

Patterson Park Public Charter School Case Study

**Prepared for
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Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in the State of Maryland**

By

**Gail L. Sunderman
Maryland Equity Project
University of Maryland**

Under supervision of Picus Odden & Associates.

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Executive Summary

Patterson Park Public Charter School is an example of the third category of schools – one that saw significant academic growth among student subgroups.

Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS) is located in southeast Baltimore across from a 137-acre park of the same name and about a mile from the Johns Hopkins Hospital. It is an elementary and middle school that serves students in prekindergarten through grade eight. It serves a diverse student population. The school is 58.8 percent African American, 24.2 percent Latino, 13.2 percent white, 80.4 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals, and 17.5 percent are English language learners. Total enrollment is 670 students.

Between 2007 and 2012, student performance on the Maryland State Assessments (MSA) increased for all students and for all subgroups of students. On average, the percentage of all students scoring proficient or advanced increased from 53 percent in 2007 to 78 percent 2012, for a 24-percentage point change. Subgroup gains were even larger. These gains are likely related to how the school allocates resources to support the curriculum and instructional program. Among these are the following:

1. Strong curriculum and instructional program. The success at PPPCS starts with investing time and resources into developing a strong curriculum and instructional program. This program aligns with the school's goals and is interdisciplinary and thematic, with an emphasis on hands-on learning. The curriculum is designed by school staff to ensure that it challenges students at a level commensurate with their academic potential, incorporates learning tasks tied to students' interests, and supports the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills.
2. Staffing. Staffing ratios allow for small classes, access for all students to "specials" classes (electives), and sufficient time for planning and collaboration. School-wide, average class size is 23 students.
3. Collaborative planning time. Time for planning is built into the school schedule and includes both individual and collaborative planning. Collaborative planning reinforces the theme-based approach to instruction by helping teachers integrate the themes across the curriculum.
4. Investments in the hiring process. Investments in the hiring process insure that new teachers are committed to the school's vision and teaching philosophy. Applicants teach a model class and interview with a panel of teachers and administrators from the school. This investment is coupled with a mentoring program for all new teachers and teachers who are new to PPPCS.
5. Prekindergarten. Investment in and expansion of prekindergarten so students are better prepared when they enter kindergarten.

6. Differentiated instruction. An emphasis is placed on differentiated instruction based on student need. This is facilitated by performance-based assessments where students demonstrate their understanding of a concept.
7. Extra support. Multiple approaches to helping students who struggle, including after-school programs for students needing extra help, a summer school program, and additional support through special education, Title I, and LEP programs.
8. Community school. The school has invested in a community school concept that brings additional resources and partners to the school. These partners play an important academic role in providing theme-based field trips that connect to what the students are learning in class. They also provide other services such as health, fitness, and social services for students and their families.

Introduction

Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS) is located in southeast Baltimore across from a 137-acre park of the same name and about a mile from the Johns Hopkins Hospital. Like many inner-city neighborhoods in Baltimore, Patterson Park experienced an exodus of middle and working class families as social and economic conditions changed. An effort begun in the mid-1990s to increase home ownership and reduce vacancies helped to increase home ownership and stabilize the area. The population of the neighborhood is diverse, both economically and racially.

Members of the neighborhood association, interested in finding alternatives to Baltimore City Public Schools System (BCPSS), founded PPPCS in 2005. In the first years of operation, the school struggled to meet the needs of a large and diverse student population, in part because of the range of student's needs, leadership challenges (the school was operated by a for-profit educational management company at that time), conflicts with the community and founders, and difficulties securing adequate funding and access to services from the City Schools. Academic performance at PPPCS placed the school in the lowest quartile among the city's elementary schools. The current principal was hired in 2007 and the board negotiated an early termination of the contract with the educational management company.

The school is located in three buildings. Two buildings that once housed a Catholic school that closed in 2003 were purchased from the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In 2010, PPPCS built a bridge building that connects the two other buildings. It houses the middle school, an art studio, Spanish lab, and science lab, and has an outdoor rooftop patio with a greenhouse. A local foundation guaranteed the loan for construction of the middle school and later a bond was issued that allowed the school to pay off the loan.

Patterson Park Public Charter School is an elementary and middle school that serves students in prekindergarten through grade eight. The Patterson Park Public Charter School, Inc. operates the school and The New and Charter School Advisory Board (NCSAB) provides oversight. State law governs enrollment in PPPCS and any student in the BCPSS can apply for admission. There are no formal admission requirements, but families need to apply, agree to the school's mandatory uniform policy, and commit to volunteering 20-hours a year. When the school is oversubscribed, admissions decisions are by lottery.

Total enrollment was 670 in 2015. About 120 students (18 percent) lived outside a 1.5-mile radius of the school. In the elementary school, there were two prekindergarten classes; four kindergarten, first, and second grade classes each; and three grades three and four classes (Table 1). In the middle school, grades six through eight, there were two classes at each grade-level. The middle school was intentionally designed to serve 150 students, although enrollment exceeded that goal in 2015 and is anticipated to continue to grow. Class size, on average, is 23 for the school, and ranges from 20 to 27 depending on grade-level. Classes in the elementary grades are,

on average, lower than those in the middle school. Class size has increased because mobility is low, less than five percent (according to the Maryland Report Card), and the enrollment model was based on a 10 percent mobility rate (according to personal communication with staff).

Table 1
Patterson Park Public Charter School Class Sizes, 2015

Grade-level	Class Size
Prekindergarten (2 classes)	23
Kindergarten (4 classes)	22
One (4 classes)	22
Two (4 classes)	20
Three (3 classes)	27
Four (3 classes)	24
Five (3 classes)	23
Six (2 classes)	26
Seven (2 classes)	23
Eight (2 classes)	25

Source: Personal communication with school staff.

The student population at PPPCS in the 2013-14 school year was 58.8 percent African American, 24.2 percent Latino, 13.2 percent white, and 2.8 percent two or more races (Table 10.2). At PPPCS, 80.4 percent of students qualify for FRPM compared to 89.1 percent for the BCPSS; 17.5 percent are English language learners compared to 5.6 percent for the city schools; and 11.9 percent receive special education services compared to 13.2 percent for the city schools. Enrollment at PPPCS has increased each year since it opened in 2005, growing from 312 students in 2005 to 674 in 2014 (Maryland Report Card, 2014). Some of that enrollment increase is attributable to the addition of the middle school, which opened with grade six in 2008; grades seven and eight were phased in over the next two years. Staff also noted a growing Latino population and an increase in white student enrollment. Latino enrollment increased 45.5 percent between 2011 and 2014 and white enrollment by 58.9 percent over that same time period (Maryland Report Card, 2014).

For the purposes of this study, PPPCS was identified as a school that improved the performance of subgroups of students, specifically its minority, low-income, special education students, and students learning English. This case study examines how PPPCS achieved those increases in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the Maryland State Assessment (MSA). It seeks to identify strategies the school used and the resources needed to implement those strategies. It uses data collected during a site visit to the school in March 2015 and document analysis. Researchers interviewed the school leadership team (principal and assistant principal) and conducted six focus groups with 22 grade-level teachers, four elective, two special

education, and two intervention teachers, the school-community coordinator, and three interns. Documents were provided by the principal or obtained from the school’s website. Table 2 shows the number of students by student subgroup attending Patterson.

**Table 2
Patterson Park Public Charter, Student Characteristics, 2014**

Student Characteristics	PPPCS: Percentage of Student Population, 2014	BCPSS: Percentage of Student Population, 2014
Race/ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	0.3
Asian	-	1.0
Black/African American	58.8	83.8
Hispanic/Latino	24.2	6.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-	0.2
Two or more races	2.8	0.4
White	13.2	8.0
Students eligible for free or reduce-priced meals (FRPM)	80.4	89.1
Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students	17.5	5.6
Special education students	11.9	13.2

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.

The report has 11 sections: 1) school performance, 2) school staffing, 3) goals, 4) school schedule and teacher teaming, 5) curriculum and instructional program, 6) assessments, 7) extra help strategies for students at risk of academic failure, including special education services, 8) professional development, 9) school culture and leadership, 10) summary, and 11) degree of alignment between the school’s strategies and the school improvement strategies embedded in the evidence-based (EB) funding model.

School Performance

Table 3 shows the composite data used to select PPPCS for a case study. The percentage of students who are proficient or advanced across all subjects (reading and math in grades three through eight and science in grades five and eight) was averaged to produce a number – percent proficient/advanced – for each year from 2007 to 2012. For 2013 and 2014, only the “All Students” results were available. During this latter two-year time period, the state’s curriculum standards changed, but the test did not. Statewide test results dropped over these two years. Schools that had a drop of less than one standard deviation were given preference for selection as a case study site. The composite test scores at PPPCS dropped for these two years to 74 percent proficient in 2013 and 68 percent in 2014.

Table 3
Patterson Park Public Charter School Performance, Maryland School Assessment (MSA),
2007-2012

Average School-Wide Percent Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Reading, Math and Science								
Performance Level	MSA 2007	MSA 2008	MSA 2009	MSA 2010	MSA 2011	MSA 2012	MSA*	MSA*
	2013	2014						
All Students	53	61	59	75	78	78	74	68
Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FRPM) Students	49	56	56	74	77	77	NA	NA
LEP Students	43	38	61	89	69	76	NA	NA
Special Education Students	20	25	43	76	74	58	NA	NA
Non-White/Non-Asian Students	52	59	57	74	76	76	NA	NA

*Assessment data by student subgroup for 2013 and 2014 were not available at the time this report was written.

As shown in Table 3, the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced increased for all students and for all subgroups of students between 2007 and 2012. On average, the percentage of all students scoring proficient or advanced increased from 53 percent in 2007 to 78 percent 2012, for a 24-percentage point change. The gains for subgroups were larger. From 2007 to 2012, the percentage of students who scored either proficient or advanced increased:

- 28 percentage points for FRPMs students (49 percent to 77 percent);
- 33 percentage points for LEP students (43 percent to 76 percent);
- 38 percentage points for special education students (20 percent to 58 percent); and
- 24 percentage points for students whose race/ethnicity is not white or Asian (52 percent to 76 percent).

School Staffing

The transition from a charter school operated by a for-profit educational management company (EMO) to the current structure was a time of considerable turmoil. PPPCS was among the poorest performing schools in the city; there were conflicts between the community and the EMO; and difficulties securing adequate funding and access to services from the city schools. The EMO provided operational services, which included the principal and administrative staff. In the spring of 2007, the board hired the current principal. During this time, a number of staff members left, which allowed the principal to bring in new people committed to the mission of the school. Just three of the original staff remained at the school in 2015.

Teacher mobility is low. When teachers leave, it is usually because they have been promoted to another position, moved, or enrolled in graduate school. The principal and one assistant principal have been at the school for eight years and the other assistant principal has been there for seven years.

The school puts considerable resources into the hiring process. When hiring new teachers, the school screens people for their commitment to the school's vision and teaching philosophy. The interview process includes a tour of the school, and each applicant conducts a model lesson and is interviewed by a panel of teachers and administrators. PPPCS is a professional development site for students from Johns Hopkins University and St. Mary's College. In recruiting new teachers, PPPCS often hires from among these former interns. The school also recruits people informally through their network connections. The school takes a proactive approach to plan for staff transitions. For example, when a large number of staff announced that they were planning to leave, the administration provided incentives to entice the staff to stay an additional year. During the following year, the school invited a large cohort of student teachers to the school. This allowed the school an extended period of time to vet possible teachers and, when 10 teachers left in the spring of 2012, the school filled half of the positions from this pool of student teachers.

Table 4 shows the school's staff. The school has 11.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) administrative staff. The administrative staff includes positions that would normally be central office positions (i.e. executive director, business manager, etc.), but since the school is a charter, it is responsible for operations. The central office staff (5 FTE) includes the principal, two assistant principals, the school community coordinator, and volunteer coordinator. The principal is responsible for setting and meeting the school's academic program goals. As a community school, PPPCS is open from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day of the week and provides additional resources the school would not otherwise have. The school community coordinator and volunteer coordinator staff the Family Resource Room (part of the community school concept), organize school activities, and coordinate building use and services with the school's partners. The business office (4.5 FTE) includes the executive director, business manager, technology coordinator, development coordinator, and controller. The executive director is responsible for setting and meeting fundraising, facilities, technology, and administration goals, and with the assistance of the controller, developing the budget (PPPCS, Annual Operating and Capital Budgets, 2014-15). There are two FTE clerical staff.

The school's staffing configuration allows the school to have small class sizes, ensures that all students receive instruction in all special classes (i.e. electives), facilitates individualized instruction, and provides time for teacher planning. The instructional staff includes 29 core teachers (including two prekindergarten teachers), which translates into an average class size of 23 students. As previously noted, this varies from 19.5 in grade two to 27.3 in grade three. Core

Table 4
Staffing in Patterson Park Public Charter School

Category	FTE
<u>Administration</u>	
Principal	1.0
Assistant Principal	2.0
Executive Director	1.0
Business Manager	1.0
Clerical	2.0
Community Schools Coordinators	2.0
Technology Coordinator	1.0
Development Coordinator	1.0
Controller	0.5
<u>Prekindergarten Program</u>	
Licensed Teachers	2.0
Para Professionals	2.0
<u>Main Program</u>	
Core Teachers	27.0
“Specials” – Elective Teachers: 1.0 Music; 1.0 Art; 1.0 Physical Education; 2.0 Spanish; 0.8 Media/Librarian	5.8
Instructional Coaches: 1.0 Math, 0.6 Reading	1.6
Special Education	6.0
LEP Teachers	3.0
LEP Para Professional	1.0
Title I Teachers	2.6
Para Professional – Kindergarten	4.0
<u>Pupil Support</u>	
<u>Licensed</u>	
Guidance Counselor	1.0
Nurse	1.0
Social Worker	1.0
Behavior Specialist	1.0
Psychologist	0.8
<u>Non-licensed</u>	
Before and After Care Programs	8.0
Cafeteria	1.0

teachers include grade-level teachers in prekindergarten through grade four and subject area teachers in grades five through eight.

The school has 5.8 FTE elective or “specials” teachers who provide instruction in art (1.0 FTE), music (1.0 FTE), Spanish (2.0 FTE), physical education (1.0 FTE), and media/technology (0.8 FTE). A standard formula for determining the number of elective teachers is to have the number of elective teachers equal to 20 percent of the number of core teachers, which would equal 5.8 positions for this school (0.2×29). The total at PPPCS is 5.8 FTE. Students at all grade-levels have art, music, and physical education once a week, although the length of the class varies between the elementary and middle school. Elementary school students (prekindergarten through grade five) have one class period (40 minutes) a week in each of the three specials; middle school students (grades six through eight) have a 65-minute block in each special every week. In addition, students in prekindergarten through grade five attend a media class once a week (40 minutes). For Spanish, elementary students receive instruction once a week for 40 minutes while middle school students receive Spanish twice a week for 65 minutes in each class. Middle school students selecting Spanish as an elective receive an additional 65 minutes of instruction each week. The differences in the class scheduling between the elementary and middle school is related to the school’s instructional approach to teaching Spanish.

Additional instructional support is provided by 6.0 FTE special education teachers, 3.0 FTE English language teachers, 2.6 FTE Title I teachers, and 1.0 FTE English language paraprofessional. To support the school’s emphasis on developing the whole child, the school employs a guidance counselor (1.0 FTE), nurse (1.0 FTE), social worker (1.0 FTE), behavior specialist (1.0 FTE), and school psychologist (0.8 FTE).

The school has a full-day kindergarten program and a full-day prekindergarten program. Each prekindergarten and kindergarten classroom has both a full-time teacher and paraprofessional assigned to the class. A resource teacher pushes into each classroom four days a week to provide literacy instruction. The prekindergarten program was expanded in 2014-15, and currently serves 46 students. This provides access to prekindergarten to a large number of the school’s students before they enter the regular elementary program.

In the elementary grades, students are assigned to classes so that each class has a fairly equal distribution of students who are high performing, middle performing, and have learning challenges. Classrooms are inclusive and include special education students and students learning English. In the middle school, students are tracked by their math and algebra ability. English/language arts classes in middle school tend to be homogeneous because of scheduling considerations while social studies and science are heterogeneous.

Teachers have subject matter expertise for the classes they teach. For example, in grade five, there is a reading teacher, math teacher, and science/social studies teacher. Class periods are 85 minutes, and students rotate among the three classes. At the end of the day, there is a 30-minute period called the “coach class” where students can go to work on areas of need, homework, or projects. Classes in the middle school are also organized by subject matter. As one middle school teacher said, “every teacher is an expert in their field; they have a deep understanding of the content and that comes across in their teaching. We have a well-rounded team that makes what we do very rich.”

PPPCS has been a community school since it was founded. Community schools expand the traditional educational mission of schools to include health and social services for children and families.¹ The aim is to improve students’ overall well-being and life prospects, and strengthen families. PPPCS has 60 partners that provide academic, health, fitness, and social services to students, their families, and the community. For example, Audubon MD/DC provides environmental education for grades kindergarten through three, Baltimore City Community College offers adult Spanish classes, and the local branch library provides reading programs for students. There are several agencies that provide health resources, including hearing and vision screenings and on-site dental care for students. External partners are also used to enhance the arts program. Other organizations provide sports and fitness activities for students and food assistance and nutrition/health counseling for their families. The Family Resource Room, which is open from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, is a place for parents to go to socialize, access community resources, or attend workshops and adult education classes.

Being a community school provides additional resources that the school would not otherwise have. To support the community school concept, the school raised \$426,795 through grants and fundraising activities for fiscal year (FY) 2014 (PPPCS, 2013-2014 Detailed Data). The largest grants included a 21st Century grant of \$212,500, two grants from the Family League totaling \$103,950, and four foundation grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Smaller grants (\$1,000 to \$5,000) came from other local foundations and organizations. These grants are above the school’s per pupil allotment received from the BBPSS and account for about seven percent of the school’s total budget of \$6 million. Per pupil funding was \$9,450 in FY 2015.

School Goals

PPPCS mission is to “provide a community-centered learning environment that values diversity and embraces a whole child approach to develop well-educated citizens.” As a community school, its vision is to develop lifelong learners, healthy families, and strong neighborhoods. When the current principal came in 2007, he worked with the school staff, community, and board

¹Valli, 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.

to redefine the goals, shifting the school away from an emphasis on test-driven instruction to a focus on an interdisciplinary, thematic, and hands-on approach to learning.

In 2012-13, the school and community engaged in a “Review, Renew, Retool” process to evaluate and modify its goals and vision. It identified five key strategic goals designed to achieve the school’s vision. These goals will be at the center of the school’s activities for the next several years. They are built on the concept of developing the whole child and include an emphasis on academic learning, character development, and fostering creativity, culture and the arts through the “specials” curriculum and art integration. The instructional approach is interdisciplinary, thematic, and hands-on learning. The five strategic goals include:

- Develop a sustainable approach to enhancing specials instruction in support of the whole child;
- ensure that all students are challenged at a level commensurate with their academic potential;
- make interdisciplinary, thematic, hands-on learning part of the fabric of the instructional model at PPPCS;
- integrate a new character education program into the existing school-wide approach with an expanded focus on 21st century skills; and
- foster an atmosphere of trust.

Specific school goals change year to year, and include both external and internal goals. The external goals are articulated in the school performance plan (required by BCPSS) and reflect how PPPCS will meet district goals such as performance on the state assessment, attendance, school climate, and suspension rates. Meeting and maintaining an adequate level of performance and other criteria established by the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners are also necessary for the school’s charter renewal. The external goals for 2014-15 were:

- Eighty percent of grade three through eight students will score advanced or proficient (or the equivalent) on the 2015 PARCC;
- increase MSA Science performance of students from 56.6 percent proficient/advanced in 2014 to 66 percent in 2015;
- decrease chronic truants (as defined as students who have missed more than 20 days) from 28 to less than 20.

The internal goals reflect the school’s five strategic goals and are intended to guide the instructional program for the year. These are the goals that drive curriculum and instruction in the school and are the ones the articulated by the staff. The school developed a dashboard that takes the five strategic goals outlined above and identifies strategies and activities for achieving each goal.

For 2015, the internal goals included:

- Accomplish the goals for 2015 on the PPPCS Dashboards (see below);
- commit to actions to increase civility;
- build endurance, frustration tolerance, and technology skills that are related to the PARCC; and
- apply and support new math curricula (i.e. Investigations and Engage NY).

Dashboard goals:

- Make interdisciplinary, thematic, hands-on learning a part of the fabric of the instructional model at PPPCS;
- integrate school-wide character education into existing school-wide approach within two years to have all children feel safe and demonstrate both independently and interdependently (“21st Century Skills”);
- infuse creativity, culture and the arts into the curriculum, develop a sustainable approach to enhancements of specials instruction (in support of the whole child); and
- ensure that all students are challenged at a level commensurate with their academic potential.

Dashboard goals include both long- and short-term goals. For example, these include strategies for promoting critical thinking skills and learning how to apply what is learned to issues, problems, or concerns that are relevant to the student, making sure each child is challenged at a level commensurate with their academic ability, fostering creativity, providing opportunities for students to practice what they learn, providing opportunities for student collaboration and teamwork, etc.

In a nutshell, the school’s goal is to develop the whole child. It organizes professional development activities and the curriculum and instruction around meeting this goal. During the site visit, teachers talked about the theme-based approach they take to instruction, the importance (and frequency) of field trips as integral to learning, and making sure that students are involved in arts integration activities.

School Schedule and Collaborative Teams

The school day begins at 7:50 a.m. with school announcements and ends at 2:40 p.m., for a 6-hour, 50-minute school day. The instructional day is 280 minutes with 45 minutes for lunch/recess. As a community school, PPPCS is open from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day of the week. Class periods vary by grade and subject. In prekindergarten through grade two, there is an 85-minute literacy block while specials classes are 40 minutes. Subjects in grades three, four, and five are departmentalized and class periods are 80 minutes. Students rotate between reading, math, and science and social studies. The specials classes are 40 minutes. Class periods in prekindergarten through grade five vary, depending on the grade-level. There is an 85-minute

literacy block in kindergarten and first grade, and some specials classes are 40 minutes. In grade five, class periods are 80 minutes, and students rotate between reading, math, science, and social studies. In the middle school, class periods are 65 minutes and classes in the upper grades are 85 minutes. Block scheduling is common in the upper grades. Classes in the middle school are also organized by subject matter and are 65 minutes, with specials classes also running 65 minutes. After-school, there is a 30-minute period called the “coach class” where students can go to work on areas of need, homework, or projects.

Planning time is built into the school schedule and for prekindergarten through grade five; it takes place when students have specials classes. This provides time during the regular school day for grade-level teams to meet and collaborate. Teachers in prekindergarten to grade five have 40-minutes each day for planning with one day a week used for collaborative planning. The middle school team (grades six, seven, and eight) has 65-minutes a day for planning. They also meet weekly during lunchtime. Because prekindergarten to grade two are assigned to self-contained classrooms, teachers collaborate with other grade-level teachers, but also engage in vertical planning so that specific grade-level content builds on the content of other grades. Grades three to eight are departmentalized, so teams meet across grade-levels. In addition, school ends early once a week and the entire staff meets for 60 minutes. Called Workshop Wednesdays, this time is for staff meetings or professional development activities. Typically, teacher teams decide their own professional development activities since needs differ by grade-level. Teachers are also encouraged to go to conferences or to visit other schools.

Field trips are integral to the school’s mission and take place once a month (they are more frequent in the middle school). Organized by grade-level, field trips are theme-based and often feature one of the school’s community partners. For example, the Parks and People Foundation may take a class to Patterson Park, located across the street from the school, and teach a lesson on the environment. The Baltimore Symphony OrchKids program (<https://www.bsomusic.org/education-community/young-musicians/orchkids>) came to the school and conducted a workshop on how to do a concert using buckets and sticks. Science-based field trips have gone to Annapolis to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to learn about the bay. To support the arts integration model, the school hosted a 10-week artist in residence program with an artist from Wolfe Trap. Fields trips are preceded by content instruction in the regular program.

Curriculum and Instructional Program

School staff members develop their own curriculum. Staff members meet each summer to review and adjust the curriculum to accommodate changing priorities or respond to newly identified issues. The goals for the summer 2014 curriculum review included:

- Developing complete thematic units that align with Common Core standards and Next Generation Science Standards;

- developing a scope and sequence for all grade-levels that make sense both vertically and horizontally;
- adding new literature units where needed; and
- creating hands-on, interdisciplinary activities that align with the current curriculum in math, science and social studies.

When designing the curriculum, several priorities guide the staff. Questions that probe for deeper meaning and set the stage for further questioning (High-Quality Essential Questions) are included in each unit of the curriculum. Staff members strive to ensure that the curriculum is rigorous for all students, that is, it challenges students at a level commensurate with their academic potential. Each unit is interdisciplinary, thematic, provides for hands-on learning, and incorporates learning tasks that are tied to students' interests, talents, and skill. Technology is integrated into the curriculum to support the development of creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and to enhance communication and collaboration. To insure text variety, primary sources are used when possible. The curriculum is aligned to the state standards for math, English/language arts, and writing, the Next Generation Science Standards, and follows the adjusted content progression adapted from the Michigan Social Studies standards. Each unit incorporates at least one opportunity to integrate the visual arts, dance, music, or drama into instruction (Arts Integration). Finally, conscious of the school's motto, The City is Our Classroom, The World is Our Future, field trips are built into the curriculum as a means of connecting classroom learning to experiential learning. Since the curriculum draws from many different sources, some staff found it difficult working without a set curriculum. They also noted that it required a lot of extra time to pull materials together.

Staff talked about rewriting the curriculum so that it better met the needs of their students. For example, the grade one teachers found resources to strengthen the reading comprehension, spelling, and writing curriculum, using such things as 6 Plus One Traits (a writing curriculum), and aligning site words across grades, from prekindergarten through grade three. They also use Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Books for literacy, a system based on small group reading instruction.

Theme-based, interdisciplinary, hands-on learning drives instruction, with themes integrated across subject areas. Each grade-level decides on a theme, often based on the state's voluntary curriculum, and carries it across subject areas and into the specials classes. Teaching these themes include hands-on projects and interdisciplinary learning, and incorporate an arts integration component and often a field trip. Instruction is also collaborative, with both grade-level planning and cross grade-level planning taking place.

Reading

For prekindergarten through grade three, the school had partnered with the Philadelphia-based Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI), a data-driven instructional program, for curriculum and instructional development. The school's reading specialist was hired from CLI. She provides

professional development on building teachers' literacy instructional skills and provides a variety of developmentally appropriate books for children's age and reading level influenced by her experiences with her previous employer.² According to the principal, the results from the CLI curricular and instructional approach were mixed. DIBLES data from the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years showed that students in kindergarten through grade two performed at a similar level to their peers across the city. In fall 2014, more intensive reading interventions and supports were put into place and student performances began to outpace city averages. Despite these gains, teachers felt they needed more foundation support. The school is considering adding McGraw-Hill's Reading Wonders to the curriculum to fill this gap. Reading instruction is small group based on a student's reading level. In prekindergarten through grade two, there are three reading groups that meet four days a week for 85-minutes each day. Groups are based on a student's reading level and are fluid so that students are reassigned as they progress. A reading resource teacher pushes into the room to teach one group, the teacher and para-professional teach the other two groups.

Inquiry-based instruction begins in grade three. The reading curriculum uses theme-based novels that include books at students' reading levels and slightly above their reading levels. The school also uses Side-by-Side, which provides research-based literacy units (grades three through six) aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

Math

For math, the school uses Investigations for the early grades and Engage NY (i.e. the New York State Curriculum) for the upper grades. The Investigations curriculum is based on three principles:

1. Students have mathematical ideas. The curriculum must support all students in developing and expanding those ideas.
2. Teachers are engaged in ongoing learning about mathematics content and about how students learn mathematics. The curriculum must support teachers in this learning.
3. Teachers collaborate with the students and curriculum materials to create the curriculum as enacted in the classroom. The curriculum must support teachers in implementing the curriculum in a way that accommodates the needs of their particular students (Investigations, <https://investigations.terc.edu/overview.cfm>).

Engage NY provides curricular modules and units for prekindergarten through grade eight mathematics, as well as high school algebra and geometry. The social studies and science

² Children's Literacy Initiative website: <https://www.cli.org/>

curriculum combines materials from the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum and the Next Generation Science Standards.

Character Education

Character education is an integral part of the school's curriculum. In spring 2013, PPPCS staff reviewed four programs and adopted the TRIBES Learning Communities. It was implemented school-wide beginning in the fall of 2014. TRIBES focuses on developing students' academic and collaboration skills and helping teachers deliver content in an active and student-centered manner. Each unit provides opportunities for student collaboration and teamwork.³ Teachers noted that student behavior has improved: "With TRIBES, the character of students has improved. They help others more and are more courteous. They also understand that when a teacher reprimands you for doing something, it is not to get you in trouble, but to help you." In addition, a portion of Morning Meetings is devoted to "positive talk" and setting the tone for the day. According to teachers, using the same language throughout the day has helped students learn what to expect.

The school adopted the goal of increasing civility for 2014-15 because there were a number of items on the student climate survey that indicated bullying was a problem. As previously noted, teachers commented on the behavioral improvements of their students after implementing TRIBES. In addition, the traffic around the school during drop-off and pick-up times was problematic, so the school began working with the police and community to improve that situation.

Science

The elementary science curriculum is developed by teachers using materials from the Maryland Voluntary Curriculum, and instruction is driven by themes that the school develops. For kindergarten through second grade, science is integrated into reading and math blocks. There is also a 50-minute science block for kindergarten students and a separate 45-minute science block for grade three students. Science is departmentalized for grades three through five, when it is taught for 65-minutes per day. In the middle school, there is a 65-minute science block. The teachers develop the curriculum. One teacher uses the Next Generation Science Standards and has assembled materials to teach to those standards. It is worth noting that the middle school science program has a Robotics component. The school's Robotic Team was the state champion in a Robotic competition in 2014-15 and went to Kentucky for the national competition.

Advanced Instruction

To support high achieving students, strategies include an interdisciplinary thematic approach to curriculum and instruction, and differentiated instruction. In addition, staff use Primary Talent

³ TRIBES website: <http://tribes.com/>

Development and Junior Great Books, and there is a Destination Imagination after-school program started in 2013-14.

Spanish Instruction

Students begin learning Spanish in prekindergarten. Instruction in the early grades focuses on exposure to the language and building a vocabulary. This includes learning words thematically, such as the names of the planets in the solar system, describing animals, learning colors, and simple verbs. Learning is thematic so that the themes tie into what students are learning in other classes. For example, when students are learning about the solar system, they will learn the names of the planets in Spanish. Conversational Spanish begins in grade five. Middle school Spanish is similar to high school Spanish, but takes longer to teach because the class time is less frequent. In addition, the Spanish teacher started teaching a language arts class in Spanish for Spanish speakers. The school had observed differences in MSA scores between students learning English and non-English learners. According to the teacher, teaching language arts in Spanish helped students see the connections between Spanish and English, and led to improved test scores and helped them move out of LEP. There is also a biannual trip to Spain for middle school students. This is coupled with “virtual” trips to Spain throughout the year where students explore Spanish cities, museums, and other points of interest.

Assessments

PPPCS pays attention to scores on the state test, the Maryland State Assessments (MSA) in past years, and will use the PARCC results in future years since performance on state tests is tied to renewal of the charter contract. Other tests that are used to inform instruction include the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). DIBELS is diagnostic tool used in the early grades. MAP, administered in the fall and spring, provides longitudinal data on student performance and is useful for examining trends over time.

For the most part, the school uses performance-based assessments where students demonstrate their understanding of a concept. The emphasis is on building portfolios and providing feedback to students. These practices depend on a teacher’s knowledge of what a child is learning. One teacher commented: “We are not using the city’s benchmarks. We look for ways that a student can show they understand something.” Another said, “We do not use standardized tests.” This teacher used a daily rubric to assess whether the student met the objective for the day. A math teacher said, “In math we have tasks that they need to do. We do not stick to a particular test or quiz. If they can show in any way that they can do it, okay – they don’t have to take a test. We make sure they can perform the task but it doesn’t have to be in context of taking a test.”

Assessments are often built into instruction. For example, the Children’s Literacy Initiative includes strategies for taking inventories, observing reading and writing behavior, studying

writing samples, and listening to student talk to understand how a child is learning. It also includes a process for using data to inform instructional decisions.⁴

At PPPCS, teachers know what students are learning based on their observations and the performance of their students on tasks, projects, and other observable measures. Teachers provide differentiated instruction based on student need.

Extra Help Strategies for Students at Risk of Academic Failure

PPPCS uses multiple approaches to help students who may struggle. One part of the strategy is to provide a sound foundation early in a child's educational career. To advance that goal, the school added prekindergarten in 2011 and doubled the prekindergarten enrollment in 2013. There are literacy blocks in kindergarten and grade one and a reading intervention teacher who pushes the classroom to provide literacy instruction. There is an ABC crew, consisting of parent volunteers, who pull students out of class to help them with sight words and phonics.

There are two after-school programs for students needing extra help. In the elementary grades, there is the PASS program, and for middle school students, there is CREATE. Students are identified based on their literacy scores on DIBLES or MAP. Teachers, the principal and assistant principals develop a plan to address each student's needs. In addition to academic help, the after-school program includes the Fitness, Fun, & Games program and a number of clubs. Many of these activities and clubs are through collaboration with the school's community partners. Some activities are held on weekends. For example, Fitness, Fun, & Games is a non-profit organization that provides programming for children ages two to 18 designed to support cognitive, physical, social and emotional development during the out-of-school hours.⁵ According to the principal, more than 350 students participate in the after-school programs.

There is also a summer school program at PPPCS. Since PPPCS students are not eligible to participate in the BCPSS summer school program unless they pay, the school developed its own program that depends on finding funding and community support. Programming varies year to year, depending on funding. For summer 2015, the Fitness, Fun, & Games program offers daily reading and math academic enrichment, fitness, arts and crafts, science, swimming and weekly field trips. There is also the SuperKids Camp for grade one, two, and three students. This program is through the Parks & Peoples Foundation⁶ and is focused on building academic skills and providing a range of enrichment activities. In the past, summer programming included a kindergarten readiness camp, and a science and social studies camp for grades four through eight. Finally, PPPCS offers free breakfast and lunch for all students during the summer.

⁴ Children's Literacy Initiative website: <https://www.cli.org/>

⁵ Fun, Fitness, & Games website: <http://www.fitnessfunandgames.org/>

⁶ website: <http://www.parksandpeople.org/learn/summer-programs/superkids-camp/>

The school provides additional support to students through its special education, Title I, and LRP programs. In 2013-14, the school increased resources to support additional special education and instructional support teachers. To support special education students, teachers use Response to Instruction (RTI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The Title I program provides small group instruction by subject areas for low-performing students. Title I is push-in/pull-out depending on student need. Title I teachers work with students who are not on grade-level or have difficulty mastering a certain skill. Student progress is monitored daily by the Title I teacher and reviewed weekly in team meetings (Title I teacher and grade-level teacher) and during monthly data meetings with the Title I teachers, grade-level teams, and instructional support teachers. Finally, PPPCS has an LEP program for students learning English. In addition, the Spanish teacher teaches language arts in Spanish to Spanish speaking students, which facilitates learning English.

Professional Development

According to the principal and most teachers, professional development is ongoing at PPPCS. It takes place during the teachers' collaborative meeting time and during Workshop Wednesday, the weekly after-school meeting with all staff. Once a month, Workshop Wednesday includes professional development on specific issues and topics. Topics are often decided on by grade-level since each grade has different needs and priorities. The collaborative team meetings keep teachers aware of content taught in other classrooms and are a means to share information on working with particular students. Workshop Wednesdays also provide time for teachers to collaborate, especially with the specials teachers. When the school implements a new program, such as TRIBES, the entire staff is trained on how to implement it. Staff members are also encouraged to go to conferences and visit other schools to learn what they are doing. New teachers (both new to teaching and new to PPPCS) complete a site developed training program supported by BCPSS and are mentored by PPPCS teachers. Mentoring groups meet once a month. Finally, the assistant principals observe classrooms and provide feedback on a regular basis (there are two formal observations a year) or when asked by a teacher. Teachers commented that these observations were useful in helping them improve their practice or to deal with particular issues they may have in the classroom.

School Culture and Leadership

Teachers described the school culture as both collaborative and challenging. One teacher said, "It's a blast to work here. There is lots of independence and the administration is open to new ideas . . . We get to do the projects we want to do. Collaboration is phenomenal." Many teachers commented on the support they receive from the administration, including both support in addressing issues a teacher may have and in providing the resources they need to do their job. There is a climate of trust at the school where teachers feel comfortable discussing issues with the administration.

Teachers have incorporated the school's mission into their teaching. They take seriously the charge to educate the whole child and work hard to develop lessons that are interdisciplinary,

theme-based, and hands-on. Yet there are also challenges. As one teacher said, “It’s a good school trying to do a lot for kids.” This means that teachers work hard, but they do so because they have the support of the administration and the time to collaborate with other teachers.

The leadership is very supportive of teachers and dedicated to providing the type of curriculum and instruction they believe will benefit the children in their school. This is evident from the inclusion of the community school to the incorporation of field trips into the curriculum and their continuing search for good practices, programs, and curricula that will help the school meet its goals. As one administrator said, “I need people to do interdisciplinary, thematic instruction here, to do TRIBES, rather than boilerplate good practices which are coming from the city.”

Summary

Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS) is an elementary and middle school that serves students in prekindergarten through grade eight. Between 2007 and 2012, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the Maryland State Assessment increased for all students and for all subgroups of students. Contributing to these gains is likely related to how the school allocates resources to support the school’s curriculum and instructional program. Among these are the following:

1. Strong curriculum and instructional program. The success at PPPCS starts with investing time and resources into developing a strong curriculum and instructional program. This program aligns with the school’s goal to “provide a community-centered learning environment that values diversity and embraces a whole child approach to develop well-educated citizens.” The curriculum and instructional program at PPPCS is interdisciplinary and thematic, with an emphasis on hands-on learning. It includes a character education component, a focus on integrating the arts into the curriculum, and the frequent use of field trips. The curriculum is designed by school staff to ensure that it challenges students at a level commensurate with their academic potential, incorporates learning tasks tied to students’ interests, and supports the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills.
2. Staffing. Staffing ratios that allow for small classes, access for all students to “specials” classes (electives), and sufficient time for planning and collaboration. School-wide, average class size is 23 students. The small classes and the availability of instructional support staff facilitate individualized instruction, particularly in the early grades (kindergarten through three). A full cadre of specials teachers means that students in all grades receive instruction in art, music, Spanish, media (elementary only), and physical education. Since teaching is theme-based, the specials classes reinforce instruction received in the core classes.
3. Collaborative planning time. Time for planning is built into the school schedule and includes both individual and collaborative planning. Collaborative planning reinforces the

theme-based approach to instruction by helping teachers integrate the themes across the curriculum.

4. Investments in the hiring process. The school invests in the hiring process to ensure that new teachers are committed to the school's vision and teaching philosophy. Applicants teach a model class and interview with a panel of teachers and administrators from the school. This investment is coupled with a mentoring program for all new teachers and teachers who are new to PPPCS.
5. Prekindergarten. The school invests in an expanded the prekindergarten program so students are better prepared when they enter kindergarten.
6. Differentiated instruction. School staff place an emphasis on differentiated instruction based on student needs. This is facilitated by performance-based assessments where students demonstrate their understanding of concepts.
7. Extra support. Multiple approaches to helping students who struggle, including after-school programs for students needing extra help, a summer school program, and additional support through special education, Title I, and LEP programs.
8. Community school. The school invests in a community school concept that brings additional resources and partners to the school. These partners play an important academic role in providing theme-based field trips that connect to what the students are learning in class. They also provide other services such as health, fitness, and social services for students and their families.

Alignment with the EB Model

The strategies at PPPCS are aligned with the school improvement system embedded within the evidence-based (EB) model. Those strategies that parallel those of the EB model include:

- School goals focused on developing the whole child, fostering creativity, and developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills;
- a curriculum and instruction program that aligns with the school's goals and includes a strong interdisciplinary, theme-based approach to instruction, and incorporates hands-on learning;
- an emphasis on differentiated instruction based on student need that is facilitated by performance-based assessments where students demonstrate their understanding of a concept;
- small class sizes, particularly in the early grades;
- the use of block scheduling in the middle school for core subjects, and in the early grades for literacy instruction;
- sufficient time for collaborative planning and professional development;

- extra help strategies for students who struggle with reading. As a community school, the school also provides a range of out-of-school programs designed to support the cognitive, physical, and social and emotional development of students; and
- strong instructional leadership provided by the principal and two assistant principals with additional instructional coaching provided by other teachers.

Patterson Park Public Charter School may function differently than other public schools because it is a charter school. It may have more flexibility to depart from the test-based accountability model now dominant among public schools, particularly those serving inner city students. Indeed, this was the case as evidenced by how it differentiated its external goals – those focused on achieving a certain proficiency rate on state assessments, a necessity for its charter renewal – from its internal goals – those that guided the instructional program. Indeed, teachers relied on classroom-based performance assessments more so than benchmark or standardized tests to guide instruction. This is not to say that the school leadership and teachers were not aware of standardized test scores, but they were not used to guide day-to-day instruction. Finally, the school engages with multiple partners to enhance its curriculum program, which includes a focus on arts integration and the extensive use of field trips. Indeed, the extensive incorporation of field trips into the curriculum sets it apart from many other schools.

In other regards, PPPCS aligns with the evidence-based model in how it allocates resources to support the school’s goals and how it uses time to facilitate collaboration. Its staffing ratio supports small classes; provides sufficient additional instructional teachers to support all students, but particularly students at risk of academic failure; and includes “specials” teachers so that all students have access to elective classes that support and supplement instruction they receive in their core classes.