

# Howard County Public Schools

## Ellicott City, Maryland

**Location type:** Large suburb

**District enrollment:** 52,806 students

**Percentage of students in district eligible for free and reduced price meals:** 19.4

### Key Takeaways

Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS) participated in the OECD Test for Schools in 2014. The district's results indicated a need to focus on raising achievement in math, increasing expectations and rigor in instruction, and better developing critical thinking and problem solving skills among HCPSS students. The district performed well when compared to students in the United States, but when compared internationally, the results were not as favorable. Too few students performed in the top proficiency levels (levels 5 and 6), especially in reading and science.

### Actions Taken

-  In response to these results, HCPSS held a work session in December 2014 where HCPSS school and district leaders came together to understand results, created an online instructional portal where teachers can interact with the OECD Test for Schools results and learn about best practices, and presented a detailed analysis of its OECD Test for Schools results to the school board.
-  District leaders leveraged the OECD Test for Schools to support its effort to define rigor across content areas and grade levels, particularly in math. By referencing international benchmarks such as the OECD Test for Schools, HCPSS faculty and staff developed a greater sense of urgency about and commitment to raising expectations for adults and students in the system. It has also helped high schools better understand the rigor and demands of state standards and other state assessments including PARCC.
-  To help students achieve these higher expectations, HCPSS began aligning K-12 math scope and sequence with the expectation that students will take calculus by senior year, which was introduced during the 2015-2016 school year.
-  HCPSS also has clarified the district's expectations for exemplary math instruction. These include, among other things, engaging students in worthwhile math tasks, integrating more inquiry-based instruction, increasing students' responsibility for leading academic discourse within the classroom, and investing more time and resources into developing student mastery of the Common Core State Standard's mathematical practice standards.
-  To support this action, the district has re-doubled its efforts to encourage schools to provide collaborative planning time for math teachers. Additionally, the district has trained a cadre of math coaches to effectively facilitate those planning times so that teachers are achieving incremental growth. The school has noticed that this intentionality is increasing rigor during instruction and on locally developed assessments.
-  District leaders, working with teachers, have developed a coherent formative assessment system, using common assessments and scoring rubrics, all of which have been developed in part by backmapping from the higher proficiency levels on the OECD Test for Schools.
-  Since 2013, over 60 people from Howard County schools and the district have participated in a variety of Global Learning Network events, including six virtual convenings, two regional meetings, and the 2014 Convening of World-Leading Schools.
-  Moving forward, the district has identified specific areas for action, which include
  -  Ensuring that lesson plans are providing students with access to the kind of thinking that is described in the level 5 and 6 descriptors.
  -  Providing professional development in targeted areas such as (1) developing and implementing high-cognitive demand tasks, (2) developing a focus on providing high-quality formative feedback to students during instruction, and (3) working to strengthen teacher team developed assessments and scoring practices.

*Those wishing to learn more about the practices at Howard County Public Schools may visit the district's website [here](#).*