

**BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**DATE:** March 9, 2004

**TO:** **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**FROM:** Dr. J. Hairston, Superintendent

**SUBJECT:** **MAGNET SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (MSAP)**  
**BCPS CHOICE PLAN**

**ORIGINATOR:** Christine Johns, Deputy Superintendent

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**INFORMATION**

The Baltimore County Public Schools Choice Plan supports the MSAP grant application. This grant will provide additional educational choices by establishing new whole school magnets at Deep Creek Middle School, Lansdowne Middle School, and Chesapeake High School and by offering a significantly revised whole school magnet program at Lansdowne High School.

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**BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
CHOICE PLAN**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Baltimore County Public Schools (“BCPS” or the “District”), the third-largest school district in Maryland and the 24th-largest school district in the United States, has a very diverse student enrollment with a range of needs. In the 2003-2004 school year, the District’s students are approximately 56 percent white, 35 percent African-American, 4 percent Asian, and 3 percent Hispanic. As of June 2003, approximately 28.4 percent of the District’s students were eligible for Free and Reduced Meals (“FARMs”). During the 1985-1986 school year, by contrast, the District’s students were approximately 82 percent white, 15 percent African-American, and 3 percent Asian. Only approximately 15 percent of BCPS students were eligible for FARMs during the 1985-1986 school year.

To meet the needs of its increasingly racially and socio-economically diverse students, BCPS has over the past decade implemented magnet schools and programs with the goals of preventing, reducing, or eliminating minority and socio-economic isolation in its schools; improving the academic achievement of all District students; and increasing the educational choices available to BCPS students of all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Despite these efforts, several BCPS schools, particularly in certain parts of the District, have experienced increasing minority and socio-economic isolation due to factors outside the District’s control.

**II. DISTRICT EXPERIENCE WITH MAGNET PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS**

One policy that guides the District’s efforts to provide all students the opportunity to attend schools with students of diverse backgrounds is its Magnet Schools and Programs policy. Under the Magnet Policy, magnet schools and programs are intended to meet the following goals: providing innovative, high-quality educational opportunities for all students, regardless of racial or socio-economic background; increasing the educational choices available to parents and students; improving educational achievement; and promoting diversity within the District’s schools. The Magnet Policy defines diversity broadly to include students from all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, students of both genders, and special needs students.

A second policy that guides the District’s efforts to provide all students the opportunity to attend racially and socio-economically diverse schools is its Boundary Changes policy. The Boundary Changes Policy provides that one factor that the Boundary Study Committee should consider in proposing boundary adjustments is the diversity of the population within the cluster of schools under consideration. The Boundary Changes Policy likewise suggests that the Committee reject boundary adjustments that would foster minority or socio-economic isolation.

Since the 1993-1994 school year, BCPS has developed and implemented various innovative magnet schools and programs to further the District goals set forth in these two policies. These schools and programs generally have been successful in: providing innovative educational opportunities for all BCPS students; increasing the educational choices available to

students; improving educational achievement; and reducing minority isolation within the District's schools. For example, BCPS has determined that, overall, students in magnet schools or programs met or exceeded the District and Maryland state average on almost all of the Maryland School Performance Program indicators, including attendance rates, dropout rates, and performance on various state-administered standardized tests.

A June 2003 Magnet Schools Assessment Report commissioned by the District likewise found that magnet students enrolled in grades subject to achievement testing generally outperformed the national-norming sample and other BCPS students. A focus group survey conducted in April 2003 and included in the June 2003 Magnet Schools Assessment Report found that parents of magnet school students were uniformly supportive of the District's magnet offerings and urged BCPS to expand its magnet programs, particularly at the middle school level. The report concluded that BCPS should continue its efforts to promote diversity within its schools, improve student achievement, and increase the range of educational choices available to all District students by offering additional magnet programs.

### **III. PROPOSAL FOR MAGNET SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM GRANT**

If BCPS is awarded a grant pursuant to the Magnet Schools Assistance Program ("MSAP"), it will provide additional educational choices in the District by establishing new whole school magnets at Deep Creek Middle School, Lansdowne Middle School, and Chesapeake High School and by offering a significantly revised whole school magnet program at Lansdowne High School. The District has selected the schools to provide these proposed new or significantly revised magnet offerings to help address issues arising from increasing minority isolation and high concentrations of poverty at BCPS schools, including the need to improve students' educational achievement. The schools selected also will provide expanded educational choices to students attending underperforming schools.

The District's choice plan is based on the success of its other magnet schools and programs. Since the District first began implementing magnet schools and programs in the 1993-1994 school year, the District's magnet offerings generally have resulted in improved educational achievement and reduced minority group isolation in BCPS schools. BCPS believes that implementing new and significantly revised whole school magnet programs at Deep Creek and Lansdowne Middle Schools and Chesapeake and Lansdowne High Schools likewise will help reduce the increasing minority and socio-economic isolation that District students are experiencing. For example, the percentage of minority students at Deep Creek Middle School was approximately 60.4 percent during the 2003-2004 school year, more than double the percentage of minority students at the school in the 1992-1993 school year (24.4 percent) and a far greater percentage than the District-wide average for the 2003-2004 school year (approximately 44 percent). Over the same time period, the percentage of Deep Creek Middle School students eligible for FARMs increased from approximately 46.5 percent in the 1992-1993 school year to 62.8 percent as of June 2003. By comparison, the percentage of students eligible for FARMs in BCPS as a whole was approximately 28.4 percent as of June 2003.

At Lansdowne Middle School, the percentage of minority students more than quadrupled between the 1992-1993 and 2003-2004 school years, from approximately 10.1 percent to approximately 43 percent. The percentage of low-income students, as measured by FARMs eligibility, increased significantly from 38.0 percent in the 1992-1993 school year to approximately 66.9 percent as of June 2003.

The statistical trends are similar at the high schools selected for the District's proposed new or significantly revised magnet offerings. At Chesapeake High School, for example, the percentage of minority students more than doubled over the past eleven years, from approximately 21.2 percent to approximately 52.5 percent. The percentage of Chesapeake High School students eligible for FARMs was approximately 39.0 percent as of June 2003, compared to 22.7 percent in the 1992-1993 school year.

The proposed new and significantly revised whole school magnets at these four middle and high schools are intended not only to prevent, reduce, or eliminate minority and socio-economic isolation in the District, but also to improve student achievement levels at those schools. For example, in the 2002-2003 school year, as indicated on the MSDE website, more than half of the eighth-grade students at Deep Creek Middle School (56.4 percent) scored below proficiency on the Maryland School Assessment ("MSA") in reading. When disaggregated by racial and socio-economic characteristics, 63.5 percent of African-American, 50 percent of Hispanic, and 66.8 percent of low-income (as measured by FARMs eligibility) eighth-grade students at Deep Creek Middle School scored below proficiency in reading on the 2002-2003 MSA. The results are similar at the other schools selected for new or significantly revised whole school magnets. For instance, at Chesapeake High School, 90.4 percent of students scored below proficiency on the 2002-2003 MSA in geometry, as did 94.8 percent of African-American students and 92.8 percent of low-income students. The District believes that implementing the planned new and significantly revised magnet programs will help improve student achievement at these schools.

The U.S. Department of Education, in seeking applications for MSAP grants, recognized that magnet schools and programs are useful tools in expanding school district capacity to provide public school choice to students at underperforming schools, such as those that have not met adequate yearly progress requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ("NCLB"). BCPS intends its proposed new and significantly revised magnet offerings to provide increased educational choices for students in underperforming schools, consistent with the goals of NCLB. Each of the schools at which the District proposes to offer new or significantly revised whole school magnet programs did not meet state requirements for adequate yearly progress during the 2002-2003 school year. By offering whole school magnets at these schools, BCPS plans to increase the educational choices available to students attending currently underperforming schools.

Accordingly, if it receives MSAP grant funding, the District will implement new or significantly revised whole school magnets as follows:

- At Deep Creek Middle School, the District will implement a new whole school magnet program with a 21st Century Digital Age Learning theme;

- At Lansdowne Middle School, BCPS will implement a new whole school magnet program with a Center for Career and Professional Studies theme;
- At Chesapeake High School, BCPS will implement a new whole school magnet program with a Academy of Career and Professional Learning theme; and
- At Lansdowne High School, the District will implement a significantly revised whole school magnet program with an Academy of Professional Studies theme.

All of the proposed new and significantly revised magnet offerings have been selected through a process that included community consultation and that considered the recommendations of the District-commissioned June 2003 Magnet Schools Assessment Report. These whole school magnets will attract students from diverse backgrounds and will meet the needs of students of all ability levels, talents, and interests. Staff working in the magnet schools will have experience, knowledge, and training in fields related to the objectives of the programs offered at those schools, including with respect to developing curricula and providing for the needs and interests of students with diverse backgrounds. Each of the schools selected for the proposed new or significantly revised magnet offerings has capacity for students from outside the attendance area to have the opportunity to participate.

BCPS will assign students to the proposed new or significantly revised whole school magnets through a process that is narrowly tailored to achieve three compelling governmental interests: (1) to prevent, reduce, and eliminate minority and socio-economic isolation in the District's schools; (2) to improve the educational achievement of all students by providing the opportunity to attend racially and socio-economically diverse schools; and (3) to increase the educational opportunities available to students at underperforming schools, in keeping with the goals of NCLB and MSAP.

The District's assignment process is narrowly tailored in that BCPS will use race-neutral methods to achieve these compelling governmental interests. These methods include the strategic placement of new and significantly revised magnet programs throughout the District, the identification of geographic attendance zones for each proposed program, and the use of extensive recruiting efforts to attain diverse student enrollments. In particular, the District will draw upon its decade of experience in implementing magnet programs to market its magnet offerings in a way that the voluntary choices of parents and students in selecting a magnet program will create a racially and socio-economically diverse student body in each grade level at each school. As part of its overall recruitment efforts, BCPS will hold individual magnet school open houses and a high school magnet fair, and also will engage in special outreach to groups and individuals who might otherwise face barriers to communication. In addition, the District's recruitment efforts will focus on students currently attending underperforming schools to ensure that they are informed of the expanded opportunities available to them through the proposed new and significantly revised whole school magnet programs.

As suggested in the June 2003 Magnet Schools Assessment Report, BCPS will increase its magnet marketing and recruiting efforts to ensure that all students and parents resident in the areas served by the proposed magnet schools, including those currently in private schools, are aware of the District's magnet offerings. Each proposed magnet school will conduct individual recruiting activities as set forth in the school's magnet recruitment plan. For instance, schools will use student performances and exhibits, visits to feeder schools, mailings, and tours to increase community awareness of the school's magnet offerings. In addition, to encourage students to apply to magnet schools outside of their attendance areas, BCPS will provide transportation to students who reside in the designated geographic zone for each magnet school. Consistent with BCPS policy, the District will provide transportation to these students between the magnet school and designated community pickup points.

Throughout the recruitment period, the District will monitor the application pool for each school to determine the number and diversity of students applying to each magnet school. Where there is not sufficient enrollment or there is underrepresentation in terms of diversity, BCPS will target its recruitment to encourage additional students to apply to a particular magnet school.

Each of the four proposed new or significantly revised whole school magnet programs will be open to students from the school's attendance area as well as from a specific geographic zone that the District will designate. BCPS will first admit all applicants residing in the magnet school's attendance area. The District then will select applicants from the designated geographic zone for each magnet school by a random lottery process. If necessary, BCPS may use socio-economic status as a factor in the lottery process in order to have diverse enrollments in its magnet programs and schools.