Executive Summary

Introduction

In October 2020, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) identified the need for an antiracist system audit following a series of racist incidents in Montgomery County. The racist incidents, combined with the achievement gaps for students who are Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and/or eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals System (FARMS services), led MCPS to focus on addressing racism in the district to provide the highest quality of education to all of its students. The disparate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color created an added urgency to transform educational policies, pedagogies, and practices to provide antiracist approaches that engage all students in the learning process.

MCPS contracted with the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (MAEC) to conduct a systemwide antiracist audit of MCPS's practices, policies, and system. The intent of the audit was to identify ways to increase access, opportunities, and equitable outcomes for every student's academic and social-emotional wellbeing. MAEC was charged with evaluating MCPS's efforts toward achieving racial equity across the district, examining six domains: (1) school culture, (2) workforce diversity, (3) work conditions, (4) Pre-K–12 curriculum, (5) community relations and engagement, and (6) equity of access.[1] MAEC conducted this audit in several stages over two years (December 2020-July 2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Antiracist System Audit was the first comprehensive, systems-wide opportunity to engage the MCPS community in discussing the role race plays throughout the entire school system. By focusing on the self-reported experiences and perceptions of students, family members, and staff, this audit aimed to provide insight into how current policies and practices are experienced and how those experiences might differ based on social identities and positions within the school system. MAEC notes that policies and practices changed rapidly to meet the evolving needs of the MCPS community during the past two years. As a result, it is possible that some of the stakeholder perceptions or concerns shared in this audit are now addressed by new school and district policies.

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1 The domains are listed in the same order that they were in MCPS's Request for Proposals (RFP) (MCPS, 2020b). The listing does not reflect order of importance.

Steering Committee

To ensure that members of the MCPS community could provide direct and ongoing feedback on the Antiracist System Audit, MCPS convened a representative steering committee composed of 43 students, family members, staff, administrators, and community organization members. This group provided guidance on key aspects of the audit, including data collection instruments and process.

Methodology

Five data sources informed the observations for this audit:

1. **Document review**. MAEC conducted a review of 17 documents identified by MCPS to gain a foundational overview of the district. These documents contained key information relevant to the Antiracist System Audit, and were reviewed and scored by pairs of MAEC staff members using an internally developed rubric. The observations generated from the document review informed MAEC in the development of focus group protocols and survey items.

2. **Equity Audit Tool**. MAEC administered its Equity Audit Tool to members of Instruction Leadership Teams (ILTs) and central offices to examine how MCPS policies, programs, and practices directly or indirectly affect students, staff, families, and other community members relative to race, ethnicity, and other socio-culturally significant factors. In total, 2,430 school-based and 84 district central office staff completed the Equity Audit Tool. Members of ILTs and central offices then met to discuss their responses and submit consensus ratings to each of the items, with 204 schools and 16 central offices submitting consensus ratings.

3. **Stakeholder surveys**. In collaboration with the steering committee, MAEC developed stakeholder surveys with items that broadly aligned to the six domains of the MCPS Antiracist System Audit for three groups: (1) students, (2) staff, and (3) families. Survey items were tailored for student subgroups (upper elementary school, middle school, and high school students) and staff subgroups (teaching staff, support professionals, school administrators and administrative staff, and district administrators and administrative staff). The survey was offered in eight languages. In total, MAEC collected 126,652 stakeholder surveys: 40,123 family responses, 11,316 staff responses, and 75,213 student responses.

4. **Community Conversations**. MAEC held community conversations with members of the NAACP Parents Council (NAACP), the Latino Student Achievement Action Group (LSAAG), and the Chinese American Parent Association of Montgomery County (CAPA-MC). In total, 79 stakeholders attended the community conversations. Each session was transcribed and analyzed for themes by MAEC staff.

5. **Focus groups and interviews**. MAEC conducted a total of 32 focus groups with students (upper elementary school, middle school, and high school), families, and staff (teachers/teaching staff, school administrators, and central office and support staff) and held four interviews (one interview with a student, one interview with a family member, and two interviews with staff members). The focus groups and interviews were organized by racial/ethnic affinity group, with the exception of three family focus groups which were organized based on a shared characteristic (e.g., having a student in a birth-5 program, having a student in kindergarten-third grade, and having a student with a disability). The focus groups were attended by 94 family members, 74 MCPS staff, and 68 MCPS students representing 96 schools across all discussions.

Key Observations

MAEC's Antiracist System Audit suggests that MCPS already follows many identified best practices and has comprehensive policies to work towards racial equity. Across all data collections, stakeholders reported overall high satisfaction with MCPS. However, community members of color had consistently lower rates of satisfaction. Overall, students, families, and staff of color reported having a less satisfactory experience with MCPS than other members of the community. The Antiracist System Audit also revealed that the implementation of policies and application of best practices differs greatly from school to school, suggesting that the system is currently fragmented.

Domain 1: School Culture

Observation 1.1: MCPS states an explicit commitment to working toward creating welcoming school cultures. Most stakeholders rate school culture as high but there are differences in how students, staff, and family members experience school culture based on race/ethnicity.
The document review revealed MCPS demonstrates an explicit commitment to creating welcoming school cultures in their policies and professional growth systems. These findings were corroborated by data from the Equity Audit Tool, where the majority of ILTs consistently rated items related to school climate as "Established" or "Advanced." Furthermore, on the stakeholder surveys, students and families showed high levels of agreement with items related to school culture. In the section pertaining to school culture on the family survey, 84.1% (n = 33,728) of respondents agreed that "staff at my child's school (e.g., teachers, special educators, teaching assistants, paraprofessionals) are responsive to my family's needs." However, while most stakeholders rated school culture as high, there are differences in how students, staff, and family members experience school culture based on race/ethnicity. For many items, the analysis revealed statistically significant lower proportion of agreement among respondents of color.

Observation 1.2: Families and students report that race-based bullying and discrimination is prevalent throughout MCPS.
MCPS has policies related to bullying, harassment, and discrimination. These policies could be strengthened by clearly defining and providing examples of race-based hate bias. Evidence from students, families, and staff indicates that there is a gap between MCPS policies and experiences with bullying and discrimination for students, families, and staff of color. The MCPS community perceives that bullying based on race is pervasive and prevents students of color from feeling comfortable in schools. Across elementary, middle, and high school students, a statistically significantly higher proportion of students of color agreed with statements related to experiencing or witnessing bullying on the basis of race, skin color, ethnicity, or culture. Race- and ethnicity-based bullying, harassment, and microaggressions were discussed in 29 out of 36 focus groups and interviews; all student focus groups raised these issues. Responses from ILTs on the Equity Audit Tool reveal another gap: while most staff across the district set expectations, teach, and reinforce positive behavior; there is variation in how schools use data to monitor and address bullying at their schools. The prevalence of acts of race-based bullying, harassment, and discrimination in MCPS schools demonstrates that the district does not consistently create an environment where all students are safe from the harm of racism and hate bias.

Observation 1.3: MCPS lacks a comprehensive district-wide system to build the internal capacity of staff to facilitate conversations about race and dismantling racism. Family members question staff ability to promote equitable achievement for all students.
The document review revealed that MCPS is clear in its intent to be an antiracist school system. With recent updates to the professional growth systems, MCPS articulates the role that staff play in combatting racism. On the stakeholder surveys, staff reported seeking resources to understand and address racism, and expressed the belief that they have the knowledge and skills to identify and interrupt race-related equity issues. However, many stakeholders perceived that the current approach to developing system-wide capacity is fragmented. On the Equity Audit Tool, 18% (n = 37) of all ILTs rated their schools as "Latent" or on the item: "Staff members are trained on what it means to be antiracist." This suggests that several schools are only in the beginning stages

of building a common understanding of how to implement antiracist approaches. Focus group feedback and the document review suggest that the current offering of professional development opportunities related to antiracism is limited. While MCPS provides trainings on implicit bias that are mandatory for all staff, MCPS staff perceive them to be stand-alone opportunities rather than part of a systemic curriculum. Furthermore, the onus for ensuring staff have access to trainings related to race and antiracism falls on individual staff members and schools. Specific examples from students, families, and staff shared in focus groups and community conversations indicate a pattern of deficit-based thinking and lack of cultural competence by some MCPS staff members. This pattern negatively affects student learning.

Observation 1.4: Some MCPS community members perceive that school staff treat students and family members of color differently in the form of harsher discipline and biased attitudes.
The document review revealed that MCPS understands the importance of fair discipline practices. However, results from the Equity Audit Tool show that the application of the student code of conduct and the implementation of disciplinary practices vary from school to school. Twenty-nine percent (n = 60) of ILTs rated their schools as "Latent" or "Emergent" on the question "the code of conduct is applied fairly and equitably regardless of race/ethnicity." The stakeholder survey revealed some community members perceive a difference in the treatment of students of color compared to other students. Of the middle and high school students who responded to the survey, 21.5% (n = 12,011) agreed with the statement "I feel like staff at my school make assumptions about my behavior based on my racial identity." Rates of agreement were higher for American Indian/Native Alaskan, Black/African American, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino students. Many school-based staff members also agreed with the statement "Some students at my school are treated differently because of their race, skin color, ethnicity, or culture," including 42.7% (n = 202) of administrators and 31.7% (n = 2,422) of teachers who responded to the survey. Racial disproportionality in discipline and the perceived impact of race on discipline was discussed in 52.8% (n = 19) of focus groups and interviews, most frequently by Black/African American students. Community members perceived that staff bias results in disproportionality in discipline and prevents MCPS from creating an antiracist and equitable school culture where all students thrive academically and emotionally.

Domain 2: Workforce Diversity

Observation 2.1: MCPS clearly communicates its intention to hire for quality, expertise, and diversity. Nonetheless, staff of color are underrepresented in MCPS, in the hiring pool, the classroom, and administration.
The document review found that MCPS clearly demonstrates its intent to recruit and hire candidates from diverse backgrounds. The district is also implementing several strategies to recruit, hire, and retain staff of color. While progress is occurring incrementally, the majority of staff at MCPS (56.4%) continues to be White. The 46% gap between the demographics of the student body and the workforce is one of the highest in the state of Maryland (Maryland State Department of Education, 2022b).

Observation 2.2: The MCPS community perceives multiple barriers to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.
While MCPS is explicit in its commitment to increase staff diversity, the MCPS community perceives that there is room for improvement in developing a workforce that is representative of the racial and ethnic composition of the student body. The MCPS community members perceive multiple barriers preventing MCPS from recruiting a diverse workforce, including lack of prioritization to hire diverse staff, limited recruitment from diverse school districts and HBCUs, bias in the hiring process, unfair standards for candidates of color, and a lack of clear hiring processes. The document review revealed that MCPS already follows some of the practices recommended by community members to increase the rates of diverse staff, but feedback from focus group and community conversations suggest that the wider community is not aware of many of these efforts.

Observation 2.3: Staff members of different races and ethnicities are not distributed equitably across the various job classifications.
Despite the reported underrepresentation of diverse backgrounds in MCPS, on the survey, staff members showed an overall high level of agreement that they regularly communicate with colleagues of races, skin

colors, ethnicities, and cultures that are different from their own. This level of agreement was noticeably lower among support staff and teachers than among district administrators. In the focus groups and community conversations, participants perceived that staff of color are not evenly distributed between the different job classifications, most noticeably in leadership at school and district levels. Participants perceived that advancement opportunities for leadership positions are largely reserved for White staff.

Observation 2.4: Some students and families report that the lack of staff diversity leads MCPS to be less responsive to the diverse needs of students of color.
On the stakeholder survey, over 95% (n = 451) of school administrators agreed that "School administrators at my school are responsive to the varied needs of students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups." More than 87% (n = 3,736) of teachers agreed to a similar question about the responsiveness of teaching staff. When asked about the extent to which staff members are responsive to the varied needs of racial/ethnic groups and communities in the Equity Audit Tool, nearly 60% (n = 122) of ILTs rated their schools as "Established" or "Advanced." In qualitative data collections, including community conversations, open-ended survey comments, and focus groups, participants emphasized the link between workforce diversity and cultural competency, frequently referring to staff's capacity to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Some parents and students shared the belief that the lack of staff diversity in MCPS contributes to an inability to check biases or challenge stereotypes; respond appropriately to bullying or disciplinary incidents; support teachers' ability to cover challenging topics; relate appropriately with all students; and address relevant cultural events.

Domain 3: Work Conditions

Observation 3.1: MCPS aims to foster an organizational culture of respect.
MCPS's documents and policies demonstrated a clear aim to foster an organizational culture of respect as articulated in the _MCPS 2022–2025 Strategic Plan_. The majority of survey participants agreed that MCPS respects their culture, ethnicity, religion, and physical needs. On the Equity Audit Tool, 74.5% (n = 152) of ILTs rated their schools as "Established" or "Advanced" on the item "Staff members engage in healthy, productive, and respectful professional interactions with other staff members from cultural backgrounds different from themselves." In contrast, the majority of central offices felt that they do not have norms or are still working on establishing norms related to a culture of respect among staff, with 75% (n = 12) rating themselves as either "Latent" or "Emergent."

Observation 3.2: Staff perceive that MCPS does not have a collective, systemic approach to antiracism.
The district is less explicit about a collective commitment to antiracism at the school level. On the Equity Audit Tool, ILTs rated their schools low on the item "Staff share a common understanding of how to be antiracist," with only 8.3% (n = 17) of ILTs rating their schools as "Established" and no ILTs rating their schools as "Advanced." At the district level, 81% (n = 13) of offices rated themselves as "Latent" and 19% (n = 3) as "Emergent." Staff who participated in the focus groups and interviews indicated that they do not perceive that MCPS has a collective, systemic approach to antiracism.

Observation 3.3: Staff members express uncertainty that school administration and/or the district address reports about bullying, discrimination, or harassment.
More than half of district administrators (54.8%, n = 212) and over one-third of support staff (35.8%, n = 1,006) and teachers (34.5%, n = 2,638) are unsure if reports about bullying, discrimination, or harassment related to race, skin color, ethnicity, or culture between or among staff, colleagues, or supervisors are addressed. Focus groups and interview participants expressed that there are issues affecting staff of color that often go unaddressed, and staff members lack a safe or effective venue through which to report grievances.

Observation 3.4: Staff report high job satisfaction levels across the district but there are differences in the experiences of work conditions at MCPS based on racial/ethnic identities.
School administrators and teachers report high levels of satisfaction at work, but teachers and administrators of color, particularly those who are Black/African American, had slightly lower satisfaction rates. There were statistically significant differences in how Black/African American school administrators responded to the

stakeholder survey compared to their peers of other races/ethnicities on four items: being held to the same standards as other school administrators; being treated differently due to race, skin color, ethnicity, or culture; comfort level with talking to other school staff about race; and hearing school staff say things related to race, skin color, ethnicity, or culture that made them feel uncomfortable. School administrators of color who participated in the focus groups and interviews—especially Black/African American school administrators—highlighted experiences of their authority being undermined, contributions questioned, and a work environment characterized by frequent microaggressions. These school administrators also shared feelings of exhaustion and isolation.

Domain 4: Pre-K–12 Curriculum

Observation 4.1: MCPS's Pre-K-12 curriculum varies in its incorporation of race, diversity, and inclusion; some members of the community would like curriculum to be more diverse and represent racial/ethnic identities of students.
In its review of the MCPS curriculum frameworks, MAEC found that the majority of subject areas and courses lack references to race and the contributions of people of color. Only the English Language Arts and Social Studies curricula critically and intentionally examine race and ethnicity. Information collected from stakeholder surveys and focus groups revealed that, while many MCPS community members feel represented in the curriculum, some students feel excluded by what is and is not taught in the classroom. On the stakeholder survey, 50.7% (n = 9,890) of elementary school students and 59.9% (n = 33,382) of middle and high school students agreed that "What I am learning at school reflects the experiences and contributions of people from my racial, ethnic, and/or cultural background." Similarly, among staff, 49.8% (n = 236) of school administrators and 57.1% (n = 4,366) of teachers agreed that the curriculum reflects the experiences and contributions of people from historically underrepresented racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds. On the Equity Audit Tool, 74.5% (n = 152) of ILTs rated their schools "Latent" or "Emergent" on the item "Teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to incorporate racially and ethnically diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions into their classroom pedagogy." When responding to the item, "Recommended textbooks and other instructional materials – across all subjects – reflect racially and ethnically diverse experiences and perspectives" 88.7% (n = 178) of ILTs rated their schools "Latent or "Emergent." These observations suggest that racial diversity and inclusion is not thoroughly integrated in the content of the MCPS curriculum.

Observation 4.2: Students and family members perceive that staff are not trained to teach different racial groups' histories with nuance and cultural sensitivity.
The majority of teachers (63.2%, n = 4,834) identified that they have the ability to teach in culturally sensitive ways and are provided with professional development opportunities related to culturally sensitive instructional practices (76.9%, n = 5,876). However, in focus groups and community conversations, participants shared experiences indicating that some teachers at MCPS lack the capacity to teach the histories of racial and ethnic groups with nuance and sensitivity. This misalignment indicates that some teachers may be unaware of their biases and that their teaching is not culturally sensitive and does not meet the needs of diverse learners. Based on the Equity Audit Tool, it appears that MCPS schools need to invest more effort in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. On the item: "Culturally-sensitive topics/issues are addressed in ways that do not stereotype or stigmatize particular groups (e.g., lessons about slavery, racial slurs, etc.)," 9.8% (n = 20) of ILTs rated their schools as "Latent" and 57.4% (n = 117) of ILTs rated their schools as "Emergent." A recurring theme shared by participants in focus groups is that Black/African American people are portrayed negatively in the curriculum, primarily within the context of poverty and/or slavery. In focus groups and community conversations, participants praised some teachers who go beyond the MCPS curriculum to create their own lessons and choose materials relevant to their students. However, many participants perceived an overall lack of sensitivity to the lived experiences and histories of all students.

Observation 4.3: Families perceive schools rarely teach students about racial bias and how to address discrimination.
Families expressed uncertainty regarding whether MCPS staff members were prepared to effectively teach about racism and how to confront it. In the family survey, over one-third (34.6%, n = 13,868) of respondents

selected "I don't know" when asked if their child is taught about the negative effects of racism in their classes. In the administration of the Equity Audit Tool, no school rated themselves "Advanced" on items related to increasing students' awareness about the effects of racial bias and discrimination and how to confront them. Members of the community expressed concern about the adequacy of staff preparation to lead difficult conversations about race. There is also evidence of students' desire to learn more about racism and antiracism at school. Over 70.6% (n = 39,351) of middle and high school students agreed or strongly agreed that they "would like to learn more about race, ethnicity, and/or antiracism at school."

Observation 4.4: The MCPS community is divided in the role of antiracism in the curriculum. Some share that there is a tradeoff between antiracist and academically rigorous content.
On the family survey, 88% (n = 35,314) of respondents agreed with the item: "I believe my child should be taught to recognize, understand, and interrupt racism." Open-ended responses to the survey demonstrated nuanced variation on the opinions of those who supported the inclusion of antiracism in the curriculum and those who opposed doing so. There was considerable variation in how antiracism should be taught in the classroom. In the open-ended survey comments, middle and high school students discussed an interest in learning more about antiracism in school. As in the family survey, there were differing views on the value of learning about antiracism. Some students expressed that antiracism was irrelevant to their education, it was an uncomfortable topic to discuss, or that focusing on race only serves to cause more conflict. While there is widespread agreement among students and family members that antiracism should be included in the curriculum, there is also substantial opposition. Among those who do want antiracism to be discussed in the classroom, there are diverging opinions on how the topic should be approached. There are also families and students who oppose teaching antiracism altogether. Many of those opposed cite a tradeoff between antiracism and academic rigor.

Domain 5: Community Relations and Engagement

Observation 5.1: MCPS has established policies that promote family and community engagement. Most staff rate their schools and workplaces high on items related to family and community engagement.
In the document review, MAEC found that MCPS clearly states the importance of engaging with communities to effectively understand their needs and gather their feedback and perspectives. On the Equity Audit Tool, ILTs affirmed that there are established policies and a shared commitment to engaging families and the community. Almost 54% (n = 110) of ILTs rated their schools as "Established" or "Advanced" on the item: "The school plans for family engagement to provide opportunities that involve all school staff and all families." The majority of surveyed staff, including teachers, school administrators, district administrators, and support staff, agreed that their schools or workplaces engaged with families in culturally responsive ways. Responses to these survey questions did not vary greatly based on respondents' race, with two notable exceptions: while the majority of staff agreed that their schools engage in culturally responsive ways with families, a statistically significant lower portion of Black/African American teachers and Asian administrators agreed.

Observation 5.2: Some staff perceive that the current system for communication and family engagement produces barriers for families of color, and report not knowing how to implement family involvement strategies in the ABC-Parent and Family Involvement district policy.
On the Equity Audit Tool, 80.9% (n = 165) of ILTs rated their schools as "Latent" or "Emergent" on the item: "Staff know about the implementation strategies related to Family Engagement as outlined in the ABC - Parent and Family Involvement district policy." ILTs also rated their schools low on a question asking whether their school has a culturally responsive plan for family engagement. This observation was further corroborated by staff who participated in focus groups. Some shared negative experiences regarding how MCPS engages families and the community. Some focus group participants also perceived that communication between MCPS and all families is not effective and exclusionary of families who do not speak English and families of less economic means. Both staff and families reported that the MCPS system is difficult to navigate.

Observation 5.3: While most families agree that communication from their school is easy to understand and helps to support their child, some families experience communication barriers. These barriers include unclear and disjointed messages, too much information, and challenges navigating virtual platforms.

Overall, there is evidence that MCPS has established mechanisms for communication with family members. On the Equity Audit Tool, 79.9% (n = 163) of ILTs rated their schools as "Established" or "Advanced" on the item: "The school engages in two-way communication (both virtual and in-person) using multiple methods (e.g., phone calls, home visits, etc.) in languages families can understand." The majority of family survey respondents reported satisfaction with MCPS's current family and community engagement practices. In response to the survey item, "Communication from my child's school is easy to understand and helps me know how to support my child," 86.9% (n = 34,884) of family members agreed. However, 27.7% (n = 15,760) of families either didn't know or disagreed that their child's school engaged them in ways that respect and honor culture. Similarly, on the item "There is at least one person at my child's school that I feel comfortable talking with when I have a question or concern," 19% (n = 7,595) of families disagreed or chose the option "I don't know." Feedback in open-ended comments of the survey focused on the following central themes: barriers to communication, such as getting too much information; unclear and uncoordinated communication; communication characterized as being one-sided or biased towards White families; and frustration with online platforms, such as ParentVue. In focus groups, participants expressed concern that the MCPS system is difficult to navigate. They shared that there is minimal support and communication to assist parents, especially newcomer parents, in navigating the complex system. While survey results suggest that the majority of stakeholders are satisfied with MCPS's current engagement practices, there is also evidence that the current practices do not reach all family and community members equitably.

Observation 5.4: There are differences in how families and community members experience MCPS based on race/ethnicity. Families of color perceive challenges when engaging with the district.

MCPS community members perceived that race affects how MCPS engages with families. On the Equity Audit Tool, 71.6% (n = 146) of ILTs rated their schools as "Latent" or "Emergent" on the item: "Racially/ethnically diverse students and families are part of the school improvement planning process." Furthermore, there was a statistically significant difference in the way families of color responded to survey items relating to school engagement and comfort level interacting with school staff. In response to the survey item, "My child's school engages my family in ways that respect and honor our culture," family members who are White, followed by family members who are Hispanic/Latino, agreed with the statement at a higher rate compared to family members who are Black/African American, Multiracial, American Indian and Alaska Native, Middle Eastern and North African, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. In open-ended survey comments, family members from several racial groups reported feeling marginalized. Many families commented about the lack of services in languages other than English. In community conversations, participants expressed that newcomer families often lack an understanding of the U.S. education system, and cited language barriers as a particularly important issue for the Hispanic/Latino community. There appears to be variability in types and levels of communication families receive across the system. Certain families, especially families of color, feel excluded from information.

Observation 5.5: Some families report a mistrust of MCPS due to a lack of transparency. They perceive that the district intentionally miscommunicates with families of color about scheduled events, enrichment and college and career programs, updates on academics, conflicts involving students, and expectations of parents.

During the focus groups and interviews, many parents shared their perceptions of an intentional lack of transparency within MCPS. Families of students of color perceived a lack of access, transparency, and communication about advanced courses and magnet programs that resulted in students of color being excluded from opportunities. Community conversations' participants shared a similar perception when discussing the lack of available information regarding academic programs and important updates. Across focus groups, community conversations, and open-ended survey comments, family members shared how the lack of transparency in communication can lead to mistrust of the entire school system.

Observation 5.6: Many families perceive a lack of a clear districtwide strategy for how to include diverse communities in school improvement and to meet student needs. Community members also perceive a lack of inclusivity in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs).

While MCPS clearly indicates the importance of engaging communities, it is unclear from the document review how MCPS works with communities to meet the needs of diverse students. Just below 60% (n = 23,681) of family members who participated in the survey agreed with the statement: "My child's school has asked me for feedback and suggestions on how to improve my child's education." However, 46.8% (n = 18,753) of family members disagreed or responded "I don't know" to the item: "My child's school has asked me for feedback and suggestions on how to improve the school." In focus groups and interviews, discussions about how MCPS schools involve family members often revolved around Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). Several participants shared positive experiences with the PTA in their schools. However, the majority of families in focus groups expressed a lack of diversity and representation from different racial and ethnic backgrounds within PTAs. Accessibility served as a critical concern for participants who lack materials in languages other than English.

Domain 6: Equity of Access

Observation 6.1: MCPS aims to create equitable access to resources, facilities, and classes regardless of students' race, ethnicity, or culture. Schools vary in equity of access to resources.

In the document review, MAEC found that MCPS aims to direct funding to improve equitable access to resources for all students. On the stakeholder survey, 72.2% (n = 28,975) of family members answered positively to the item "Students at my child's school are given equitable access to resources, facilities, and advanced academic classes regardless of their race, ethnicity, or culture." Rates of agreement varied for staff members depending on their role: 86.5% (n = 409) of school administrators, and 87.0% (n = 6,645) of teachers indicated agreement. Only 42.4% (n = 164) of district administrators and 63.6% (n = 1,791) of support staff indicated agreement. Lower rates of agreement across multiple professional roles suggest inconsistency in access to resources for students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Students, family members, and staff who participated in focus groups further reported that resources are not always accessible or equitably distributed. Among the factors that interrupt both the provision and availability of resources, facilities, and programs, staff and families cited a lack of equitable funding and fundraising and program design. It is clear that there are excellent programs and resources within MCPS schools. Ensuring access to resources, facilities, and advanced academic programs requires further equitable and deliberate work.

Observation 6.2: MCPS values the importance of using data to promote equitable learning outcomes. Some community members perceive that data is often collected and not fully utilized.

Responses from the stakeholder surveys revealed that a majority of staff agree that disaggregation of student data by race, ethnicity, and language groups is practiced system-wide. Similarly, the majority of ILTs rated their schools as "Established" or "Advanced" on the Equity Audit Tool in response to a series of items about data from the Performance Matters tool being regularly disaggregated, analyzed, and discussed by different racial, ethnic, and language groups. District staff, school staff, and family members disagreed on the degree to which MCPS uses the disaggregated data to make informed, equitable decisions. Focus group participants, including staff and family members, perceived that there is a disconnect between MCPS's data collection and its use. These participants shared that MCPS knows disaggregated data demonstrates disproportionality, achievement gaps, and inequitable work conditions based on race, ethnicity, and language group; but they perceive that the district is not doing enough to resolve these issues. While some staff members report efforts to use disaggregated data to develop solutions that advance equity, other staff members and families perceive little progress towards equitable outcomes. Staff and families perceive that MCPS is reluctant to engage in difficult conversations to make lasting change based on the data.

Observation 6.3: Community members perceive that a lack of cultural competency among staff results in discrimination against students of color and prevents them from receiving the resources they require to meet their diverse learning needs.

Across focus groups, interviews, and community conversations, MCPS family members, students, and staff identified the prevalence of discriminatory behavior, biases, and stereotyping among staff toward students who are Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian. Focus group participants reported that these interactions often create classroom and school environments that limit access to resources for students of color and leave them feeling excluded.

Observation 6.4: Many members of the MCPS community perceive students of color are not provided equitable opportunities to enroll in rigorous courses that prepare them to be college and/or career ready.

In the document review, MAEC found underrepresentation of racially and ethnically diverse learners in rigorous and advanced courses. Students and family members shared that advanced courses are less accessible to students of color. Participants in focus groups, interviews, and community conversations emphasized a number of factors that prevented access to rigorous and advanced courses for racially and ethnically diverse learners. On the systemic level, family members and staff mentioned the prevalence of tracking from an early age, and the lack of proportionate placement of students who are Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino on advanced tracks. Participants shared that teacher bias and discrimination could be determining factors for course recommendations. While MCPS has a stated commitment in their "All Means All" approach for student success, observations from all data collections indicate that students of color lack access, opportunities, and resources needed to reach their full potential.

Conclusion

In response to the MCPS Antiracist Audit observations, MAEC offers a detailed list of aligned recommendations.

View the recommendations.