



**Evaluation of the Implementation of the Supporting
Services Professional Growth System
(SSPGS): Interim Report**

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Executive Summary

This is an interim report on the evaluation of the implementation of the Supporting Services Professional Growth System (SSPGS).

The SSPGS is a system of performance evaluation and professional development for support (supporting services) professionals in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Support professionals include nonadministrative and non-teacher employees. The goals of SSPGS are to promote personal and organizational excellence, streamline the evaluation process, and focus on performance and growth.¹ SSPGS is designed to attract and recruit high-quality supporting services personnel from diverse backgrounds, ensure and document good-quality performance, provide feedback and mentoring for continuous professional development, provide comprehensive professional development opportunities, and provide performance recognition.

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) has evaluated the MCPS professional growth systems² as they were implemented. The current evaluation serves to determine the extent to which schools and offices are implementing SSPGS as designed.

OSA is conducting a mixed-method implementation evaluation of SSPGS in 2007–2008. Data sources include personal interviews with school and office managers, focus groups with program stakeholders, surveys of supervisors and support professionals, and program document reviews.

This interim report addresses implementation of SSPGS as of spring 2008, focusing on performance evaluation and professional development in schools and offices that began implementing SSPGS on July 1, 2006 (“Phase 2” cohort). Findings presented in this report are primarily from the personal interviews and group discussions; survey findings will be presented in the final report.

¹ *Regulation GJA-RA*. MCPS, revised August 7, 2006.

² To date, these have included Teacher Professional Growth System (PGS) and Administrative and Supervisory Professional Growth System (A&S PGS).

Key Findings

What have been stakeholders' experiences with the implementation of SSPGS?

Those who supervise and evaluate support professionals see SSPGS as a positive process. In particular, expectations for employees are clearer than they were prior to SSPGS, and are consistent school- and districtwide. This is due to the introduction of clear performance criteria. Scheduling evaluations is simpler, with a uniform schedule of evaluation due dates, and notification of evaluations needed, at the beginning of each fiscal year.

SSPGS is still a new initiative for many MCPS personnel. At midyear, both supervisors and support professionals have limited experience working with SSPGS. This context should be considered when reviewing findings about topics on which people need more information.

To what extent has SSPGS been implemented as intended?

As of midyear (data collection described in this report), some supervisors had not conducted performance evaluations using SSPGS; and some support professionals had not experienced the SSPGS performance evaluation process. Also, some components of SSPGS had not yet been rolled out.

To date, interview findings indicate that the focus has been primarily on completing the actual performance evaluation, with less attention on the “professional development” years of the SSPGS cycle. Implementation of SSPGS is not consistent across sites with regard to the staffing model indicated in the SSPGS handbook for collecting input and completing performance evaluations. High schools appear to have a more consistent process for conducting performance evaluations than other work sites; they use the business manager position to support SSPGS.

Challenges to Implementation

Key challenges to fuller implementation of SSPGS with supervisors are as follows: (1) Some supervisors have not attended evaluator training. (2) Most supervisors have focused on helping underperforming employees or on discussing day-to-day performance, rather than developing long-term professional goals with support professionals who meet performance expectations.³

Key challenges to fuller implementation of SSPGS with support professionals are as follows: (1) Supervisors of support professionals perceive their employees to be focused on doing their current job, rather than on attaining long-term professional goals. (2) Accessing training and skill development opportunities can be a challenge for support professionals. Supervisor resistance, lack of awareness about training opportunities, difficulty arranging time away during the workday, child care, school, and second-job responsibilities are contributing factors.

³ Next steps or enforcement mechanisms are unclear for supervisors who do not implement the SSPGS process in a timely manner.

(3) Supervisors of support professionals perceive that language issues and a diversity of professional backgrounds and experiences affect the SSPGS process.⁴

Key Recommendations

- **Enhance and clarify guidance when supervisors are not following the intended model, or have unanswered questions.** More guidance is indicated about the role of particular staff members in evaluating and providing feedback on performance, expectations for timely completion of performance evaluations, and consequences for noncompliance with SSPGS requirements.
- **Incorporate the core competencies evaluated under SSPGS into job descriptions and requirements.** Include a detailed breakdown of the competencies in the SSPGS handbook, with specific examples of how these competencies relate to MCPS positions.
- **Increase opportunities for job coaching as a training tool.** Create a larger pool of job-alike coaches. Building services personnel, in particular, will benefit from more on-site job coaching.
- **Provide additional information about training offerings, schedules, and how to access training. Maximize flexibility by offering multiple training times and dates for all trainings involving personnel evaluated using SSPGS.** Personnel in various roles in a school will benefit from refresher training on SSPGS. Provide additional support and information about how to apply SSPGS competencies to specific job responsibilities. Provide additional publicity about available training. Consider non-computer-based access to training information.
- **Support the diverse culture of support professionals.** Consider publishing the SSPGS handbook in multiple languages. Offer English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for job-alike positions. Training plans should be sensitive to the wide variety of professional backgrounds and experiences of support professionals. Some may need more introduction and practice with critical SSPGS concepts such as professional conversations between individuals and supervisors, and how SSPGS supports students.

⁴ More than one half of support professionals report having a first language other than English. Please see Department of Shared Accountability, (2007). *Research Findings from the SEIU English Language Proficiency Survey*.

Background

This report examines implementation of the Supporting Services Professional Growth System (SSPGS) as of spring 2008, focusing on performance evaluation and professional development in schools and offices that began implementing SSPGS on July 1, 2006. Throughout this report, “performance evaluation” refers to job-performance assessments. “Program evaluation” and “implementation evaluation” refer to the program evaluation of SSPGS conducted by OSA.

Program Overview

Goal 4 of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) strategic plan is to create a positive work environment in a self-renewing organization. This goal addresses the need for high-quality professional development and the ability “to recruit, support, and retain highly qualified and diverse professional and support personnel” (MCPS, 2006). Supporting services includes all nonadministrative and non-teacher-level employees within MCPS (support professionals). This group includes about 8,000 school-based and central services employees who comprise almost 40% of the MCPS workforce, in approximately 500 different position classes. SSPGS is designed to attract, recruit, and evaluate, develop, and retain high-quality supporting services personnel from diverse backgrounds.

SSPGS is a competency-based model, with seven core competencies and performance criteria for each competency (see Appendix A). It “is a collaborative process that promotes workforce excellence by applying a core competency model in order to encourage personal and systemic growth and focus on performance through continuous improvement.” The goals of SSPGS are to promote personal and organizational excellence, streamline the evaluation process, and focus on performance and growth.⁵ The competencies inform each of the five components of SSPGS: recruiting, staffing, evaluation, professional development, and retention and recognition. Each component of SSPGS is described below.

- *Recruiting; Staffing.* In SSPGS, the process of recruiting includes identifying and encouraging talented personnel who exhibit the core competencies—skills, knowledge, and abilities—required of a support professional.
- *Evaluation.* The evaluation component serves to ensure and document good-quality performance of support professionals and provide feedback for continuous professional development. Employees new to their position are evaluated at six months. After permanent status is attained, the employee is evaluated 18 months later at the two-year mark. Scheduled evaluations occur every three years thereafter. Employees who have not met competency on one or more core competencies on a formal evaluation, or who have a period of documented underperformance, are referred to the Performance Improvement Process (PIP). This process is designed to provide underperforming supporting services employees with the professional development opportunities necessary to improve performance and achieve competency in all core criteria. PIP offers several

⁵ *Regulation GJA-RA*. MCPS, revised August 7, 2006.

options: a six-month Peer Assistance and Review program (PAR), a 90-day Special Evaluation, the opportunity for reassignment to a previously held position at which the employee was successful, resignation, or retirement.

- *Professional development.* The professional growth cycle begins at the end of the second year of employment in a position. At the beginning of this cycle, each employee collaborates with his/her supervisor to create a Professional Development Plan (PDP).⁶ Its objective is to target areas for growth and identify strategies for successful attainment of professional goals.
- *Recognition and Retention.*⁷ Opportunities to highlight individual achievements of staff members in a positive and supportive manner are consistent with a professional learning community. The role of this component is to identify those practices, performances, and achievements attained by an individual/team that distinguish them and that set a standard for excellence.

⁶ The PDP is scheduled for rollout in July 2008 for Phases 2 and 3.

⁷ The retention and recognition components are in development.

Methodology

Evaluation Questions

The following key questions guide the SSPGS implementation evaluation:

1. What have been stakeholders' experiences with the implementation of SSPGS?
2. To what extent has SSPGS been implemented as intended?

Data Sources

The Office of Organizational Development (OOD) staff indicated that Phase 2 implementation has been fuller, more consistent, and representative of a wider variety of functions when compared with Phase 1 implementation. Therefore, the target population for data collection is support professionals and supervisors in Phase 2 schools and offices.

The evaluation utilizes a mixed-method design, including multiple data-collection strategies, to triangulate information gathered from multiple stakeholders. Data-collection methods included (1) in-person interviews with supervisors in a sample of Phase 2 schools and offices; (2) a group interview with the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) panelists (11 participants); a group interview with the professional growth consultants (PGCs) (8 participants); and (3) review of existing documents and data from the Office of Human Resources (OHR) and OOD. OSA survey data from the MCPS Surveys of the School Environment and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) English Language Proficiency Survey were also reviewed.

Sampling procedures. A sample of Phase 2 schools and offices was selected to represent the range of experiences with implementing SSPGS. More support professionals work in high schools than in middle or elementary schools. Therefore, all nine Phase 2 high schools were selected to maximize the number of support professionals represented by the school sample. In addition, four middle schools and three elementary schools were selected at random. Different levels of enrollment among middle and elementary school buildings were included by stratifying the sample by enrollment size before random selection. Two special programs (McKenney Hills and Stephen Knolls) were also part of Phase 2 and were included in data-collection activities. One half of the offices/departments (six) were sampled at random for interviews.

Interviews were conducted with 21 personnel in all 18 schools and special centers, and with 6 personnel in 4 of the six sampled offices. Table 1 shows the completed interviews by work site. Appendix B displays Phase 2 schools and offices sampled for data collection activities.⁸

⁸ Because OSA seeks to limit the burden on schools, MCPS elementary and middle schools involved in other major program evaluation initiatives with OSA (Middle School Magnet Consortium, Middle School Reform, Title I) were not considered for the SSPGS program evaluation.

Table 1
Individual Interviews Completed

	Number of Schools and Offices Sampled	Number of Schools and Offices with Completed Interviews	Number of Individuals Interviewed
High Schools	9	9	10
Middle Schools	4	4	4
Elementary Schools	3	3	5
Special Centers	2	2	2
Offices ^a	6	4	6

Note. Principals and office directors were asked to nominate a person for the interview. At some sites, two people were nominated and interviewed.

^aOne nominee was interviewed but was later determined to be part of Phase 1.

Instrumentation. Two instruments were developed for conducting group interviews. The evaluation questions were used, detailed by findings from developmental interviews with school principals and district managers in Phase 1 schools and offices (fall 2007). Proposed questions were then thoroughly reviewed by the Evaluation Advisory Group and by program staff familiar with the details of SSPGS. The instruments were as follows:

- *A discussion guide for group interviews with PAR panelists and PGCs.* The discussion guide addressed: employee knowledge about the SSPGS and program procedures; employee knowledge of training and professional development opportunities; recent experiences with reviewing cases (PAR) and training employees (PGC); and challenges and opportunities for improvement.
- *A protocol for individual in-person interviews with school and office supervisory personnel.* The interview protocol addressed: supervisor's background; supervisor's role as an evaluator, including training received on conducting evaluations; experiences with evaluating employees; training and professional development for the supervisor's staff; and challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Copies of interview instruments are in Appendix D.

Evaluation Advisory Group. A stakeholder group comprising central office staff, school administrators, school personnel, and employee union representatives was formed to provide peer review and oversight of the evaluation. When the initial configuration of members did not fully represent all stakeholders, particularly those in nonmanagement positions, additional personnel were added to the group. OSA staff also met with the SSPGS Implementation Team to introduce the evaluation project and get feedback.

Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

This program evaluation features several strengths with regard to method and reliability of data. First, developmental interviews were conducted with supervisors in Phase 1 schools and offices to develop questions that would properly reference the language and experiences of MCPS personnel working with SSPGS. Questions were further vetted by program staff. An Evaluation Advisory Group provided detailed consideration and comments on the evaluation plan, process, and questions of interest. The SSPGS Implementation Team also was consulted. Early input from the group interviews with PGCs and PAR panelists also helped in the selection of appropriate interview questions for supervisors. Second, the sample of schools selected for interviews (and surveys, in an upcoming report) was stratified, to ensure that elementary and middle schools of different enrollment sizes were represented. Finally, the findings discussed in this report were based on input from multiple stakeholders (supervisors, PGCs, and PAR panelists) who were asked many of the same questions in order to triangulate information.

The limitations of this program evaluation include the following: (1) The PGCs and PAR panelists interviewed for this study noted that they work only with people who require performance improvement; they are less familiar with the experiences of employees who are meeting performance expectations. (2) The cyclical nature of the performance evaluation process means that support professionals and supervisors have a wide range of experience with the process (from no experience to completed performance evaluations and possibly Performance Improvement Process [PIP] experience).⁹ (3) The experiences of Phase 1 and Phase 3 personnel are not included in the evaluation design. (4) Findings in this interim report do not include the direct opinions of support professionals (e.g., those evaluated using SSPGS). Any comments in this document about their perceptions were made by others. The final report will include findings from a survey of support professionals.

⁹ For example, one office director who was scheduled to be interviewed said that no manager in the office has experience conducting an SSPGS performance evaluation and therefore could not answer the questions.

Findings

Key to Attributed Quotes

PGC: Professional growth consultant

PAR: Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) panelist

Evaluator/supervisor: Person charged by office or school head to conduct SSPGS performance evaluations.

Manager/direct supervisor: Person who manages one or more support professionals (e.g., building services manager, food service manager, media specialist, teacher, school security).

The program evaluation was developed using evaluation questions. Findings in this section are organized by evaluation question.

Evaluation Question: What have been stakeholders' experiences with the implementation of SSPGS?

SSPGS requires a cultural shift in how performance evaluations are conducted and how the value of professional growth is perceived. This section details important changes attributed to SSPGS by MCPS personnel, including the use of a competency-based model and the concept of supporting students through the work of support professionals.

Supervisors have a positive response to SSPGS. They like the competency-based system for performance evaluation, and find the scheduling of evaluations under SSPGS to be helpful and efficient. Supervisors familiar with PIP consider it a positive aspect of SSPGS.

Both supervisors and support professionals need additional support on relating competencies to job duties and understanding the performance improvement process (PIP).

To date many supervisors and support professionals have limited experience with SSPGS. This will change as June 2008 evaluations are completed. At that time, many more supervisors and support professionals will have had direct experience with the process.

Supervisors' Experiences

Supervisors perceive a number of important changes with SSPGS that affect the work of support professionals, most especially the introduction of competencies and relating competencies to job duties.

Competencies. School- and district-based evaluators believe SSPGS offers the opportunity to articulate goals and competencies. According to a school-based evaluator, "The competencies make employees more accountable and help them have a vested interest in doing well and to monitor their own growth." A school business manager said, "Articulating the goals and competencies makes it easier to have a conversation across all roles and responsibilities.

Everyone works toward the same purpose—student achievement. The new system focuses [us on] and values students and the mission of the school.”

Supervisors perceive that the competencies and the rating form are very structured, providing the evaluator with things to look for and clearly identifying what employees need to do. The previous evaluation system used subjective checklists, rather than competencies. A school principal said, “The forms and competencies emphasize professionalism and give personnel more ownership for their professional responsibilities.” Another principal said, “Expectations of roles are clearer, not as general as before. These expectations are school- and districtwide. The evaluation now digs down into job responsibilities.” They see clearly articulated expectations as helping them to facilitate conversations during the performance evaluation because the evaluator can provide more details and criteria for meeting or not meeting competencies.

Relating competencies to job-specific duties. Most evaluators and supervisors believe that their employees need more support in relating the core competencies of SSPGS to their professional responsibilities. As one principal said, “We need to show employees how to apply the competencies to their job responsibilities . . . that competencies equal behaviors.” A school business manager clarified, “Most employees would benefit from a detailed breakdown of competencies, to provide very specific examples of what it means for their specific job responsibilities.”

Several school-based evaluators commented that employees’ current conception of what constitutes “doing a good job” may not align with the competencies. According to one school-based evaluator, “If documentation of job responsibilities is vague (e.g., security), the person may not meet the standards established by the school administration. Building-specific responsibilities need to be fleshed out by school administrators; sometimes [we may need to] bring in an MCPS supporting services supervisor.”

Scheduling evaluations. Evaluators find scheduling of evaluations using SSPGS to be easier than before. Notifications of evaluations for the year are provided together at the beginning of the year, so principals and managers can plan.¹⁰ A school principal said, “There are no random due dates; all [evaluations] are due at the same time.” A school business manager concurred, “Yes, we get a whole year to complete them and all are due at one time.” And a central office supervisor agreed, “SSPGS streamlines the process; it’s easier to work through all the evaluations, since they’re due at one time.”

A note on tardiness and absenteeism

Interviews with PGCs, school- and district-based evaluators indicate that additional information may be needed regarding treatment of tardiness and absenteeism. The SSPGS handbook references these topics in Core Competency 3, Professionalism. However, SSPGS is not structured to address supervisor referrals or complaints solely on the basis of tardiness or

¹⁰ At developmental interviews, some principals showed the interviewer the document from the Office of Human Resources. It identifies all support personnel in the building and highlights those with evaluations due during the year.

absenteeism. Therefore it may be preferable to provide the needed support or clarifications to supervisors separately from the SSPGS evaluation process.

Support Professionals' Experiences

Supervisors say the support professionals working for them are focused on maintaining or getting permanency status in their jobs, and on aspects of the evaluation process that support pay increases or avoid problems that could lead to termination. PGCs agree with this assessment, reporting that support professionals focus on how they will meet all seven competencies, or on “how to get to six months” (permanent status).

According to interview findings, specific aspects of SSPGS require a cultural shift in the nature of interactions needed in professional settings. For example, one PAR panelist pointed to the significance of “one-to-one” conversations in SSPGS and said this is not a familiar concept for some support professionals.

Supervisors are encouraging support professionals to take advantage of professional growth opportunities in MCPS but are not yet satisfied that utilization of these opportunities is as high as it could be. (See more on training elsewhere in this report.)

Midyear data collection focused on supervisors’ experiences and perceptions, including perceptions’ of their employees’ experiences with SSPGS. The final evaluation report will focus more directly on the experiences and self-reports of support professionals.

Understanding support for students. Both school-based evaluators and PGCs commented directly on the first core competency—a commitment to students. In briefings, PGCs said they now always ask: “How does your job relate to students? How do you make things better for kids?” School-based evaluators reported that SSPGS raises the level of responsibility and significance of employees’ work, because it relates to their commitment to students. They said this competency also increases employees’ self-awareness of their roles as responsible for academic achievement, because it focuses on how job performance helps to make the learning environment conducive to student achievement. PGCs said the concept of connecting to students is difficult to grasp for employees who work in the central office or otherwise have no direct contact with students. Furthermore, PGCs reported that these employees ask them, “How do I have commitments to students?”

Understanding performance improvement. The Performance Improvement Process (PIP) and its related component, Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), are designed to support underperforming employees. Supervisors familiar with PIP consider it a positive aspect of SSPGS. As a school business manager said, “Employees who have difficulty get resources not charged to [themselves] or [to their school]. SSPGS provides resources to remedy challenges to successfully complete job responsibilities.”

Educating employees about PIP is challenging for two particular reasons. First, most personnel achieve competency and never have direct experience with PIP. Some school- and district-based personnel with very stable workforces stressed that they have no need for interventions.

Second, PIP is a confidential process. As one PAR panelist put it, “You can’t really ‘promote’ the benefits of SSPGS,” meaning that confidentiality prevents them from talking about how the PIP process helped actual employees.

- 1) Employees can choose to enter a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program, to receive the support of a professional growth consultant (PGC) to work on their job skills and improve their performance.
- 2) Employees can choose to receive a special evaluation, conducted by their supervisor, that will take place over 90 days.
- 3) Employees can choose to be reassigned to a previous position in which they were successful, if it is available.
- 4) Employees eligible for retirement can choose to retire.
- 5) Employees can choose to resign.

Figure 1. Performance Improvement Process (PIP): Options for underperforming employees.

Source: *10 Tips to Understanding the Performance Improvement Process* (Working Draft 2006–2007).

Those who work with underperforming personnel and their supervisors say it takes time to understand PIP. “At the beginning,” said one PGC, “there is no understanding. There is apprehension and fear about PIP based on a misconception that this process is intended to get rid of the worker. Over time, workers better understand the value of the system.” A PAR panelist concurred, saying, “Initially, people are defensive. They need to cover themselves. Once the PGC is assigned and they do the interview, they understand this is not punitive and there is room for growth.”

A lack of understanding of performance improvement has the potential to limit employees’ choices of how to improve their next performance evaluation (Figure 1). According to a PGC, “Two bus drivers who were not meeting competency chose 90-day evaluations because they did not understand PAR.”

*Using job coaches to support performance improvement.*¹¹ Six school- and district-based supervisors discussed the assignment of a coach to address performance challenges. They said this was an excellent intervention, and that coaches should be used more often. As a school business manager commented, “Not only is the mentoring beneficial for the employee with performance challenges, but the mentor often can model and support leadership skills for the employee’s other team members.”

Another business manager commented about a job coach who helped a building service employee: “Having a job-alike mentor who can model and guide the employee sometimes lasts beyond the probation period. Not only is the mentoring beneficial for the employee with performance challenges, but the mentor often can model and support leadership skills for the employee’s other team members.” One principal said a consultant came in to work with cleaning

¹¹ Please note that personnel in the coaching role were referred to as “mentors,” though mentoring under SSPGS will be performed by a different group of personnel than those discussed in the interviews.

staff. This person modeled appropriate work habits and skills and helped staff understand big job performance concepts.

Language. According to the most recent SEIU English Language Proficiency Survey, English is the primary language of less than one half (46%) of MCPS support professionals in Food and Nutrition Services and the primary language of less than two thirds (60%) of those working in School Plant Operations (Department of Shared Accountability, 2007). Supervisors say limited English language skills can affect the ability to absorb what SSPGS asks of support professionals.

PGCs said the core competencies in SSPGS can be a challenge to employees trying to understand what is expected of them when English is not their first language. Supervisors confirmed these challenges. As summarized by one supervisor, “It is very hard to communicate with transportation workers about SSPGS. Even with my interpreter, it is hard to explain in English. There is frustration on both sides.” One school business manager explained, “The cafeteria manager [supervises staff with five languages] and this inhibits communication with each other, students, and staff. If supporting services professionals do not understand what is being written about them, they will not be able to improve. I am not sure that supporting services professionals understand what ‘core competencies’ means.”

School-based personnel sometimes use employees who do not supervise the employee to translate during the performance evaluation. One said, “Many food service workers are Asian, so I use the food service manager to help translate and communicate.” Another said, “We use other staff to help translate. However, there is no indication that the employee understands what is being said.” Another supervisor indicated, “I have Chinese and Korean employees and there is concern with translation.”

Evaluation Question: To what extent has SSPGS been implemented as intended?

SSPGS is completing its second year in Phase 2 schools and offices, yet it is still a very new program. There are two main reasons for this. First, as of winter 2008, supervisors and support professionals in Phase 2 have had limited or no experience with performance evaluations, a central component of SSPGS. Second, rollout has not taken place for some parts of SSPGS as of the time period for data collection, including Professional Development Plans (PDPs)¹² and the recognition component.

Implementing the Performance Evaluation Process

The SSPGS handbook outlines the elements of the evaluation process. Employees are evaluated according to core competency criteria, on a prescribed evaluation cycle. The evaluation process includes both the completion of a written evaluation and an in-person discussion. The direct supervisor of the employee is assigned to conduct the evaluation (also known as the *evaluator*). Employees without direct supervisors are evaluated by the principal or office director, with input from others who can provide feedback on performance.

Models for evaluation. According to interview findings, schools have adopted multiple models for obtaining input for and conducting a performance evaluation. In elementary schools, all performance evaluations are conducted by the principal, assistant principal, or principal intern, using input from the manager or direct supervisor of the support professional.

All of the high school and middle school evaluators interviewed used one of the following two models, or a hybrid of the two models, to prepare for and conduct performance evaluations:

1. If the manager (e.g., building service manager or food service manager) has the appropriate verbal and writing skills to complete the performance evaluation form, the designated evaluator reviews the performance evaluation, and the manager may conduct the performance evaluation with the employee and the designated evaluator present.
2. The manager provides written or verbal input into the employees' performance and the performance evaluation is written by the designated evaluator (e.g., a school principal). The performance evaluation is then conducted with three people present—the evaluator, the direct supervisor, and the employee.

Implementation experience in high schools appears more consistent than in middle or elementary schools, because the performance evaluation process can be built around the school business manager, a position unique to high schools.¹³ In general, the business manager most often evaluates building maintenance and food services personnel. Performance evaluation of clerical staff, security staff, and paraeducators is divided up among assistant principals and the principal.

¹² PDPs begin for Phase 2 and 3 cohorts in July 2008. See more about PDPs in “A Note on Professional Development Plans” at the end of the Findings section.

¹³ The type and number of SSPGS employees evaluated by the high school business manager varies from school to school.

Implementation also is more consistent in special education centers, where the site coordinator conducts all performance evaluations.

While the SSPGS handbook provides information on conducting evaluations, some school-based evaluators interviewed indicated a need for additional information on particular aspects of the evaluation model. As one school business manager said, “Business managers need clarification. Must we sit in on all reviews or just review the evaluations?”

Schedules for evaluation. Rolling performance evaluation schedules, such as every three years for most permanent employees, have limited the direct experience of supervisors and support professionals with the SSPGS process. For example, since the deadline for completing the performance evaluations scheduled for the 2007–2008 school year is June 2008 for support professionals meeting competency, many performance evaluations had not yet been conducted at the time of the OSA interviews. Experience with SSPGS can be limited, even for support professionals and supervisors in Phase 1 schools and offices. Not all SSPGS employees for whom implementation began during FY2006 had been evaluated yet. One PAR panelist said, “Some will only get their first SSPGS [performance] evaluation this year [June 2008].”

PGCs expressed concern that there is no enforcement mechanism for SSPGS. That is, in the event that supervisors do not implement the SSPGS performance evaluation process in a timely way, consequences need to be made clear.

Training and Support

Successful implementation of SSPGS is centered around local supervisors. According to OOD records, 597 staff members (supervisors of support professionals) have attended evaluator training sessions since the Phase 2 rollout began (July 2006). The level of utilization of available places for training has been very high. Each evaluator interviewed reported that he or she attended one or more evaluator training sessions.¹⁴ Table C1 in Appendix C summarizes recent evaluator training.

Evaluator and supervisor training. OOD offers supervisory training; Professional Development Online (PDO) lists training. Comments from interviews indicate that more information is needed about the availability of supervisory training offerings and who should attend training.

During interviews, school-based staff indicated that there may be confusion about which staff members should attend evaluator training. For example, should it be the employee’s direct supervisor (e.g., building manager or food service manager), the person who is going to conduct the review, or both?

¹⁴ These self-reports were not in agreement with the comments of PGCs and PARs, who said not all supervisors were attending evaluator trainings and not all were required by their supervisors to do so. Also, the level of Phase 2 participation in evaluator training, when compared with those from other Phases, is not detailed by OOD training records. The final report on the evaluation of SSPGS will offer more findings on evaluator training and expectations for attendance.

Principals and assistant principals say instructional paraeducators (“paras”) are supervised and evaluated by personnel who have not attended evaluator training, such as special education teachers, other teachers, and media specialists. For example, one principal said, “The special education teacher and resource teachers never went through evaluator training.” According to a school business manager, “Teachers who evaluate paras need to have training on how to apply competencies to the para’s job responsibilities.”

Training topics for evaluators and supervisors. Findings from the individual interviews indicate that support is needed in preparing evaluators to perform SSPGS processes and communicate with support professionals. As one principal said, “Day and evening managers still need on-site coaching and group work . . . They need organizational leadership and managerial skills.” Another principal said, “Building managers need more training in leadership and problem solving. Managers need leadership training.”

As a school principal commented, “Food services and building services managers do not get managerial or leadership training. They need this to feel empowered. We need to show them respect and trust by offering them training.” School business managers concurred with principals that more training is needed on SSPGS processes, for those who conduct evaluations. One said, “Employees need to become more involved in the evaluation effort and make a collaborative process. Managers need training in the collaborative process.”

According to interview findings, certain topics need particular emphasis in supervisor training. Evaluators in two schools mentioned specifically that support is needed for supervisors and evaluators to align job responsibilities with job performance; several others interviewed commented generally on the challenges of aligning the competencies with specific jobs. There also were comments about conducting performance evaluations for employees with few English language skills, and comments about developing the writing skills of supervisors who conduct performance evaluations.

Training and professional growth opportunities for support professionals. Both interview questions and a review of training records were used to understand the current training climate as SSPGS is implemented. Nearly 3,500 people have attended computer and competency-based training since the Phase 2 rollout began. Utilization is increasing, as the numbers of support professionals attending training rose during this period (when compared with the numbers attending training in the first year of SSPGS and in the year prior to SSPGS startup). As with evaluator training, trainings were not limited to Phase 2 employees. Please see Appendix C for training details.

Awareness of training and availability of training. Based on interview findings, supervisors, administrators, and support professionals need more information about the training available for support personnel. Several administrators and evaluators expressed a concern that there were no leadership or writing courses for support personnel (even though these courses are available). Wider dissemination of training information beyond required courses such as bus safety or boiler certification may be indicated.

Depending on the work site, training attendance may be limited to those at a supervisory level. Both PGCs and PARs reported that some employees were not being allowed to attend training (“it’s at the whim of the supervisor”).

Supervisors are not in agreement about the state of professional development for paraeducators (paras). Some supervisors think paraeducators have *more* access to professional development than do other types of support professionals, because paraeducators have more exposure and opportunities to attend the same trainings as the professionals they work with on a daily basis (e.g., classroom teacher, special education teacher). Others think they have *less* access. For example, one school principal said, “Paras are some of the most important people in the school, but they do not get an opportunity to attend trainings. This shows a lack of respect for their positions from MCPS. The MCPS budget does not provide paras with training for everyday responsibilities, such as restraint training.”

Support for attending training. More information is needed about how to register and how to make arrangements with supervisors to attend training. Based on comments from interviews with supervisors, building and food services employees in particular need additional information. Most school-based evaluators believe that language has some impact on whether employees attend training, but it is not the major challenge.

School- and district-based evaluators offer additional reasons why some support professionals may not attend training. These include difficulty arranging time for training during or after work hours due to child care, school, or second-job responsibilities; a lack of substitutes for employees to attend training (especially in elementary and middle schools and in special centers)¹⁵; and lack of access to training information on PDO (lack of computer skills to use the site, or lack of access to computers). In discussing Professional Development Plans (see next section), some supervisors are concerned that some activities listed on the PDP form may appear inaccessible to support professionals because of the same types of challenges (for example, time constraints due to job and family responsibilities).

Table 2 summarizes training needs and logistical support needed in order to take full advantage of SSPGS training opportunities, as indicated by interview comments.

¹⁵ At work sites that encourage training, both supervisors and employees work as a team and pick up extra responsibilities. For example, at one site, there is cap of five employees per day who can be out to attend training. This cap helps to ensure that substitutes are available.

Table 2
Training and Training Support Needs for SSPGS
Identified in Supervisor Interviews

Training Content	
For supervisors:	
•	Identifying training needs—who is required to attend?
•	Evaluating paraeducators
•	Learning organizational and managerial skills; leadership skills
•	Problem solving
•	Transitioning new personnel into a supervisory position
•	Evaluating personnel with limited English language skills
•	Learning writing skills
For both supervisors and support professionals:	
•	Collaboration
•	Aligning job responsibilities with performance; understanding SSPGS competencies with regard to specific jobs
•	How to develop a PDP
Training Support for Support Professionals	
•	Access to PDO and course information (computer access)
•	Release time provided by supervisor to attend training during work hours
•	Support to address child care needs after hours
•	Support to negotiating second-job schedules or staggered schedules (in order to attend training)

Future Impact of SSPGS on Support Professionals

Impact or outcome measures require that program implementation has taken place as designed and with a known level of quality. The ability to design meaningful measures is very limited during implementation of a new program or process. Evaluation findings indicate that all components of SSPGS are not yet fully implemented, nor with all staff, as required.

Measures such as rates of hiring, attendance, retention and promotion, and employee background statistics, already collected by MCPS, supply a baseline that can be used to compare with future years when the longer-term impacts of SSPGS are considered.

Several aspects of SSPGS point to the potential for changes and impact over time, including the potential for increased awareness of training and professional development opportunities.

A Note on Professional Development Plans

Professional Development Plans (PDPs) were rolled out for Phase 1 schools and offices in November 2007, and will be available to Phases 2 and 3 beginning in July 2008. While the impact of PDPs cannot be determined at this time, comments from the midyear interviews indicate that, even before formal rollout, personnel are aware of the PDP as an element of SSPGS and are actively preparing for it.

While it is early for concrete reactions to PDPs, comments appear positive. For example, a principal said, “The growth plan does make employees more accountable about how they fit into the school improvement plan.”

School-based evaluators are concerned about the correct assignment of responsibility for developing PDPs. In two schools, the staff development teacher (SDT) has created materials and conducted sessions on developing PDPs. Support personnel attend those sessions and may request help from the SDT. Evaluators in other schools say that the SDT was given guidance from the central office that they should not work with support professionals. Clarification about the role of SDTs in SSPGS is indicated.

Based on findings from the interviews, the following steps are indicated with regard to PDPs.

- Emphasize the following in PDP training: How core competencies relate to job responsibilities; the importance of employee investment in developing skills; how to create opportunities to engage in training; and how to allot time needed for developing, implementing, and monitoring PDPs. Include guidance on which personnel have roles in the process and the nature of those roles.
- Develop a process for monitoring PDPs for continuous improvement between performance evaluation years, for future growth opportunities.
- Provide additional information about how the PDP will relate to, or improve, job performance and salary for support professionals.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the findings from multiple data collection activities.

What have been stakeholders' experiences with the implementation of SSPGS?

Those who supervise and evaluate support professionals perceive SSPGS as a positive process. In particular, expectations for employees are clearer than prior to SSPGS implementation, and expectations are consistent school- and districtwide. Evaluators like the simplified schedule for conducting evaluations.

Evaluation findings reveal that SSPGS is still a very new initiative for many MCPS personnel. According to interviews with PGCs, PAR panelists, school and office managers, and supervisors, both supervisors and support professionals have limited understanding and experience working with SSPGS. Experience is scant with the Performance Improvement Process (PIP), because most employees meet competencies and never need to go through performance improvement.

To what extent has SSPGS been implemented as intended?

Based on interview findings, the implementation of SSPGS can be characterized as partial. This level of implementation is expected at this point in the introduction of SSPGS to the Phase 2 schools and offices. MCPS personnel have been taking advantage of SSPGS-related training and training participation appears to be increasing since Phase 2 began.

Supervisors' experience with SSPGS has been limited, to date, by intermittent evaluation cycles, no experience with underperforming employees, a need for more evaluator training, and/or a need for additional information or clarification of their roles in the professional growth process. Comments from interviews indicate that the focus for supervisors has been on discharging the duty to complete performance evaluations, not on employees' professional development. High schools appear to have a more consistent process for conducting performance evaluations than other work sites. This is partly because they utilize the business manager position to support SSPGS.

Support professionals have had similarly limited experience with the program, due to evaluation cycles, limited training access, or no need to interact with the Performance Improvement Process.

Challenges to successful implementation include a need for more information about available training for both support professionals and supervisors; clarification on the roles of various personnel in the performance evaluation process; more guidance on aligning job responsibilities with job performance; and advice on supervising and evaluating employees with limited English language skills.

Future Impact of SSPGS on Support Professionals

Implementation studies are not designed to measure impact. It is possible to create and measure indicators of impact only once a program is known to have been fully implemented and with a level of quality that matches the intended design. SSPGS is still developing and evolving as it moves toward full implementation.

While it is too soon to measure the impact of SSPGS, several aspects of this system have the potential to impact support professionals in the future. These will include a broadening perspective of the value of planning and achieving long-term professional goals and the training to support those goals. As SSPGS becomes more familiar and its message more pervasive in MCPS, the value of providing a richer variety of strategies to support performance improvement, such as on-site mentoring, may also become more obvious.

Recommendations

The following recommendations on improving the clarity, implementation, and outcomes of SSPGS emerged from the focus groups and individual interview findings. They are organized into five areas: program guidance, program compliance, training and development, mentoring, and supporting a diverse culture.

Program Guidance and the SSPGS handbook

- Provide a detailed breakdown of competencies in the SSPGS handbook, with very specific examples of how competencies relate to specific MCPS positions (e.g., food services, building services, security, paraeducators).
- Add handbook material to support and provide expectations for supervisors.
- Incorporate competencies into job descriptions and requirements advertised by MCPS. This will lay a foundation for SSPGS, from the job interview process right through to performance evaluations.
- Consider translating the SSPGS handbook and forms into languages spoken by employees, other than English.

Program Compliance

- Create explicit guidance on expectations for the timely completion of performance evaluations (by support professionals, supervisors, and administrators). Guidance should include steps to be taken if performance evaluations are not completed on time and with the needed information. Information should also be provided on consequences for noncompliance.
- Clarify expectations about the role of particular staff members in evaluating and providing feedback to employees (e.g., should staff development teachers coach employees on SSPGS and PDPs? Should classroom teachers evaluate paraeducators?).

Training and Development

- Publicize training opportunities early, often, and widely. Coordinate promotional efforts with the relevant offices or departments. Provide additional information to employees about tuition reimbursement and courses offered.
- Train evaluators in how to apply SSPGS competencies to specific job responsibilities.¹⁶ Offer multiple training times and dates for all trainings involving personnel subject to SSPGS, so that employees on staggered schedules can attend.
- Continue to publicize that both Evaluator A and overview presentations are joint training opportunities for supervisors and support personnel in order to develop a common knowledge base and increase collaboration among supervisors, managers, and support professionals. Provide school-based refresher training for teachers, managers, and administrators together, so that personnel in various roles within a school receive the same information.
- Determine goals for training on SSPGS overall and for specific competencies. Communicate training expectations. Segment records on training registration and

¹⁶ This includes teachers and media specialists who are assigned to evaluate paraeducators.

attendance by cohort group and work site, and track the extent to which goals are being met.

- Provide learning opportunities listings in formats, other than PDO, for employees without access to a computer.

Job Coaching

- Increase opportunities for job coaching as a training tool; this supports the manager. Support professionals also benefit from leadership coaching.
- Create a larger pool of job-alike coaches. Building service personnel, in particular, need more on-site job coaching. Practicing managers, not consultants, should provide coaching.

Supporting a Diverse Culture

- Continue working to establish a culture in which support professionals feel comfortable having conversations with supervisors and asking questions about how to do their jobs. SSPGS requirements, including understanding competencies and having professional conversations, are new concepts for many support professionals.
- Provide information, support, and encouragement to attend skills training and professional development programs. Supervisors indicate that they are not fully satisfied with the current level of participation by support professionals in MCPS professional development opportunities.
- Offer ESOL classes for job-alike positions (e.g., building service, food service).
- Consider providing the SSPGS handbook and forms in languages other than English. Understanding and completing the evaluation process and forms can be challenging for those with limited English language skills.

Next Steps

Surveys of support professionals and supervisors of support professionals were conducted in June 2008. Findings from these surveys will be presented, along with conclusions about the implementation of SSPGS, in a report scheduled for publication later in 2008.

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Appendix A

SSPGS Core Competencies and Performance Criteria

The competencies inform each of the five components of SSPGS: recruiting, staffing, performance evaluation, professional development, and retention and recognition.

Core Competency 1: Commitment to Students.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- understands how the job contributes to success for every student;
- cares genuinely about the overall learning environment to ensure student success;
- acts with the student in mind;
- is dedicated to meeting the expectations of principals, supervisors, staff, parents, and students; and
- is dedicated to supporting high-quality education for students.

Core Competency 2: Knowledge of Job.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- understands assigned job duties;
- is knowledgeable about current and new practices and methods;
- uses appropriate materials, equipment, and resources;
- implements and completes work assignments;
- learns new skills and procedures; and
- knows appropriate policies, procedures, and regulations.

Core Competency 3: Professionalism.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- is patient to hear the entire story;
- is calm under pressure;
- is timely with information;
- is positive, reliable, and trustworthy;
- responds to all people equitably;
- is proactive when handling all situations; and
- possesses the ability to handle all matters in a professional and confidential manner.

Core Competency 4: Interpersonal.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- is polite and approachable;
- is able to be a team member/player;
- cares about people;
- is available and ready to help;
- treats people with respect;
- acts as a mentor and a student advocate;
- attempts to understand other perspectives; and
- relates well to others.

Core Competency 5: Communication.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- understands how to be an active listener;
- is effective in oral and written skills;
- is able to communicate well to manage conflict and deal effectively with problem situations; and
- is tactful when handling situations and difficulties, making the least possible disruption.

Core Competency 6: Organization.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- knows how to get things done in the classroom, school, office, or other work location;
- assists as needed to organize meetings and tasks;
- anticipates needs of principals, supervisors, staff, parents, and students;
- gets things done in a timely manner; and
- manages a broad range of activities.

Core Competency 7: Problem Solving.

Performance Criteria: The employee—

- changes routines to fit the needs of the situation;
- accesses and uses resources effectively and efficiently;
- identifies process improvements;
- explores beyond the obvious when solving problems;
- asks appropriate questions to clarify situations;
- is logical when discussing the pros and cons of situations; and
- recognizes issues and their implications quickly.

Appendix B

SSPGS Phase 2 Schools and Offices

School Clusters: Clarksburg, Damascus, Gaithersburg, Col. Zadok Magruder, Watkins Mill, Montgomery Blair, Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, and Northwood.

Special Programs: McKenney Hills Center and Stephen Knolls School.

Offices and Departments: Offices of the Chief Operating Officer, Special Education and Student Services, Information and Organizational Systems (reconfigured since SSPGS began); Departments of School Safety and Security, Association Relations, Materials Management, certain divisions within Facilities Management; Division of Controller; and Clarksburg Transportation Depot.

SSPGS Phase 2 Schools Sampled for Interviews and Surveys	SSPGS Phase 2 Offices, Departments, and Divisions Sampled for Interviews and/or Surveys
Montgomery Blair High School	Association Relations
Eastern Middle School	Chief Operating Officer
Albert Einstein High School	Clarksburg Transportation Depot
Rock View Elementary School	Controller
John F. Kennedy High School	Facilities Management: ¹⁷
Northwood High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction • Long-range Planning • Energy Resources Team • Indoor Air Quality/Environmental Safety Team • Real Estate Management Team • Safety Management Team
Clarksburg High School	
Clearspring Elementary School	
Damascus High School	
Forest Oak Middle School	
Gaithersburg High School	
Gaithersburg Middle School	Materials Management
Col. Zadok Magruder High School	General office staff of the former Office of Information and Organizational Systems
Mill Creek Towne Elementary School	School Safety and Security
Redland Middle School	Special Education and Student Services
Watkins Mill High School	Technology Consulting and Communication Systems
McKenney Hills Center	Technology Implementation and Support
Stephen Knolls School	

Figure 2. Schools and offices selected for data collection activities.

¹⁷ Other work units within Facilities Management were not part of the SSPGS Phase 2 cohort.

Appendix C

SSPGS Phase 2 Training Experience

Table C1
Evaluator Training Offered
by the Office of Organizational Development Since Phase 2 Rollout

Audience	Months Offered	Number Registered (#)	Percentage of Available Seats Full (%)	Number of Sessions (#)
General Sessions	January 2007	292	77	1
	March 2007			1
	September 2007			2
	October 2007			3
	November 2007			1
	December 2007			1
	January 2008			2
	February 2008			1
	March 2008			1
	April 2008			3
Division of Food and Nutrition Services	November 2006	147	92	2
	November 2007			2
Office of the Chief Operating Officer Leadership	November 2006	56	100	1
	March 2007			1
Department of Transportation	November 2007	54	90	2
Division of School Plant Operations	January 2008	48	96	2
Totals		597		26

Source: OOD.

Notes. Percentage of Available Seats Full = number registered divided by number of seats offered. Trainings were not limited to specific SSPGS cohorts.

Table C2
Computer Training and Competency-based Training
Attended by SSPGS Employees Since Phase 2 Rollout

Training Type	History		Phase 2 (First Year)	Percentage Increase FY 2006 to FY 2007 (%)
	FY 2005 (#)	FY 2006 (#)	FY 2007 (#)	
Computer Training Attendance	659	812	1,530	88
Competency-based Training Attendance	1,167	1,363	1,967	44
Total Attendance	1,826	2,175	3,497	

Source: OOD.

Note: Training not limited to Phase 2 employees.

Appendix D

Interview Instruments

- Group Interview Discussion Guide
- Individual Interview Protocol