

STRATEGIC PLANNING INNOVATION INCUBATOR

COHORT ONE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **PGCPS Strategic Planning Innovation Incubator Pilot** was launched in November 2024 to spark creative problem-solving and foster a culture of innovation across Prince George's County Public Schools. This initiative empowered employees to submit proposals aligned with the district's Strategic Plan and 2024–25 Focus Areas. By embracing a disruptive innovation mindset—and through collaboration, mentorship, and ongoing feedback—participants transformed their ideas into practical solutions that enhance both the educational and workplace experience at PGCPS.

Over several months, eight innovators participated in the pilot, receiving professional development, mentorship, and structured support to design and test their ideas using a **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)** approach. From improving classroom engagement to streamlining operational processes, each project reflected a strong commitment to improving experiences for both students and staff.

By the end of the pilot, **100%** of participants completed their PDSA cycles, and **92%** reported they would recommend the incubator to others. The pilot not only showcased the talent and creativity within our district but also demonstrated that meaningful change can begin with small, simple, and sustainable actions.

This report outlines the journey, key outcomes, and next steps as we look ahead to future cohorts of the Innovation Incubator.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- ✦ Empower PGCPs staff to lead innovative ideas that address challenges in their schools or departments.
- ✦ Foster a mindset of disruptive innovation—solutions that are simple, generate no or minimum cost, equitable, and quick to implement.
- ✦ Build a district-wide culture of continuous improvement through iterative learning (PDSA cycles).
- ✦ Promote collaboration across departments and schools to spread impactful ideas.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Timeline:

- The pilot ran from February 2025 to June 2025.

Application Process:

- Staff were invited to submit proposals during the months of November and December 2024. Of the **18** applications received, **9** projects were selected, and **7** ultimately completed the pilot.

Support Model:

- Each innovator was paired with a mentor – either a Central Office leader, a University of Maryland partner, or subject-matter experts.
 - Participants attended one orientation, two innovation hours, frequent check-ins, and coaching sessions with their mentors and SPRM staff.
 - An Innovation Incubator [Thoughtcatcher toolkit](#) and templates supported innovators in documenting and presenting their work.
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KEY MILESTONES

✔ Kick-Off & Orientation Day:

Innovator Orientation: On February 5, 2025, a one-hour virtual orientation was held with the 10 selected innovators. The session covered program expectations, the toolkit, and key resources. Innovators also reflected on innovation and creative thinking, exploring how new perspectives enhance their work. The session concluded with a Q&A about the new program.

Mentor Orientations: Two virtual orientations for PGCPs leaders were held on February 25 and 28, 2025, to identify and prepare mentors. Participants reviewed selected applications, pilot expectations, and mentorship guidelines. The sessions included role-play activities to help mentors practice their role and anticipate potential questions.



KEY MILESTONES

✓ 2 Innovation Hours (Midpoint Learning)

PDSA & Practices for Improvement and Innovation

Tuesday, March 26, 2025 – Bowie South Bowie Branch Library

The first in-person Innovation Hour, led by Dr. Segun Eubanks, focused on [Dispositions and Practices for Improvement and Innovation](#). He encouraged participants to move forward fearlessly, embrace vulnerability, take risks, and view problems as part of the learning process. The session inspired participants to foster creativity and imagine bold, collaborative solutions. Innovators also pitched their ideas, shared challenges, and discussed how collaboration could help bring their projects to life. Approximately **21 people attended**, including innovators, mentors, and strategic planning partners.

PDSA Implementation

Tuesday, May 6, 2025 – JA Finance Park, Prince George's County

The second Innovation Hour featured breakout sessions and presentations on PDSA implementation. Dr. Jean Snell spoke on [Fostering Innovation through PDSAing](#), and Mrs. Laura Liccione presented on [PDSA Cycles in Practice](#). Key takeaways included: start small, adapt ideas as needed, and remember that abandoning an idea is a last resort. **18 participants** attended, including innovators and mentors. The session was closed only to innovators and mentors.



KEY MILESTONES

✔ Final Showcase Event: PGCPS Innovation Incubator Symposium Day

The final in-person session was held on Thursday, June 12, 2025, at Surrattsville High School. This event brought together students and PGCPS staff to celebrate the innovators' journeys.

Innovators shared reflections on implementing their disruptive ideas, while mentors participated in a panel discussion about their experiences. Surrattsville students served as moderators and greeters, gaining insight into district-wide innovation beyond the classroom.

The event concluded with a gallery walk, where attendees visited each innovator's station to learn more about their initiatives. The session was open to other offices, which joined to support the innovators and mentors during their final presentations.

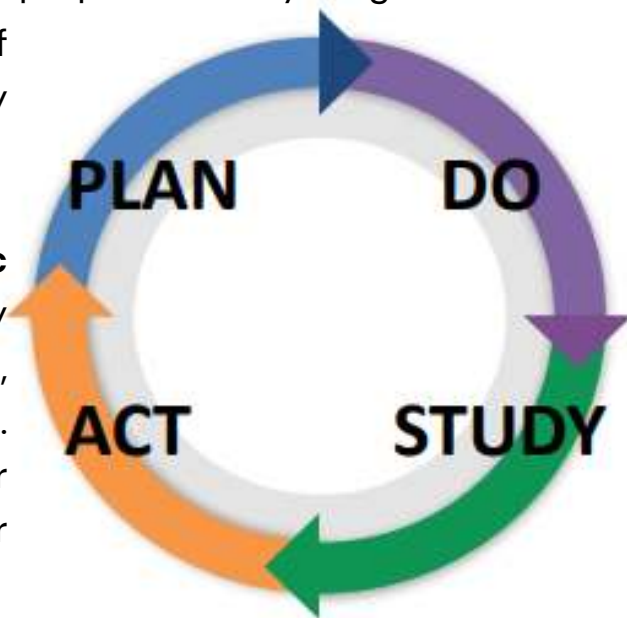


PDSA CYCLE IN ACTION

The Innovation Incubator supported participants in using the **PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) cycle** to address real challenges in their schools and departments through iterative testing, reflection, and refinement.

One innovator reimagined the **New Employee Orientation**, which had been reduced to a 3-hour virtual session post-COVID. Drawing from her own recent experience, she piloted a redesigned 2-day in-person orientation, welcoming over **120 new employees**, who participated and left feeling connected, supported, and better prepared. A key insight from the “Study” phase was the value of tailoring sessions to each group, as every cohort brought unique perspectives.

Another innovator addressed **chronic absenteeism among 9th graders** by introducing the “Level Up Milestone” system, a gamified approach to boost attendance. Data showed improvements: **92% to 93%** for the Intervention Group and **92% to 94%** for the Comparison Group. Student feedback also revealed benefits beyond attendance, including stronger engagement, better grades, and improved behavior. The innovator plans to personalize the system further based on these results.



These examples reflect the power of the PDSA framework in supporting low-risk experimentation and meaningful, user-centered change. Innovators embraced learning at every step, adapting their ideas based on real-time evidence and lived experience. You can explore more stories from other innovators [here](#), each offering a unique lens on problem-solving, creativity, and impact across the district.

MENTORSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Mentorship played a vital role in the success of each innovator's journey, offering thought partnership, accountability, and strategic support throughout the implementation process. Mentors helped innovators refine their ideas, navigate challenges, and maintain focus on outcomes, often helping them unlock new ways of thinking and approaching problems.

For example, one innovator, with their mentor, helped narrow the project focus when the original idea was really broad. Another innovator, paired with a supervisor as mentor, unexpectedly found a strong partnership. Their collaboration led to a live infographic on special education supports, which gained wide interest across the division.



One innovator expanded her approach to data collection after her mentor encouraged her to value qualitative data alongside quantitative metrics, using stories, interviews, and observations to strengthen her analysis.

Another innovator, after connecting with her mentors and participating in Innovation Hours, found new clarity on her idea. She adjusted her idea instead of abandoning it and successfully completed the program.

These few examples highlight how mentorship nurtured innovation, sharpened ideas, and empowered participants to grow as reflective practitioners and change agents. The relationships built through this program were a critical driver of each innovator's success.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The Innovation Incubator Pilot yielded meaningful outcomes at both the individual and organizational levels, reinforcing the value of investing in staff-led innovation. Participants reported increased confidence in problem-solving, improved collaboration, and a renewed sense of agency in shaping their work environments.

Participation Outcomes

- **8** Innovators successfully completed the program.
- **92%** of participants would recommend the incubator to a colleague.
- **100%** submitted a final PDSA cycle summary and presentation.

Key Survey Highlights:

Based on post-program surveys:

- **71%** of respondents agreed that the incubator helped them apply the PDSA cycle effectively.
 - **77%** of participants would be interested in participating in the program again.
 - **94%** of participants found the Innovation Hour sessions effective in fostering innovation and collaboration among innovators, mentors, and guests.
 - **100%** rated the experience as very good or excellent
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Project Impact Areas Aligned to the T26 Strategic Plan

Each innovation aligned with one focus areas of the T26 Strategic Plan, reinforcing district-wide goals and driving meaningful progress across schools and departments. The following areas highlight where innovators concentrated their efforts:

Educational Excellence

Several innovators focused on advancing Educational Excellence through targeted interventions. One disruptive idea used **gamification to improve 9th-grade attendance**, engaging students through a system of incentives and milestones. Another aimed to **accelerate math achievement** by shifting student mindsets from “answer-getting” to valuing the learning process, promoting risk-taking, reflection, and confidence. A third project supported college and career readiness by piloting a **mobile-friendly tool** that enables general education teachers to quickly access student accommodations and make real-time instructional adjustments for students with special needs.

Workforce & Operational Excellence

Projects in this area centered on building an organizational learning culture. Innovators introduced **peer mentorship** models, redesigned the **onboarding experience** to strengthen staff readiness and connection, and created a **live infographic** to improve communication and access to services across teams.

Mental Health & Wellness

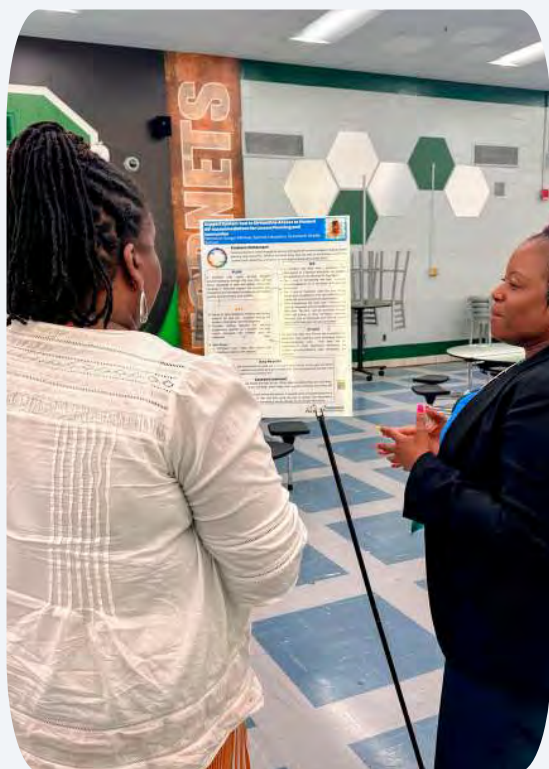
One innovator piloted a **mindfulness-based afterschool program** that integrated movement, SEL enrichment, and wellness supports to promote social-emotional well-being among students.



Qualitative Feedback

“Understanding the PDSA and how it helped me break my disruptive idea into small steps. Being able to try my idea on a small scale first, and expand it next year. The study phase allowed me to gather feedback and data quickly to see what was working and what wasn’t and adjust accordingly. I liked how my disruptive idea evolved and got better with each cycle.” – Innovator

“PGCPS staff have amazing ideas that have the potential to enhance support to students and staff, and if allowed to present their ideas I believe PGCPS can improve staff experience.” – Mentor



“I learned the importance of taking an idea and breaking it down into clear steps that anyone can understand. Getting real feedback from teachers helped me improve my tool and better understand their needs. This innovation incubator cohort helped me to think about the importance of aligning my tool with county guidelines and legal requirements. It is important to be around like-minded people. All the people in the cohort had brand new innovative ideas. That motivated me.” – Innovator

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Start Small, Think Big:** Participants were successful when they focused on small, manageable changes aligned with a broader vision. Encouraging “simple, easy, no-cost, equitable, and quick” solutions helped build confidence and momentum.
- **Mentorships & Collaboration:** Some innovations emerged as a result of collaboration and consistent support. Mentorship and team check-ins were key in helping participants stay motivated and reflective throughout the process.
- **Time is a Barrier and a Bridge:** While lack of time was a common challenge, carving out a regular “Innovation Hour” gave innovators permission to pause, think, and take risks. Making time visible and protected matters.
- **Data Reflection Drives Progress:** Using the PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) cycle helped participants see the value of reflecting on data—both quantitative and qualitative—as a tool for improvement, not just accountability.



- **Creative Constraints Spark Ingenuity:** Encouraging disruptive thinking within school systems prompted participants to challenge assumptions and reimagine what’s possible, even with limited resources.
- **Celebrate the Journey, Not Just the Results:** Sharing progress, setbacks, and breakthroughs publicly (e.g., during presentations and reflections) created a culture of learning and reduced fear of failure.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COHORTS

- **Allow More Time for Reflection and Planning:** More time to analyze their results and adjust their plans thoughtfully.
- **Clarify Expectations Early On:** Some participants needed more clarity around the scope of their projects, the use of data, and how success would be measured. Offering concrete examples and a clear timeline at the start could help future innovators stay focused and confident.
- **Strengthen the Program Launch:** A more robust kickoff—perhaps with a short boot camp or innovation crash course—can help participants better understand design thinking, the PDSA cycle, and their roles in the process.
- **Invite Specialized Mentors:** Creating a pool of content-specific mentors could expand the support available, some projects required more targeted expertise.
- **Foster a Community of Innovators:** Some participants expressed interest in staying connected beyond the program. Consider creating an alumni network or innovation hub where past and current cohorts can collaborate, share ideas, and mentor one another.



COHORT PROFILE



Abiola Macaulay, Ed.D.

ELD Teacher, High Point High School

Disruptive Idea: [Pathways to Presence: Ensuring Every Student's Success](#)



Amy R. Warren, Ed.D.

Instructional Support/ Assessment Resource Teacher, DSE in John Carroll ES

Disruptive Idea: [Get the Word Out: Infographics on Topics in Special Education](#)



Charmelia Smith-Baxter

Administrative Secretary, Department of Capital Programs

Disruptive Idea: [Office Allies](#)



Nemahun Aminata Songu-Mbriwa

7th Grade Special Education Teacher, Greenbelt Middle School

Disruptive Idea: [Support System Tool to Streamline Access to Student IEP Accommodations for Lesson Planning and Instruction](#)



Adriene Marshall, M.E.d

High School Math Teacher, CMIT South Middle/High

Disruptive Idea: [Educational Excellence through Standards-Based Grading in Math](#)



Betsy White

Diversity Strategy Officer, Office of Equity, Diversity & Belonging

Disruptive Idea: [Unified Systemic Onboarding](#)



Jessica Knox

Classroom Teacher, James McHenry Elementary

Disruptive Idea: [Heartopia: A Ground-Zero Student Development Initiative](#)



Rowland Dent

Itinerant Crisis Resource Teacher, Jessie B. Mason School

Disruptive Idea: [Get the Word Out: Infographics on Topics in Special Education](#)

To learn more, view the full profile at:
bit.ly/PGCPSInnovationIncubator

MENTOR PROFILE



Amy A. Wiley, M.S. Ed.D.
Instructional Supervisor,
Physical Education
Department of Curriculum &
Instruction, PGCPs



Colin Welch
Strategic Planning Specialist,
Strategic Planning and
Resource Management,
PGCPs



Michelle Blakey-Tuggle
Coordinating Supervisor
Office of Instructional
Supports, Assessment, and
Accountability, PGCPs



Randolph Barnes
Professional Development
Specialist, Office of
Professional Learning and
Leadership, PGCPs



Tiffanie Horsley
Strategic Transformation
Partner, Strategic Planning and
Resource Management, PGCPs



Andrea Bedenbaugh
Supervisor, Strategic Grants
Development and Management,
Strategic Planning and Resource
Management, PGCPs



Jean Snell, Ph.D.
Associate Director and Senior
Faculty Specialist for the Center
for Educational Innovation and
Improvement at the University of
Maryland



Negasti McCurdie-Wright, Ed. D.
Grants Development Specialist,
Strategic Planning and Resource
Management, PGCPs



Tisa M. Holley, Ed.D.
Director, Student Services,
PGCPs

To learn more, view the full profile at:
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THANK YOU



EMAIL

strategicplanning@pgcps.org

