Office of the Superintendent of Schools

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Rockville, Maryland

January 19, 2021

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Antiracist System Audit

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information on the Antiracist System Audit. Background information on both the rationale and explanation of the audit, an overview   
of the audit process, details about the selected consultant, timeline of activities and deliverables, stakeholder identification and involvement, and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) communication strategy are included.

**Introduction**

The Antiracist System Audit will provide an opportunity to examine our systemwide practices   
and policies to ensure that race and bias do not impact access, opportunities, or equitable outcomes for every student’s academic and social-emotional well-being. The audit will be an important opportunity to analyze policies and practices that impact staff as well. The audit, which was approved unanimously by the Board of Education at its meeting on November 10, 2020, (Resolution No. 496-20) was awarded in contract to the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) and will be conducted throughout MCPS next year.

Decades of informed, hard work by multiple leadership teams and committed educators have maintained high achievement levels for students. However, not all students are reaching their full academic potential. The audit is a timely investment in understanding and removing practices   
and policies that contribute to racial disparities, so that we can, with honesty, say “All Means All.”

MCPS has been at the forefront of analyzing disaggregated quantitative student data that demonstrates disparities in student performance. Additionally, a variety of qualitative data provides further evidence that one’s racial background can have an impact on a student’s, parent’s, or staff member’s experience in MCPS. The Antiracist System Audit will provide us a more comprehensive understanding of the practices and policies that contribute to racial disparities   
in access, opportunities, and outcomes. The Antiracist System Audit will allow us to further engage the voices of all of our stakeholders through the lens of race to better analyze   
how these interactions, practices, and policies impact their lived experiences so we can determine how to mitigate the impact of these experiences on access and opportunities for students and staff academically as well as though social emotional means.

The MCPS Antiracist System Audit is the next right step at the right time toward building upon the All In: Equity and Achievement Framework. The framework currently provides necessary measures, monitoring, and resource allocation guidance that commits the district to equity   
and expands students’ access and opportunity. As a district, we have been engaging in work around race and equity for many years. The recent events of a global pandemic, racial injustice, and unrest in communities across the country have served to amplify the need to engage in this work more than ever. Our students, staff, and community have been vocal in their desire to see us examine our practices and policies to ensure we take action to create a school system free of racism or bias. The Antiracist System Audit is the next significant investment for the future of the county’s students. It is proof of a community and school system committed to success for every student.

The Antiracist System Audit will focus on analyzing six key areas to review the impacts of race and bias by:

* Conducting a curriculum review;
* Evaluating school cultures;
* Analyzing workforce diversity;
* Examining work conditions and other barriers to equity;
* Measuring the progress of the All In: Equity and Achievement Framework; and
* Recommending appropriate communication and engagement strategies.

The Antiracist Audit will provide MCPS with a review and synthesis of our existing qualitative and quantitative data (Attachment A). This review will form the basis for the data collection process and tools that will be used to analyze the six areas of focus. Included in the data   
collection that will be initiated by the consultant will be multiple opportunities to engage   
our community voices through stakeholder surveys, town halls, focus groups, and classroom observations. This information will be synthesized in a report that identifies systemic barriers   
and makes recommendations for action. The information obtained from the audit will result in the creation of Learning Progressions for staff and students. Furthermore, the information will impact   
the development of the MCPS Strategic Plan moving forward.

**Overview of the Antiracist System Audit Process**

At its meeting on July 14, 2020, Dr. Monifa B. McKnight, deputy superintendent, presented   
the Board the vision behind the implementation of a systemwide Antiracist Audit. Following this Board meeting, 8 focus groups of more than 160 stakeholders were convened in August   
and September 2020 to solicit feedback on both how they wanted to engage in the audit and what they wanted to see happen as a result of the audit. These stakeholder focus groups were composed of students, staff, and community members. Additionally, feedback was solicited and information was presented on the audit vision to the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Parents’ Council, the Deputy Superintendent’s Advisory Group (DSAG), the Association Deputy Chief meeting, and the senior leadership team. Stakeholder feedback was used to create the Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit a consultant to conduct the audit.

After synthesizing the community feedback, RFP No. 4900.1 was posted on September 21, 2020, and closed at 2:00 p.m. on October 12, 2020. Questions about the RFP were submitted by vendors on September 29 and responses to questions were posted on October 2. In response to the RFP,   
we received two proposals with strengths and experience in educational equity. A stakeholder consultant proposal review committee was convened on both October 13 and October 15, 2020,   
to review the proposals and provide feedback and recommendations to move forward to the Board. The committee was composed of 21 stakeholders and included community representation, parents/guardians, district leaders, teachers, students, support staff, and administrators.

MCPS outlined in the RFP for a consultant to do the following for the audit:

* Engage various stakeholders (employees, students, and leaders) to report their voice data and share their experiences to identify and address issues that are contributing to the lack of social-emotional and academic well-being for students and staff within MCPS.   
  This will assist us in gaining a deeper understanding of why there remains persistent gaps in academic data, persistent reports of school incident data around hate/bias and feelings of a lack of belonging/morale for students and staff in their classrooms and workplaces.
* Engage with an advisory group composed of students, staff, parents/guardians, community, district leaders, and national experts in order to analyze the current state of MCPS   
  by examining our current qualitative data. Based on this analysis they collaboratively   
  will create questions and a data collection process that will allow us to gain   
  a deeper understanding of how the lived experiences in our community are reflected   
  in the qualitative data so that innovative and thoroughly informed short- and long-term recommendations can be made.
* Collaborate with teachers, principals, district leaders, senior leaders, and the Board   
  on an action plan focused on antiracism to be implemented and monitored by MCPS staff and the Board.

An outside consultant is important is because the depth and breadth of the work is extremely broad. A consultant will allow us to collaborate in order to ensure we are accessing all parts   
of our community. Additionally, in order to collect authentic quantitative data an objective entity is vital in ensuring people feel safe to engage in and speak their truth. Lastly, the national experience they will bring to MCPS will allow us to gain a broader perspective and expertise   
as we not only conduct the audit but create action plans.

**MAEC Information and Background**

MAEC is a Bethesda-based organization with more than 25 years of providing states, districts,   
and schools high-quality assistance and training to ensure the educational needs of racially, ethnically, economically, culturally, and linguistically diverse children and their families   
are met. It has vast experience in conducting equity audits for school districts, state education agencies, and other youth-serving organizations. MAEC is a federally designated Region I Equity Assistance Center serving 15 states, including Maryland.

MAEC has a longstanding history of using an antiracist lens when conducting equity audits. It uses an antiracist, culturally responsive approach when reviewing policies, curriculum, and other important district documents. From these reviews, MAEC provides policy recommendations   
and develops training and tools to create equitable and safe learning environments for all students and staff. MAEC’s previous work using data to advance culturally competent leadership   
and promote equitable decision-making and practices include:

* Working with the Title I—Program Improvement and Family Support Branch   
  of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE); in 2019, MAEC conducted   
  a third-party root cause analysis project in three Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools identified for closure in June 2019. The three closing CSI schools had unique needs specific to school closure and student transition activities that were best supported through this careful analysis and expertise of MAEC.
* Partnering with Danbury School District in Connecticut in 2018 to conduct a needs assessment, including an analysis of achievement data, stakeholder surveys,   
  and the facilitation of stakeholder focus groups for teachers, parents/guardians,   
  and students. MAEC triangulated these data and provided a report and recommendations to the school district that led to policy changes, with the goal of improving school climate, achievement of Black and Latinx students, and addressing issues of disproportionality   
  in discipline.
* Working with the Delsea Regional School District in New Jersey in 2019 to increase awareness and understanding of how the district interprets and responds to student misbehavior. In this project, MAEC worked with the Delsea Regional School District   
  to address disproportionality in discipline. The scope of this project focused on using data to identify and understand the equity problem related to racial disproportionality in district discipline practices. MAEC conducted a root-cause analysis and needs assessment using the district's discipline data and found racial disproportionality in discipline, especially   
  for students with multiple infractions.
* Collaborating with the Christina School District in Delaware during the 2017‒2018   
  school year, MAEC designed materials and facilitated five focus groups and two community forums. The results of the focus groups and community forums helped   
  the district to identify deeply rooted racial and cultural equity issues, and to invest district resources into addressing these issues, including creating a district equity team,   
  a new disaggregated data system, and a more culturally responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system.
* Assisting Portland Public Schools in Maine during the 2017‒2018 school year, MAEC designed and conducted an equity audit that was aligned with key approaches in the district’s strategic plan, Portland Promise. To better understand the needs and challenges the district faced regarding the implementation of equitable practices and policies, staff conducted 17 listening tour sessions with various stakeholder groups such as families, students, community members, teachers, other school staff, building administrators,   
  and district administrators. Because of the listening tours, MAEC became aware   
  of the strengths and equity challenges facing Portland Public Schools. MAEC staff   
    
  provided a written report with an analysis and recommendations from the listening tours. These findings were used to plan for future technical assistance and training to increase equitable practices and procedures.

**MAEC Antiracist Audit Timeline and Deliverables**

MAEC is taking a mixed-methods approach to the Antiracist System Audit, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses. Additionally, it is prioritizing a synthesis of our current system data so as not to repeat work that already has been completed. The following information clarifies the timelines and deliverables for the audit.

*Document Review: December 2020‒January 2021*

MAEC’s first step will be to produce a report explaining the findings of a thorough review   
of the documents already identified by MCPS in the RFP (Attachment A). In addition to the documents and resources MCPS provided, MAEC also will review MCPS’ prekindergarten‒Grade 12 curriculum frameworks. This information will be used to inform all further data collections proposed by this project, decreasing the burden of duplicative data collections.

*Equity Audit: February‒May 2021*

MAEC has developed a robust equity audit instrument that it has successfully used with schools and districts throughout the United States to help identify areas of potential inequities. Its tool specifically reviews policies, programs, and practices that directly and indirectly impact students and staff relative to their race, ethnicity, gender, national origin (English Language Learners), color, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or other socio-cultural significant factors. The tool examines the criteria for an equitable school and is divided   
into the following sections: school policy, school organization and administration, school climate/environment, assessment and placement, professional learning and standards,   
and curriculum development. MAEC will use information from the document review and feedback from the Antiracist Audit Steering Committee to ensure that our equity audit is tailored   
to the specific areas of concern for MCPS and that it does not duplicate information gathered   
by other studies and data collections. The tool will be administered in all 206 schools and the data will be triangulated with the other data collections processes to provide information on individual schools and the district as a whole.

*Stakeholder Survey: February‒May 2021*

MAEC will use findings from the document review, school level equity audit, and input from   
the steering committee to develop a series of Stakeholder Surveys, which will be administered electronically. MAEC will create four different survey forms to collect the perspective of diverse constituent groups, including MCPS students, staff, families, and other community members. The surveys will assess constituents’ experiences and perceptions related to the six key areas   
of the audit: school culture, work diversity, work conditions, prekindergarten‒Grade 12 curriculum review, community relations and engagement, as well as the All In: Equity and Achievement Framework. Information gathered from different stakeholder groups will be compared   
and disaggregated by key variables, including race, socioeconomic status, language,   
and geographic location. The survey will be offered in multiple languages.

*Town Halls: March‒April 2021*

MAEC will conduct nine regional town halls that will be open to the public to obtain a sense   
of geographic differences across the county. If permitted by health and safety regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2021, these meetings will be conducted in person and also live streamed. Alternatively, the meetings will be held virtually via Zoom. These meetings will be held in the evenings and will be open to anyone in the community. Each meeting will last approximately one hour and will be led by a trained facilitator who will use a pre-developed protocol to solicit feedback on each of the six areas of interest to the audit.

*Focus Groups: April‒May 2021*

In order to gain further insights on stakeholder perceptions, MAEC will conduct 24 virtual focus groups with key stakeholders, including students, staff (teachers, support staff, and administrators in central services and schools), Board members, parents/guardians and family members, and other community members. Each group will comprise up to 10 stakeholders. These focus groups will be specifically designed to target representatives of MCPS whose voices may have been omitted from the other data collections.

*Classroom Observations: April‒May 2021*

Classroom observations will be conducted as another data collection opportunity. In light   
of the COVID-19 pandemic, MAEC will work with MCPS on determining the best course   
of action in how to appropriately conduct classroom observations whether we are in a virtual   
or in-person environment. Although classroom observations are essential for all grade levels  
in the system, they will be particularly important for preschool and the early elementary grades,   
as those students cannot participate in surveys and focus groups in the same way as older students. The Antiracist Audit Steering Committee composed of teachers, administrators, central services staff, community members, parents/guardians, and students will be consulted to provide feedback on the classroom observation process.

*Final Report: June‒September 2021*

MAEC will work during this time to create a final report that synthesizes the data from   
all of the of data collection processes listed previously

*Recommendations, Dissemination, and Strategic planning: September‒October 2021*

Following the creation of the final report, MAEC will work collaboratively with MCPS staff   
as well as the Antiracist Audit Steering Committee to make recommendations that will   
influence the professional development and learning of our staff and students as well as the MCPS   
Strategic Plan.

**Antiracist System Audit Stakeholder Engagement**

A critical component of the Antiracist System Audit is collaboration and communication with   
key stakeholders. There will be two advisory groups that will be engaged throughout the Antiracist System Audit process.

One advisory group will be a multistakeholder committee composed of students, parents/guardians, teachers, supporting services staff, administrators, and community members. All three employee associations provided feedback on their representation in this group. This group will serve as an Antiracist System Audit Steering Committee and will work   
directly with MAEC to provide feedback on development, implementation, findings,   
and recommendations throughout the Audit process. Throughout the development of this steering committee, consideration was taken in regard to varying and diverse experiences and perspectives of each individual in the group so that the entirety of our community would be represented. Staff in the Equity Initiatives Unit, in collaboration with MAEC, will be responsible   
for the engagement of this committee. A summary of the steering committee participation follows.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **MCPS Staff Participation** | | **Organizations** |
| **Association** | **Position** | * Black and Brown Coalition * MCCPTA * CAPA-MC * LSAAG * AASAAG * APASAAG * Linkages to Learning * Impact Silver Spring * 1977-II * NAACP Parents’ Council * Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County * FEAT |
| MCEA | Elementary School Teacher (2)  Staff Development Teacher  Athletic Director  Learning and Achievement Specialist (2)  MCEA President  Consulting Teacher |
| MCAAP/  MCBOA | Elementary School Principal  Middle School Principal  High School Principal  High School Assistant Principal (2)  Director II (2)  Curriculum Supervisor |
| SEIU | ITSS  Assistant Project Manager |
| Executive Staff | Associate Superintendent  Executive Director  Deputy Superintendent |
| MCPS Students | Albert Einstein High School Student  Gaithersburg High School Student  SGA-MCR |  |

The second advisory group will be the Antiracist System Audit Expert Advisory Group. Staff in the Office of the Deputy Superintendent will be responsible for this committee.   
This advisory group will engage a series of national and local experts on equity and diversity   
in education. The purpose of the group is to serve as a “think tank” to provide feedback on audit progress and provide us with questions to consider and advice from an academic expert lens. This group will meet every two months, commencing in January 2021. It will provide MCPS   
an opportunity to share the work the consultant and steering committee has engaged in to provide an additional layer of analysis throughout this process

**Antiracist Audit Communication Strategy**

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process in August and September prior to the RFP,   
our stakeholders repeatedly communicated a desire to receive frequent and transparent communication about the progress of the Antiracist System Audit. In December, following   
the approval of MAEC as the consultant, communication was disseminated in the following ways:

* [Antiracist System Audit Website](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/antiracist/) was created that regularly will be updated with information about the progress of the work;
* An e-mail communication to staff on December 7, 2020, providing an overview of the audit as well as links to resources;
* An e-mail communication to secondary students on December 8, 2020, providing   
  an overview of the audit as well as links to resources;
* A message to parents/guardians/community through MCPS *QuickNotes* and translated into all languages on December 9, 2020, providing an overview of the audit as well as links   
  to resources;
* Collaborated with the Student Member of the Board’s Communication Advisory Group   
  on student outreach;
* Social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; and
* Work with student leaders to share social media posts on their platforms.

Moving forward we will provide communication to the community in a variety of languages following each board presentation through email, social media, and the website. We also will work collaboratively with MAEC to ensure our communication about engagement opportunities   
in surveys, focus groups, and town halls will be conducted through a variety of venues to ensure maximum participation.

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