

## Pocomoke Middle School

800 Eighth Street  
Pocomoke, MD 21851  
Caroline Bloxom, Principal

---

Pocomoke Middle School is the sole middle school in Worcester County, Maryland and includes grades 4–8. In 2008, the school was identified as one of ten “Breakthrough Schools” selected by the National Association of Secondary School Principals for its commitment to excellence and school improvement. Every staff member at Pocomoke Middle School is involved in literacy instruction and is supported by leadership with opportunities for continual professional development, collaboration, and planning.

- ◆ Middle school (grades 4–8)
- ◆ 49% White
- ◆ 47% Black
- ◆ 2% Hispanic
- ◆ 1% Asian
- ◆ 1% Native American
- ◆ 56% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 0% English Language Learners
- ◆ 12% Special Education

Pocomoke employs a curriculum planner and instructional coaches to support ongoing professional development with staff. The school has one reading program coordinator who works primarily with teachers in grades 4 and 5 and another who works with teachers in grades 6–8. Teachers have opportunities to collaborate in teams daily and prioritize time in the classroom for literacy instruction.

The program for upper grades (7–8) includes a 90-minute period of instruction in comprehension, vocabulary, and language. Teachers use a core reading program in addition to various kinds of literature. Reading is also taught in the content areas, as all teachers are trained in reading instructional strategies. Comprehension strategies used across content areas include summarizing, clarifying, predicting, and questioning. Practicing these strategies is often scaffolded by using graphic organizers before, during, or after reading. Teachers also engage students in text discussion to help students become more independent in applying these strategies to increase comprehension.

Vocabulary has been a major focus at Pocomoke Middle School. When staff analyzed their data and learned of significant vocabulary gaps, they focused their attention on ways to improve instruction schoolwide in this area. Each classroom houses a content-specific “interactive word wall” to address key words that repeat throughout the year. Students participate in a “\$100 word” activity in which they submit vocabulary entries to be selected and read daily by the principal. Teachers across content areas use graphic organizers and visualization to teach vocabulary more explicitly and foster motivation in students to seek and use new words.

Pocomoke uses a comprehensive assessment system. All students take a screening assessment twice a year. The county develops benchmark assessments that the students take throughout the year. These are written by teachers in the district and mapped to state standards. All students also participate in a standardized measure of comprehension and vocabulary as well as informal reading inventories and formative assessment for individual students. All data are entered into a data management system and incorporated into Student Success Plans by teachers.

Student Success Plans are reviewed quarterly and placement in intervention is determined for every student who is struggling with reading. Thirty additional minutes are provided in smaller class sizes targeted toward individual student needs. Each intervention program is selected by the district to be research-based and address specified elements such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as well as phonemic awareness and phonics. An after-school program, in which approximately 85% of students participate, also offers opportunity for additional intervention as well as enrichment.

Pocomoke Middle School has much to celebrate. Quarterly assemblies are held to recognize growth in all students making improvement. The school's achievement on the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) has improved dramatically over five years, particularly in subgroups. The staff at Pocomoke Middle School attributes this success to their focused attention, as a school, to meet the individual needs of every student.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-PEP-11-C-0068. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.