe special needs attend high school for six years. Three years of the program are geared toward helping students complete assessments necessary for high school graduation and the other three years are geared toward helping students gain career skills. This is a small program. According to staff, 10 students were enrolled in this program for the 2014-15 school year.

In 2014, 837 students were enrolled in Fairmont Heights (see Table1). In past years, enrollment at Fairmont Heights was higher due, in part, to a relatively large population of overage students. The current principal explains that the previous principal worked to reduce the number of overage students enrolled at Fairmont Heights by helping them enroll in job training programs and general education development (GED) programs. The current principal reports that the school enrolls fewer overage students than in the past.

Table 1
Fairmont Heights High School Grade-Level Enrollment and Core Class Size, 2014

Grade	Enrollment
Grade 9	259
Grade 10	237
Grade 11	198
Grade 12	143
Average core class size across grades	24.6

Source: Maryland Report Card; Personal communications with school staff

Most of the students at Fairmont Heights are African American, and a small percentage of students are Latino (see Table.2).

In 2014, 86.3 percent of Fairmont Heights’ students were African American, and 11.5 percent were Latino. Nearly two-thirds of the students (65.3 percent) were FRPM, and 15.6 percent of students received special education services.

Table 2
Fairmont Heights High School Student Characteristics, 2014

Student Characteristics	Percentage of Fairmont Heights Student Population
Race/ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-
Asian	-
Black/African American	86.3
Hispanic/Latino	11.5
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-
Two or more races	1.2
White	-
Limited English Proficient (LEPs)	-
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	65.3
Special Education students	15.6

Source: Maryland Report Card (www.mdreportcard.org). A “-“ indicates either no students or the number of students was suppressed due to too few students in the category.

Student Performance

In recent years, performance of certain subgroups of students at Fairmont Heights has improved significantly (see Table 3).

Table 3
Fairmont Heights High School Performance, High School Assessments (HSA), 2008-2013

Average School-Wide Percent Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Reading, Math and Science						
Performance Level	HSA 2008	HAS 2009	HAS 2010	HAS 2011	HSA 2012	HSA 2013
All Students	50	57	53	62	69	79
FRPM Students	42	52	55	54	69	74
LEP Students	-	-	-	-	-	-
Students with Special Needs	5	Missing	19	11	26	36
Non-White/ Non-Asian Students	49	56	53	62	69	79

Source: Data provided by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). A “-“ indicates too few students in the category to report scores.

Specifically, from 2008 to 2013, the percentage of students who were proficient or advanced on the High School Assessments (HSA) increased:

- 32 percentage points for students who were eligible for FRPM students (42 percent to 74 percent);
- 31 percentage points for special education students (5 percent to 36 percent); and
- 30 percentage points for non-white and non-Asian students (49 percent to 79 percent).

This case report examines the resources that the school uses as it works toward improved student achievement. The report has 11 sections: 1) school performance, 2) staff, 3) goals, 4) schedule, 5) curriculum and instruction, 6) assessments, 7) interventions, 8) professional development, 9) culture, 10) summary, and 11) alignment with the evidence-based model. These sections of the report draw upon information from two main sources: a review of documents provided by school staff or available online, and individual and focus group interviews with school staff (school administrators, instructional staff, and support staff) that occurred in February 2015.

School Staff

The Fairmont Heights staff includes administrators, teachers and aides who work in the main program and special education programs, and several pupil support personnel. Table 4 presents the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff by category working in Fairmont Heights.

School administration includes a principal, who began working at Fairmont Heights in 2012 as a resident administrator under the New Leaders initiative.³ The principal is joined by three assistant principals, an athletic director (who splits time between this role and teaching), a student accountability administrator, the coordinator of the school’s special education services, and a testing/data coordinator. Several staff members help operate the school by performing clerical or administrative assistance, business, scheduling, and technical support roles.

Fairmont Heights has 34 teachers who teach in one of the core subject areas of English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and world languages. Given a student enrollment of 837 students in 2014-15, the average core class size is approximately 25 students. Fairmont Heights also employs 14.5 elective teachers who provide instruction in subjects such as art, music, drama, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), physical education, business education, and information technology. According to school personnel, several teachers came to the school through the Teach for America program. Many teachers serve as department chairs, and three teachers in the school serve as professional development lead teachers. Department chairs and professional development lead teachers carry full teaching loads and therefore perform chair and lead teacher duties as an addition to their instructional responsibilities.

Table 4
Staffing in Fairmont Heights High School, 2014-15

Category	FTE
<i>Administration</i>	
Principal	1
Assistant Principal	3
Athletic Director	0.5
Testing Coordinator	1
Special Education Program Coordinator	1
Student Accountability Administrator	1
Clerical, Business, Scheduling, and Technical Support	6
<i>Main Program</i>	
Core Teacher	34
Elective Teacher	14.5
Special Education Self-Contained	1
Special Education	2
<i>Aides</i>	
Special Education Paraprofessional	1
Itinerant Special Education Assistant	3
Special Education (Self-Contained) Paraprofessional	2

³ The previous school principal, who worked at Fairmont Heights for four years, also came to the school through the New Leaders program.

Category	FTE
Dedicated Special Education Aide	4
<i>Pupil Support</i>	
Guidance Counselor	3
Nurse	1
School-Based Wellness Center Personnel	2
Community Resource Coordinator/Social Worker	1
Speech and Language Therapist	0.6
Psychologist	0.2
Vision and Hearing Specialist	0.03
Other Pupil Support	1
Security	3
Cafeteria Manager	1
Custodial Staff	2

Two special education teachers provide co-teaching support within the general education program. One special education paraprofessional also works in the general education program, and three itinerant special education assistants float to different classes within the general education program to assist on an as-needed basis. The school's CRI program, the self-contained program for students with severe special needs, has a lead resource teacher and two paraprofessional educators. Four dedicated aides work one-on-one with particular students.

The school has three guidance counselors. These counselors provide a variety of services to students, including assistance with course registration, assistance with registration for college placement exams, filling out Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) paperwork, seeking scholarships for postsecondary education, and bringing students to a district-run college and career day.

The school receives support through Prince George's County Public Schools' Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative, making Fairmont Heights a community school.⁴ Through this initiative, the school employs a community resource coordinator who works year-round to address issues in the school and community such as child abuse, homelessness, food vouchers, pregnancy and other health concerns, and educational challenges. Fairmont Heights is also the site of one of the district's four School-Based Wellness Centers, and staff members at that site provide medical services to students at the school.

⁴ For more information on the Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative, see <http://www.princegeorgesdistrictmd.gov/sites/ExecutiveBranch/CommunityEngagement/TransformingNeighborhoods/Pages/default.aspx>.

Some personnel serve multiple schools in the district. During the 2014-15 school year, a psychologist comes to Fairmont Heights one day a week, a speech and language therapist is at the school three days a week, and vision and hearing specialists are at the school once a month. The school can request the services of an occupational therapist, but it does not need this person to visit the school on a regular basis.

As shown in Table 4 and outlined in the preceding paragraphs, Fairmont Heights has access to a wide variety of human resources, including: (a) administrators who focus on different aspects of school operations; (b) teachers of English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and world languages; (c) teachers who teach elective courses in the general education program, the academies, and for the JROTC program; (d) several different types of special education teachers and aides; (e) guidance counselors; and (f) personnel who support the physical and mental health of Fairmont Heights students.

School Goals

According to the school website, the vision of the school is to “continually ignite curiosity and facilitate habits of the mind, which create globally contributing citizens.” The school’s mission is to “empower students to become lifelong learners dedicated to achieving academic excellence and becoming active members in a global community that exemplifies duty, honor, and citizenship.” References to the vision and mission of the school are evident in communications between school administrators and families (e.g. letters to welcome students to school at the beginning of the school year).

According to the school principal, the school’s goal is to use data to improve how the school operates and, ultimately, to increase student performance. Like many other PGCPs schools, Fairmont Heights has begun to use Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Data Wise program. According to the Data Wise website, the program encourages educators to engage in eight steps that will help them use data to improve student achievement. The steps are to “organize for collaborative work; build assessment literacy; create data overview; dig into student data; examine instruction; develop action plan; plan to assess progress; [and] act and assess.”⁵

The school principal says that the staff uses the program to schedule students into classes, schedule teachers for classes and organize teachers into groups, and analyze student data to monitor and improve school performance. Goals that stem from the Data Wise program cover many aspects of school operations. For instance, the principal says that one goal is to keep class sizes low; her goal is 25 or fewer students in core classes and between 35 and 40 students in elective classes.

In addition to the goals of improved student performance, school staff also report goals regarding the school’s presence in the community. The school principal explains that school performance

⁵ These steps are located on the Data Wise website at <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=datawise&pageid=icb.page547509>.

declined in the past decades and, as a result, community members sometimes express negative perceptions of the school. One of the principal's main goals is to highlight the school's successes and help community members see the ways in which the school has improved in recent years.

School Schedule

Fairmont Heights utilizes a block schedule. Students at Fairmont Heights begin their day at 8:30 a.m. and attend four class periods each day. The first two periods each last one hour and 30 minutes. The third period, which includes a 30-minute lunch period, is two hours long. The last period of the day is one hour and 25 minutes. Students end their school day at 3:10 p.m. Teachers instruct for three periods and have one period for planning.⁶

Each student has a conference with school administrators prior to enrolling in grade nine at Fairmont Heights. This conference provides school staff, students, and their parents the opportunity to discuss any academic or behavioral issues that the student may face, describe the supports available at Fairmont Heights, and create plans to address potential issues. These conferences also allow school staff to get an understanding of students' academic background and level of preparedness for high school courses.

The school's guidance counselors assign students to classes. Fairmont Heights offers standard, honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses in English; standard and AP mathematics courses; standard and AP history/social studies courses; and standard, honors, and AP science courses. Students need approval from a teacher to register for honors and AP courses.

Students in the Biotechnology, Information Technology, and Environmental Science Academies generally move as cohorts. That is, these students attend core classes and academy-specific courses together but other electives with students from throughout the general education population.

Curriculum and Instruction

As noted in the introduction, the general education program at Fairmont Heights contains Hornets' Academy (a general program of study), an Academy of Information Technology (some funding for which came from the U.S. Department of Education), an Academy of Environmental Sciences, and (for only a few more years) an Academy of Biotechnology. Students in all academies are required to take classes in the core subjects of English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and world languages.⁷ Students enrolled in the Academy of Information Technology, the Academy of Environmental Sciences, and the Academy of Biotechnology are

⁶ Professional development lead teachers and department chairs, who carry full teaching loads, may use non-teaching periods to perform lead teacher or chair work rather than as a planning period.

⁷ School documents outline that students must take four years of English/language arts and mathematics. While students are only required to take three years of science and social studies, they have the option to take a fourth year of these core courses as an elective. Similarly, while students are only required to take two years of world languages, they have the option to take two more years as elective courses. The school also requires that students take some credits in fitness/health, fine arts, and technology.

required to take academy-specific courses. All students are required to supplement core courses with electives, which include advanced or specialized offerings in English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and world languages as well as offerings in the arts, business, JROTC, health and physical education, technology, and engineering. Students can also earn college credit through dual enrollment agreements with Prince George's Community College and Bowie State University.

Fairmont Heights' teachers use district-recommended textbooks. For instance, English/language arts teachers use online textbooks obtained through Holt McDougal, and mathematics courses use Glencoe textbooks for algebra. The district provides pacing guides and a curriculum for all subjects, which teachers at Fairmont Heights supplement with materials they gather from a variety of sources. Across subjects, the curriculum is changing due to the transition to the state's new College and Career-Ready standards.

Teachers at Fairmont Heights use a variety of instructional techniques and resources. Some teachers throughout the school have integrated technology into their instruction. Particularly due to the school's information technology program, teachers and students throughout the school have access to resources such as tablets and computers. Some classrooms have interactive whiteboards, and some teachers report that they encourage their students to use their own technology (such as their phones) in the classroom setting in order to access instructional materials.

In sum, Fairmont Heights has multiple resources to implement its curricular and instructional programs. First, the school requires a teaching staff capable of delivering instruction in the core subjects and electives (academy-specific and other). Teachers at the school require textbooks and time to find additional resources to supplement the text. They also need time to become familiar with the College and Career-Ready standards and find materials that support its implementation. Many teachers at Fairmont Heights have embraced technology for instruction; these teachers use materials such as computers, tablets, and interactive whiteboards.

Assessments

Students at Fairmont Heights take a variety of tests for different purposes. The following paragraphs outline four categories of assessments.

First, like their colleagues throughout PGCPSS, teachers at Fairmont Heights are evaluated, in part, based on their ability to meet student learning objectives (SLOs). Thus, students take pre- and post-assessments that provide data for teachers' SLOs. Some tests for SLOs come from the district, while others are teacher-created.

Second, students at Fairmont Heights take benchmark assessments. Students take district-level benchmark tests on a quarterly basis; these tests include the Mandatory Unit Systemic Test (MUST) and the Formative Assessment Systems Test (FAST) assessments.

Third, students take tests to measure their mastery of course content. In some cases, these unit exams come from the district, but in other cases, teachers themselves create unit tests. In still other cases, teachers use commercially available assessments. For instance, English/language arts teachers have access to online assessments through the online textbook system. The extent to which teachers themselves create unit tests may have increased this year, due to the shift to the new state standards. For example, while algebra teachers had access to district-created common assessments last year, they needed to create their own unit tests this year, which reduces comparability across classrooms and schools. Teachers in non-tested subjects typically create their own tests, which they base on the district curriculum.

Fourth, students also take state assessments. In past years, high school students in Maryland took the High School Assessments (HSA) in English, algebra, government, and biology. Students need to take and pass each of these assessments at some point during their high school career in order to obtain a high school diploma. Beginning in spring 2015, students will take Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in English and algebra,⁸ government and biology tests, however, will still follow the HSA format.

As discussed above in the section on school goals, the staff at Fairmont Heights follows the steps in the Data Wise program to analyze results from these varied assessments. Administrators, a data coordinator, and teachers work together to implement the Data Wise program. According to the principal, school staff review benchmark data, identify trends in student performance, and make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and the organization of teacher teams. Periodically, the school engages teachers in full-day data analytic sessions; on these days, substitute teachers cover classes so that teachers can spend the day taking a close look at student performance.

The school uses several resources for assessment. In addition to the assessments themselves, the school has access to the Data Wise program and a data coordinator to assist with program implementation. Finally, the school needs time to allow teachers, administrators, and the data coordinator to analyze the data and use them to shape curriculum and instruction.

Interventions

Students at Fairmont Heights have access to a variety of interventions, some of which focus on academics and some on health, wellness, and behavior.

Academic

In an effort to provide extra support to students as they transition from middle school to high school, the school has begun to pay special attention to grade nine students. In addition to the grade nine academy, where students have access to a cohort-like environment, the school uses an

⁸ Passing scores on the PARCC English and algebra assessments are not graduation requirements for students who initially take the exams during the 2014-15 or 2015-16 academic years. For more information, see <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/w/Top5HSTesting0214.pdf>.

early warning system to track the progress of grade eight students who will enter the school. The district-provided early warning system, which keeps track of indicators such as reading and mathematics performance, attendance, and discipline data, flags students who may need extra supports when they enter the high school environment. When the system flags a student as needing extra support, the school works with the student's parents to create a plan that may include daily check-ins, a mentor, extra support from a guidance counselor, conferences with parents, afterschool study hall sessions, or enrollment in the other support programs.

According to the school principal, Fairmont Heights works with a feeder middle school to bring overage grade eight students to the high school so that these students can make up their course credit in the high school environment. Additionally, when possible, the school refers overage grade nine students to an alternative school in the district to make up course credit; the school then accepts these students back at grade 10. Due to resource shortages, however, the school does not refer all overage grade nine students to the alternative school.

Across grades, educators at Fairmont Heights provide multiple supports to students within the school day. For instance, particular students who demonstrate ongoing academic challenges are referred to a team of school staff who devise an individualized support plan for that student. Additionally, the school offers semester-long intervention elective courses for students who have taken but not yet passed the English or mathematics state exams. Furthermore, in addition to in-class supports of co-teachers or paraprofessionals, the school offers a resource course for special education students and, for some special education students, provides intensive courses for core subjects.

The school also has after-school supports for students who struggle academically. While Fairmont Heights does not have a school-wide, formal tutoring program, some teachers do tutor students after-school. Additionally, Fairmont Heights is one of four PGCPHS high schools to participate in the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection program. The Hillside program, created and supported by Wegmans grocery store, provides compensatory education students supports including tutors and advocates, extracurricular life skills enrichment courses, college information and tours, and job training.⁹ The principal reports that this program is so popular among students it has a waiting list, since interest in the program exceeds available slots.

⁹ According to the Hillside program website (<https://www.hillside.com/about-us/family-agencies/hwsc/hwsc-who-we-are/>), students with two of the following characteristics may be eligible for the program:

- “School attendance between 71 percent and percent;
- overage for grade-level;
- failing grade in core subjects;
- multiple school suspensions;
- low standardized test scores; and
- low socioeconomic status.”

Fairmont Heights’ students also have access to extracurricular activities that can enhance their academic experiences. These experiences, while not targeted toward students at risk of academic failure, may help students succeed in secondary school and beyond. First, some Fairmont Heights students participate in federally funded Upward Bound programs at Howard University and the University of Maryland. These Upward Bound programs help students prepare for postsecondary education by offering academic supports as well as help filling out college applications and student aid forms. Second, the school operates a JROTC program, which receives a large portion of its funding from the U.S. Department of Defense and usually serves about 225 students in the school. While all students in the school are welcome to take JROTC courses, only those students who attend summer programs and pass a series of tests become cadets. Third, teachers in the school operate a Saturday program to help prepare students for AP exams.

In sum, key resources in the provision of academic supports include (a) access to data on student performance in order to identify students who may need extra help; (b) collaboration among school staff to recommend supports for students who are particularly struggling; (c) in-school interventions for both general and special education students; and (d) out-of-school programs, some of which are funded by the school and some of which receive external support.

Health, Wellness, and Behavioral

Fairmont Heights is one of four high schools in Prince George’s County Public Schools to house a district-supported School-Based Wellness Center, which school staff say is highly-utilized by students. According to the Prince George’s district government website, this center offers “[c]omprehensive health and social services ... in a student-friendly, readily accessible school health center... The goal is to make students available for learning by promoting health, preventing disease, and reducing behavioral risks. The Wellness Centers provide care to youth currently enrolled in each school that minimizes the physical and emotional conditions that become barriers to optimal school performance. Student health services include:

- Physical examinations;
- lab testing;
- mental health counseling;
- treatment of common illnesses;
- gynecological care;
- on-site screening/treatment of sexually [transmitted infections];
- dental care; and
- immunizations.”¹⁰

In addition to the School-Based Wellness Center, the school has other resources to address health, education, and behavior issues. For instance, the community resource coordinator for the

¹⁰ Information about the School-Based Wellness Centers in Prince George’s district can be found at <http://www.princegeorgesdistrictmd.gov/sites/Health/Services/HealthServices/Adolescents/Pages/SBWC.aspx>.

Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative assists students who are struggling with a variety of issues. Additionally, in the same way that teams of teachers might recommend supports for students who persistently struggle academically, teacher teams may recommend supports for students who face ongoing behavior challenges. The school also operates a student accountability center (SAC) for students to serve in-school suspensions. Finally, the guidance department can refer students to placements in alternative schools if the school environment at Fairmont Heights is not a good fit for them.

Many of the resources that the school uses to ensure the health, wellness, and behavioral success of students come from the district's School-Based Wellness Center and Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative. Resources that support these initiatives are in addition to the per pupil allocation the school receives. Some supports, however, are located at the school-level; in these cases, teachers, guidance counselors, and school accountability personnel provide behavioral support to students.

Professional Development

Teachers at Fairmont Heights participate in many different kinds of professional development. Professional development lead teachers and department chairs, who themselves carry teaching loads, learn about professional development opportunities and pass them along to their colleagues. Additionally, teachers may seek professional development on their own. These opportunities range from district-delivered professional development (including cross-school content area meetings) to continuing education (including pursuing a master's degree). Teacher-directed professional development occurs after-school, on weekends, and during the summer time; teachers who engage in professional development during school time have access to substitute teachers to cover their classes, and the district calendar includes a few professional development release days each semester.

Within the school, administrators, professional development lead teachers, and department chairs offer professional development to teachers. Most school-based professional development is for the entire staff, though some school-based professional development opportunities are broken out by content area. These sessions include activities such as data analysis, relationship-building (especially staff-to-student relationships), and navigating the shift to the College and Career-Ready standards.

Teachers have 90 minutes of planning time each day.¹¹ According to the school's master scheduler, teachers in the same department have planning periods at the same time. The extent to which teachers plan collaboratively varies. While some teachers use a portion of their planning time to work with colleagues, other teachers choose to work independently. Whether during common planning time or after-school, some departments meet with each other to discuss

¹¹ As noted above in the section on the school schedule, professional development lead teachers and department chairs may use this time not for planning but rather to perform their additional responsibilities.

subject-specific curricular and instructional issues. Specifically, the entire English/language arts department meets once per month and smaller English/language arts sub-groups (such as English teachers in the same grade) meet as often as once per week. The whole mathematics department meets once a month and math teacher subgroups meet once or twice each month.

The main resources that educators at Fairmont Heights use for professional development include release time (either from substitute teachers or in the form of professional development days) and access to information about available professional development opportunities.

School Culture

According to staff, students at Fairmont Heights face many challenges outside of school, such as poverty, family instability, and crime. Teachers at the school explain that neighborhood problems can sometimes lead to problems at school and can serve as obstacles to learning. Perhaps due at least in part to these challenges, some teachers say that Fairmont Heights has a negative reputation in the community.

Because many Fairmont Heights students confront challenging circumstances, teachers explain that their ability to form caring relationships with students is crucial. Teachers say that they respect and care for each other and their students. They want to support their students, invest in them, and demonstrate that they are worthy of care. Caring relationships provide students necessary emotional support; additionally, student trust in and reliance on teachers provide the foundation for meaningful learning experiences. The principal of the school reports that since she expects teachers to build caring relationships with students, relationship-building is often the focus of professional development.

Some teachers at Fairmont Heights noted that student troubles still exist, and there are occasions when conflict between students and staff or among students themselves occurs. Still, teachers say that students are responsive to teachers who care about them and appreciate the supportive learning environment that stems from an atmosphere of caring relationships. One teacher noted that the culture at Fairmont Heights is marked by both “shame and pride”; while members of the school community may feel shame associated with the challenges associated with poverty, family instability, and crime, they are proud of their school community and their ability to overcome adversity.

Summary

In recent years, the academic performance of certain subgroups of students at Fairmont Heights has improved by a significant amount, with the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the HSA who are low income, receiving special education services, or are of racial or ethnic minorities all improving by 30 percentage points or more.¹²

¹² Differences were calculated using unrounded numbers.

Educators at Fairmont Heights work toward improving student performance in an environment marked by a focus on core subjects, the use of assessment and other student data to drive decision making, multiple academic supports for students, multiple behavioral supports for students, and supports for teachers' engagement in professional development. Specifically:

1. Focus on core subjects. The school's high proportion of core subject teachers indicates a commitment to these subjects and also contributes to a low average core class size.
2. Use of assessment and other student data to drive decision making. PGCPs has supported the school's adoption of the Data Wise system, which promotes in-depth use of student performance results to inform decisions about staffing, personnel organization, curriculum, and instruction.
3. Multiple academic supports for students. The school provides many types academic assistance to help students succeed. For instance, Fairmont Heights provides targeted supports to grade nine students in an effort to help them navigate the transition from middle school to high school. Across grades, students who have failed the English or mathematics state assessments can enroll in intervention courses to prepare them to take the exams again. The school also has a partnership with the Hillside after-school program so that participating students have access to tutoring and academic enrichment activities.
4. Multiple health and behavioral supports for students. Prince George's County Public Schools has initiated programs aimed at improving the quality of life for district residents, and Fairmont Heights has received support from these initiatives. As a community school under the district's Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative,¹³ Fairmont Heights receives social work assistance from a community resource coordinator. The school is also the site of one of four district School-Based Wellness Centers. The on-site location of the wellness center allows Fairmont Heights' students easy access to physical and mental healthcare.
5. Supports for teachers' engagement in professional development. The district supports teachers' engagement in professional development by offering professional development opportunities, providing substitute teachers for educators who seek out their own forms of professional development, and setting aside professional development release days so that teachers can engage in ongoing learning without having to plan for an absence from their class.

¹³ Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2014). *School-community partnerships: A typology for guiding systemic educational reform*. College Park, MD: Maryland Equity Project, The University of Maryland.

Alignment with the Evidence-Based Model

The most notable ways in which Fairmont Heights aligns with the evidence-based (EB) model are through (a) staffing the school with the EB-recommended ratio of core to elective teachers and implementing small core class sizes, (b) engaging in data-based decision making, and (c) providing extra help for students at risk of academic failure.

1. Following the EB-recommended core to elective teacher ratio and implementing small core class sizes. Just over two-thirds of the school's teachers (34 teachers) teach in one of the core subject areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and world languages, and just under one-third of the school's teachers (14.5) teach an elective subject. This ratio aligns very closely with the EB model recommendations for core and elective teachers in high schools. Furthermore, based on the number of core educators, class sizes in core subjects are 24.6 students, very close to the EB model's recommended 25 students. This small core class size also aligns with one of the identified school goals; the principal's aim is to enroll 25 students in core courses and 35 to 40 students in elective courses.
2. Engaging in data-based decision making. The school's use of the Data Wise program indicates a willingness to pay serious attention to student performance and to use data to inform decisions regarding staffing, how to organize teachers into collaborative or departmental groups, and how to proceed with curriculum and instruction. Staff at the school dedicate time and effort into analyzing data, which they do with assistance from the school's administration and data coordinator.
3. Providing extra help for students at risk of academic failure. Fairmont Heights provides multiple supports for students at risk of academic failure. The school offers intervention courses for students who have struggled to pass the English and math state tests. It also offers a resource course for special education students and intensive core courses for those special education students who would benefit from specialized instruction. Additionally, through the school's partnership with the Hillside program, students at Fairmont Heights can access after-school tutoring and other support, and through partnerships with Prince George's County Public Schools, students at Fairmont Heights can access physical and mental healthcare.

While the school aligns with the EB model in these ways, there are ways in which it diverges from the model. Two areas in particular are noteworthy. First, the number of administrators at Fairmont Heights is greater than the recommendations in the EB model. Second, the EB model recommends that schools employ instructional coaches who can support teachers' work. While Fairmont Heights does have professional development lead teachers and department chairs, these educators carry teaching loads; therefore, teachers at Fairmont Heights do not have access to non-teaching instructional coaches.

Despite areas in which Fairmont Heights does not align with the EB model, the school has access to resources that go beyond those recommended by the EB model, which only addresses academic resources. These include resources that support both the Transforming Neighborhood Initiative and the School-Based Wellness Center. These additional resources reflect a school community model and represent a broader approach to addressing both educational and community challenges.

In sum, there are some ways in which the resources to which educators at Fairmont Heights have access align with the EB model. In other ways, their available resources do not match EB recommendations, and increased access to certain resources (such as, perhaps, non-teaching instructional coaches) may assist educators at Fairmont Heights as they continue to work toward improved student performance.