



## **Executive Summary**

### **AdvancePath Academics, Inc - Maryland**

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## **Introduction**

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning. <br><br> The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

## Description of the School

**Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?**

AdvancePath Academics has a long-term and successful partnership with Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). Today there are five AdvancePath Academies throughout this school system. The AdvancePath Academies are located at Chesapeake High School (which opened in August 2007), Dundalk High School (August 2009), Overlea High School (October 2012), Woodlawn High School (September 2012), and Lansdowne High School (August 2013). BCPS is the 26th largest school system in the United States and the 3rd largest in Maryland. BCPS reported 7,252 graduates in 2013 and AdvancePath Academics is proud to report that 276 of these 2013 BCPS graduates received their diploma in large part due to the support they received their enrollment in an AdvancePath Academy. In the four high schools where AdvancePath Academies operated in 2012-13, graduation rates increased between 8 and 21%, specifically due to the number of AdvancePath Academy graduates at their high school. The communities surrounding the five high schools where AdvancePath Academies currently exist are some of the most educationally challenged areas in Baltimore County. These four high schools are identified as "Tier 3" schools due to poor graduation rates, the high percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price meals, and the high percentage of mobile student populations. The feeder middle schools to these four high schools are similarly identified by the State of Maryland as challenged school settings. Most feeder middle schools are identified as Title I eligible. The middle school students matriculating to the high schools (and AdvancePath Academies) are often arriving with significant learning and emotional deficiencies. It is also important to note that Baltimore County has a very high number of students in foster care, and this places additional challenges on the school system. Multiple teenage group homes are present within the Lansdowne and Woodlawn boundaries and this is a unique feature that both BCPS and AdvancePath recognize and address in serving our students. BCPS has partnered with AdvancePath at these particular locations because of the significant academic and socio-emotional challenges students from these communities face on a daily basis. BCPS recognizes AdvancePath's proven track record to re-engage, educate, and graduate students facing these multifaceted challenges.

Baltimore County Public Schools serves over 108,000 students. The current active enrollment at each of our AdvancePath Academies is as follows: Chesapeake-92, Dundalk-104, Overlea-83, Lansdowne-192, and Woodlawn-88. It is important to note that active enrollment figures represent students who attend a full morning, afternoon, or evening session (full-time) and students who may only attend an Academy for a portion of the day (hybrid). Approximately 45% of students served in the school system are eligible for free/reduced priced meals. The percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price meals is much higher at the high schools where AdvancePath Academies operate. Overlea High School, for example, has 67% of its students eligible for free/reduced price meals. BCPS demographic statistics indicate that approximately 44% of the students in the school system are White, 39% are Black/African American, 7% are Hispanic/Latino, and 6% are Asian. The demographics in AdvancePath Academies differ from overall school system figures primarily when it comes to the percentage of Black/African American students who attend an AdvancePath Academy. For example, in the five high schools where an AdvancePath Academy exists, the percentage of Black/African American students is closer to 55%. Another significant factor regarding student demographic information is the high percentage of students classified as "mobile" at schools with an AdvancePath Academy; 40-50% of students are classified as "mobile" indicating that they are highly transient. This student demographic data represents one of the first unique features and challenges associated with students and communities that AdvancePath Academies serve. Students attending an AdvancePath Academy often arrive below grade-level in literacy, language usage, and mathematics. Many of these students have not had academic or other necessary intervention services; home, school, and community have not properly addressed these deficits. The fact that many of the students AdvancePath Academies serve are transient and move quite often represents further challenges for the Academy staff in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for the students. The AdvancePath Model has a proven track record of effectively assessing

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students during their enrollment in order to identify their academic and socio-emotional strengths and weaknesses and then creating an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) based on these results. AdvancePath Academy students often must take foundation-level courses to improve their reading and math skills before they can attempt credit-bearing courses. Once students are placed in classes where they experience success and receive the necessary support to develop their skill sets for future success, we find they become more engaged in their educational program and no longer feel the education system has given up on them and, consequently, they become re-engaged and successful in school. We see this proven methodology of the AdvancePath Model as an exciting opportunity for students and families of the specific communities in Baltimore County where we operate Academies.

AdvancePath crosswalks the curriculum with BCPS school system leaders on an annual basis. Due to the unique credit requirements in BCPS and Maryland, we occasionally encounter instances where a course in the digital curriculum offering must be adapted to meet these district and state standards. This is true, for example, with the BCPS Economics course. We actively engaged with the developer of the Apex Economics class to restructure the content to include components of a Financial Literacy course, thus satisfying the school system's requirements. BCPS has been extremely diligent in their approval process for online courses. Although this due diligence ensures the alignment of AdvancePath courses is consistent with BCPS courses, it does occasionally present challenges in quickly adopting new college- and career-readiness electives offered in the five AdvancePath Academies. The AdvancePath Curriculum Department recognizes this challenge and maintains a proactive working relationship with the BCPS Curriculum Team to reduce or eliminate unnecessary delays.

A unique feature presented in our partnership with BCPS is the fact that the teachers and staff at the AdvancePath Academies are employees of BCPS. To ensure the fidelity of the AdvancePath Model implementation in the Academies we work very closely with the partnering schools' principals and the BCPS human resources department staff to provide guidance on what teacher qualities have been proven to be most successful in working with at-risk students. While the BCPS administration team is ultimately responsible for all Academy staffing decisions our collaborative efforts are designed to ensure the assigned staff is both competent and excited to be a part of the Academy team. All teachers are fully endorsed in their subject content areas, highly qualified, and possess Maryland teaching licenses. The teachers are evaluated and supervised by an assigned administrator of the high school. AdvancePath provides primary support and professional development to these teachers; however, the formal evaluation process is always completed by BCPS administrators. The teachers regularly report that their association with AdvancePath provides them with the best of both worlds - the security and benefit of employment with a top tier public school system and the opportunity to engage in a blended learning model specifically designed to re-engage at-risk students. They have access to AdvancePath curriculum materials, instructional supplies, resources on the Shared Network folder (which include lesson plans, small group learning experiences, and professional development resources), and technology support due to our partnership with BCPS that complements what they receive from Baltimore County. We recognize, however, challenges will occasionally arise is leveraging all of this additional support within some of time restrictions associated with the school district's regulations. AdvancePath provides initial training and ongoing professional development to BCPS teachers assigned in our Academies on the unique features of the AdvancePath model. This ensures these teachers, instructional aides, and registrars have the support and resources to be successful. Our ability to fully implement this educational model is occasionally limited based on to what degree our Regional Director and Education Consultant can direct teachers to fully implement the model's tenants with fidelity. We are proud of our relationship with BCPS and find that when these isolated instances arise where challenges develop, our Regional Director can resolve these issues by communicating with appropriate school system leaders. This is, however, a strong testimony to our ability to develop and sustain powerful partnerships with school systems such as BCPS.

### School's Purpose

**Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.**

The mission of AdvancePath Academics is "To Enrich Lives and Improve Society Through Education - One Student At A Time." Central to this mission is our core belief that all students can learn and that no student should suffer a lifetime of failure because they cannot succeed academically and/or socially in a traditional middle or high school setting.

Our vision is to provide innovative, high-quality, cost effective alternative programs to educate at-risk and disengaged students, instilling in them an appreciation for learning, motivation for personal growth including high school graduation, better employment prospects, and the foundation for a productive life and good citizenship. AdvancePath Academy students in BCPS join a well-educated, productive workforce able to make positive social and economic contributions to their communities. AdvancePath Academics has been serving at-risk youth through our AdvancePath Academies since 2005, demonstrating with more than 15,000 students that this population can learn and succeed in the right environment.

The AdvancePath Model is built upon the two important pillars: a knowledge base of over 30 years of education research in identifying what works with at-risk high school students and the hands-on experience of implementing 22 AdvancePath Academies across the nation specifically addressing the needs of these students. We have successfully graduated nearly 4,000 students since inception and demonstrated an innovative model of blended learning that can support a comprehensive alternative education system combining the power of interventions and mentoring for students with a clear focus on meeting each student's academic needs. The AdvancePath Model brings together the most effective features of classroom interaction and focused, technology-based instruction. This unique model personalizes learning and empowers students to take greater ownership of their education. Students matriculate through the program with more confidence in their skills, which translates to extraordinary levels of personal and academic success.

As an organization, we are dedicated to working with school districts such as BCPS to create innovative, powerful, and sustainable models of multiple pathways of learning for all students. It is our shared goal and responsibility to ensure every student, regardless of the challenges they face, has the opportunity and support to graduate from high school both college and work ready, as well as fully prepared to participate as productive and contributing members of their communities. As an experienced and qualified provider of alternative education programs delivered through partnerships with public school districts, AdvancePath Academics has the capability for delivering high support, high achievement academic programs for out-of-school youth, students significantly at risk of dropping out, those subject to discipline, transfer, or expulsion, and students returning from adjudicated placement. The instructional practices cited throughout this section are research-driven elements that are regularly cited as proven strategies for diverse learners and learning communities (Barr, Chester, Jr., Manno, and Vanoureic, 2000; Callet & Valerie 2010; Fuller, Bruce, et al.1999; Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, 2001; Ormrod, 2006; Waxman, Padrón, & Arnold, 2001).

#### How AdvancePath Academies Embody Its Purpose

AdvancePath integrates numerous evidence-based instructional strategies and socio-emotional programs to supports the educational philosophy and purpose of the program at BCPS. AdvancePath Academies are successful in delivering a program that includes innovative instructional methods that engage and support students from diverse skill levels, reading and writing across the curriculum, and the development of thinking, speaking, and listening skills needed for future success. The instructional practices that follow are research- and

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evidence-driven elements, proven to work effectively for disenfranchised youth who are the targeted population for this Program. These instructional practices engage learners and can be easily differentiated by teachers. This unique opportunity to differentiate and individualize content is particularly well-suited to address the unique needs of the targeted population. Our program goals are also specifically created and implemented with our targeted student population in mind. We are always cognizant of the fact that students enter our program with skill deficiencies in a number of critical academic, social, and emotional domains. Therefore, we tailor program and individual goals to recognize and celebrate incremental improvements while maintaining rigorous expectations aligned with the Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) requirements for culminating summative standards necessary for credit attainment, promotion, and high school graduation.

The AdvancePath Academy academic philosophy is framed by both a culture of learning and success that holds these principles as paramount:

We believe all students can learn. Students most often come with a history of academic failure. However, academic failure does not necessarily equate to capability. No student deserves to be "thrown away" because he or she does not fit into a specific learning model or struggles to progress at the same pace as other students. We believe it is our obligation as teachers to create a positive and sustainable learning environment for all students, regardless of their academic and/or behavioral background.

It is our job as educators to facilitate a learning environment that actively engages students in the learning process. The student populations represent a diverse set of student needs. As educators, our job is to keep students engaged, motivated and demonstrating academic progress. The teachers and support staff, through ongoing consultation and review of student performance and engagement with positive behavioral support actions and direct instruction, are responsible for guiding, mentoring, and coaching students to ensure they graduate college-ready and work.

We embrace a learning environment that uses data to drive instructional decisions and continuous program improvement. The Program learning environment is a data rich and helps provides teachers with up-to-the minute snapshots of student academic performance and behavioral growth. Using data to drive student achievement, plan for interventions and inform program improvement is an essential part of holding all stakeholders - including students who are responsible for their own learning - accountable for student success.

We believe in timely and appropriate interventions to guide the students' learning path. Data gives teachers the essential information to plan interventions that improve student performance. Timely interventions help keep students on track with a clear vision of how to achieve academic success.

We take seriously our obligation to prepare students for graduation and their next step on the journey...college, career and life. Our most fundamental task is to ensure students graduate with an academic diploma that prepares them for future education, work and citizenship. The blended learning environment of the AdvancePath Model combines technology-based delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and direct instruction to focus instruction and personalize learning across a diverse group of learners.

The importance of a positive school culture can never be overlooked. Educational research cites how a school community that is committed to embracing the diversity and exceptional attributes contributes positively toward student academic and social outcomes (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Osher & Fleischman, 2005). This is especially true for schools that serve students with special needs, English Language Learners, and students at-risk of academic failure. The emphasis on establishing and modeling a culture of acceptance is an essential and ongoing component of professional development. The corporate leaders, Regional Director, and Education Consultant provide teachers in our BCPS Academies with meaningful, job-embedded training designed to educate them on the research- and evidence-based strategies that build a positive school culture within their respective programs.

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The following instructional methods, program offerings, and expectations for students are regularly used in the BCPS AdvancePath Academies to achieve these performance goals.

**Collaborative Group Work:** Students taking similar courses are grouped together on a weekly basis to complete activities that routinely include project-based learning activities focusing on real-world, relevant topics

**Writing-to-Learn Activities:** Students will regularly participate in critical thinking writing assignments designed to improve literacy skills, deepen content knowledge and help students clarify their own ideas

**High-Level Questioning Strategies:** Teachers will engage students in high-level questioning prompts that foster deeper classroom conversations

**Scaffolding of Text:** Teachers offer students an appropriate amount of support to assist students better comprehend textual information

**Classroom Talk:** Teacher- and student-led classroom discussions are integral components to promote deeper understanding among learners

The AdvancePath Model demonstrates how a new culture of learning for students who have not thrived in the traditional and alternative education settings can experience success. The AdvancePath Model has been proven in multiple settings to be a positive academic and social learning environment for at-risk students. Students in the BCPS Academies immediately understand that their participation in the Academy will not only lead them on a path toward high school graduation, but also prepare them for a transition into posts-secondary education and career credential programs. As students witness the relevance of their academic program in order to secure new opportunities, they quickly buy into the culture.

The learning environment itself also reinforces a paradigm shift in the culture of learning in the Academy. It is businesslike, yet warm and inviting. The climate fostered by the Academy staff reinforces with students the school's full commitment to reach out and reengage them in learning. BCPS students are typically surprised when they enter an AdvancePath Program. They realize they are in a different kind of school where they are valued and have a full range of technology-based instructional resources available to them. Each Academy is built around an "academy pod" housed in 2,500 to 3,000 square feet of contiguous space, and great attention is taken in the details such as providing ergonomic seating, enhanced lighting with the use of windows allowing for ample natural sunlight, soothing colors, and state-of-the-art technology. Students quickly gain a feeling of security in their own work setting. The exact layout of each Academy in BCPS is dependent on the space that the school provides AdvancePath.

A culture of academic excellence and respect is immediately created when the student and teacher collaboratively develop an individualized learning pathway. During this review of the student's transcript and academic records, the student is positively recognized for credits he or she brings to the Academy. A pathway for graduation is then created by the student so he or she sees the relevance of every course. Since a student's schedule typically only includes two courses at a time, he or she is able to intensely focus on the courses at hand. Our experience reinforces research that suggests that when students are presented flexible learning situations, they experience new-found academic success. Students soon discover how they are able to secure credits at a pace that is appropriate for them. Students are able to receive credit for previously-mastered material and are able to accelerate their progress in line with their previously learned material. We find our students embrace this aspect in our Program and appropriately utilize it to recover lost credits. This makes graduation and grade promotion a reality for them--often for the first time. As students and families discover that our program's academic environment is designed around them, they engage in academic pursuits and experience outstanding success.



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AdvancePath Academics realize that a positive social environment is critical to engaging students in academic work. The first step to creating this positive social environment and establishing high expectations for students is training teachers about their invaluable role in the student's academic, social, and emotional development. Teachers quickly understand that they must demonstrate to students how much they care about the student first, before they can expect the student to care about academic success. Ongoing professional development supports teachers and staff in developing and nurturing positive and appropriate relationships that are built on trust and respect. Students regularly comment that teachers and instructional assistants in AdvancePath Academies are the first adults who have taken a vested interest in their success. Our teachers and staff members assume the role of mentors and learning coaches to develop this positive climate conducive to learning. They greet students at the door, attempt to learn what motivates and interests each student, develop communication channels with parents/guardians, praise students for meeting student learning targets, and possess only the highest expectations for each student. The BCPS Academies hosts regular celebrations to recognize student and Academy-wide accomplishments. Students feel a sense of belonging and treat the Academy, the staff, and classmates with respect and dignity that sets the tone for success in post-secondary and employment settings.

The student relationship model encourages an open, positive culture to develop within the Academy. The teacher manages a caseload and develops a close relationship with the students. The teacher is a facilitator of learning and the focus is on the learner, not the teacher. Motivational coaching, positive reinforcement, and a unique style of student management are all components of the development of an Academy culture. Likewise, the clerk-registrar and instructional aides are included in the training sessions to ensure that the culture is embodied throughout the Academy. Teachers - and all staff - are working together as a "team of teachers" to support all students.

## **Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement**

**Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.**

AdvancePath's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years are a testament to the strong partnership AdvancePath maintains with Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). The first area of achievement is the significant improvement in graduation rates for the four high schools where an AdvancePath Academy operated during the 2012-13 school year. Two hundred seventy-six students graduated with a BCPS diploma because of an AdvancePath Academy. These 276 students completed 1,813 courses while attending an AdvancePath Academy and earned 934 credits during their enrollment. Students at the Chesapeake High School Academy accounted for 52 of the school's total 251 graduates. Since this Academy opened in August 2007, 284 students have graduated from Chesapeake High School through the AdvancePath Academy. Dundalk High School AdvancePath Academy graduates accounted for 46 of the school's 303 total graduates. The Dundalk AdvancePath Academy opened in August 2009 and 285 students have graduated by attending the AdvancePath Academy. The two newest Academies at Overlea and Woodlawn High School opened in the Fall of 2012. In their one year of operation, 141 students have earned a BCPS diploma thanks to the individualized instructional program offered at the AdvancePath Academy. These numbers demonstrate how students who otherwise may have dropped out of high school are earning a high school diploma and becoming contributing citizens of Baltimore County due to the successful partnership between BCPS and AdvancePath Academics.

A specific example of where the addition of an AdvancePath Academy assisted BCPS can be seen at Dundalk High School. This school was placed under "warning" in 2007 by Maryland. Thanks largely to the launch of the AdvancePath Academy, Dundalk High School was able to more effectively serve all students and improve their graduation rates. The partnership between AdvancePath and BCPS allowed Dundalk students to have additional resources, personalized learning experiences, and intensive interventions in the AdvancePath Academy. These new student support services, along with specialized professional development training for teachers in the Academy, allowed students to secure the course credits necessary for graduation and was a significant factor in removing the "warning" designation at Dundalk High.

A further example of the success of the AdvancePath Program in Baltimore County is the fact that a fifth AdvancePath Academy was launched in the Fall of 2013. This Academy at Lansdowne High School is already helping students acquire high school credits in a highly structured and supportive learning environment. The new Superintendent of Schools at BCPS, Dr. Dallas Dance, regularly comments in the community and on BCPS social network sites that the partnership with AdvancePath Academics is re-engaging students who may otherwise have become high school dropouts. Through our successful relationship with BCPS leaders our outreach to the community at large is an area of improvement. We recognize the need to engage the community and are continuing to develop sustainable partnerships to help students succeed in their post-secondary pursuits. This includes linking with local business leaders to offer students with suggestions for how to land their first job, as well as partnering with local colleges and universities on how to best position our students for admission and financial aid packages.

As an educational organization committed to offering our school system partners, students, and families with a premier level of educational programs, AdvancePath is steadfast in our determination to continually improve and enhance our program and academic model. Maryland and BCPS like many other states and school systems is preparing itself for the transition to Common Core standards. We are working aggressively with our digital content providers to ensure that the courses offered at the BCPS AdvancePath Academies are prepared for this transition. The Common Core requirements state that students must demonstrate more evidence of higher order thinking and the application

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of skills in all subject areas. Our AdvancePath Curriculum Manager is working alongside the Regional Director and Education Consultant to provide teachers with a wealth of resources to make this transition as easy as possible. Professional development associated with these new resources will be offered throughout the 2013-14 school year to educate teachers about Common Core and how it can most effectively be implemented in AdvancePath Academies.

An accompanying new mandate to school systems like BCPS is the requirement for more data-driven decision making. AdvancePath's Data Analyst will be working collaboratively with the Regional Director and Education Consultant to ensure teachers have access to real-time student performance data. More importantly though our mission is to ensure teachers know how to best interpret and analyze this data to most effectively improve student achievement. This was noted in the AdvancePath AdvancED Readiness Analysis and will be an ongoing objective for improvement.

## **Additional Information**

**Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.**

The AdvancePath Model is a proven model of blended learning designed specifically to address the needs of high school students experiencing academic and behavioral challenges and in danger of dropping out of school. Our program features a primary focus on academic performance in a positive behavioral intervention and support setting, while taking full advantage of technology-based learning resources supported by a team of teachers trained to work together with all students. As an overview, the AdvancePath Model incorporates key components necessary in serving the unique needs of at-risk students including:

- Small, personalized, safe learning environments for students who have been unsuccessful in previous educational environments through supportive scaffolding pedagogy;
- Relevant and rigorous curricula offerings that link academic learning to real world experiences;
- Positive relationships between students, family members, school staff, and community social service providers;
- Incorporation of 21st century skills and the development of pro-social skills;
- Use of technology and the fostering of experiential learning;
- Emphasis on civic competencies of tolerance and conflict resolution;
- Intentional design features that address dropout prevention and recovery;
- Effective and accountable leadership to maximize learning opportunities;
- Career pathways with rigorous preparation for college.

The AdvancePath model is built upon the application of over 30 years of education research in identifying what works with at-risk high school students and the hands-on experience of implementing 22 AdvancePath Academies across the nation specifically addressing the needs of these students. We have developed a model of blended learning that can support a comprehensive alternative education system combining the power of interventions and mentoring for students with a clear focus on meeting each student's academic needs. The AdvancePath Model brings together the best features of classroom interaction and focused technology-based instruction, personalizing learning and empowering students to take ownership of their education, become more confident in their skills and achieve personal and academic success.

In 2009, the California State Attendance Review Board recommended AdvancePath as a "model program" Districts in California should consider partnering with to establish programs for at-risk youth. With a commitment to the rigor and relevance of the curricula and the creation of a positive learning environment where students can regain their confidence, AdvancePath is bringing to its district partners an economical and effective strategy for increasing graduation rates.

AdvancePath Academics remains committed to a comprehensive accountability framework to ensure all of our Academies meet and exceed intended learning outcomes for students. Today, AdvancePath operates Academies in California, Maryland, Michigan and Alaska serving more than 4,000 students annually. AdvancePath Academies are designed to work specifically with out-of-school youth and students who are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school and a predominant number of the students are African American and Hispanic youth. With an overall student success rate of 90%, over 4,000 students will have received their high school diplomas through June 2013.

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