

## **Introduction**

The Racial and Social Justice Commission (RSJC) is tasked with examining how public education policies are impacting students of color. In order to be more directed in our work, the Education Committee of the RSJC prioritized three initial areas of study: the School Resource Officer (SRO) program, Prince William County Schools (PWCS) discipline practices and policies and the information included in the Annual PWCS Equity Scorecard. The information and analysis included in this initial report are limited to those focus areas and are sourced from presentations delivered by members of the SRO program, the ex-officio School Board member and various community partners at the general RSJC meetings. Additionally, the Committee heard from staff from the PWCS Central Office, including the offices of Student Services, and Student and Professional Learning. A full list of presenters to the Education Committee is included in the Appendix as Exhibit A.

While the following report is reflective of the Committee's thorough examination of the three established priority areas (SRO, discipline, and Equity Scorecard) over the course of the past year, further study of the areas is still required. The work of the Committee was impacted by a number of external factors, such as, the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, a significant change in administration at the school district, as well as, by time constraints. Over the next few months, the Committee looks forward to increasing engagement with stakeholders (community members, parents, students, faculty, etc.) through listening sessions, focus groups, surveys and public comment time and also aims to build our understanding of what programs and policies PWCS is continuing to put into place, especially in light of the new administration and the inclusion of a Chief Equity Officer in the Superintendent's Executive Cabinet.

## **Priority 1: Prince William County Public Schools School Resource Officer Program**

### Best Practices

From the personal experiences shared by the School Resource Officers in their presentation to the Commission, it appears that the current program provides the opportunity for relationships to be built between students and police officers. School Resource Officers are seen by some students as trusted adults and/or mentors in the school environment and students may gravitate towards such individuals. These relationships, as stated by the officers in their statements, sometimes also lead to increased cooperation in community policing initiatives and can be a tool for recruiting Prince William County youth into the police force. The overarching theme of the experiences shared by the School Resource Officers was that they are able to form close relationships with some students who then come to trust them and seek their guidance/mentorship during their time in school and beyond. Officers see this as a rewarding and motivational part of their role and they use their visibility in the halls, classroom visits and other programming as a means to increase their access to the student population in more positive ways.

These relationships are partially the product of the flexibility afforded to School Resource Officers in how they conduct their day-to-day operations. While we discuss the need for more clearly defined roles in the growth areas section of the report, it is worth noting that the ability to form bonds with the student body are sometimes predicated on an officer's flexibility in how they interact with students. Flexibility and some individual discretion in programming and incident resolution could lead to more sustainable, positive relationships between officers and students.

Finally, as addressed in this report, the Prince William County Police Department and Prince William County Public Schools have both undergone significant changes in leadership in recent months. As the School Resource Officer program is a collaborative effort between the two entities, we expect it to be one of the areas that is explored and updated as a part of the new leaders' initiatives. In fact, recent comments (cite the news article) made by both parties hint to a forthcoming review/reevaluation of the current School Resource Office program and are welcomed by the Commission. This collaborative quality of the program is yet another positive aspect of Prince William County's School Resource Office program.

### Growth Areas

The School Resource Office program was repeatedly mentioned in presentations by community leaders and organization to the Commission, as well as by the public at large. Many of these comments raised issue with the current program and its impact on students of color specifically. Prince William County organizations, which included VOICE, NAACP, Unity in the Community and CASA, called for either a serious overhaul of the current program or for an end to the program all together. Much of the community concern was elevated by news articles surrounding a 2019 report from the Department of Juvenile Justice that showed a staggering number of school disorderly conduct charges against students in Prince William County Public Schools. Between fiscal year 2016 to 2018, Prince William County Schools had the highest number of school disorderly conduct complaints (216) from schools, many of which were filed by School Resource Officers. Prince William County Police officials, however, point out that only 24.7% of the total intake complaints (including disorderly conduct and other offenses) were eventually petitioned (to initiate proceedings in the court system) by the School Resource Officers and the remainder were handled informally (through diversion, informal counseling,

mediation, etc.). The resulting diversion programs are only offered as an option after a complaint has been filed by the School Resource Officer and highlights the absence (or limited availability) of sufficient programming options without a complaint needing to be filed.

In 2020, Virginia House Bill 256 made it unlawful to charge students in school or on the school bus with disorderly conduct in an effort to reduce the impact of such charges on Virginia's youth. Despite this, the racial disparity in the school-based disorderly conduct charges poses a continuing concern. Black or African American students make up roughly 20% of the Prince William County Public Schools' student population yet between 2017 and 2019, Black or African American students accounted for half of all school-based disorderly conduct charges. These rates mirror the disparities seen in other aspects of school discipline as well and underscore the need for a deeper look into the causes for the disparities even if the school disorderly conduct charges are no longer applicable.

While the program is a partnership between the school district and the police department, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that governs the relationship does not specifically address the delineation of roles between School Resources Officers, school security specialists and school administration as it relates to student discipline. The document deals mostly with provision of resources, evaluation of performance, information sharing and general guidelines of cooperation on law enforcement issues between the school and the police officer. Furthermore, when combined with the site-based operation of Prince William County public schools, the role a School Resource Officer plays in a school building becomes almost solely dependent on the interactions between specific school administrative teams and the School Resource Officer. A School Resource Officer at one school, for example, may have daily functions which differ considerably from that of another officer in a different building. This could be a factor that

impacts the involvement of the police in discipline matters that are otherwise addressed by school officials in accordance with the Prince William County Code of Behavior. The MOU is approved yearly by the Prince William County School Board but it has not undergone significant changes or revisions in recent years.

Lastly, the absence of official channels for providing performance related feedback on individual School Resource Officers, the program as a whole, or on the MOU largely excludes Prince William County residents from being involved with a program that affects close to 90,000 of our youngest community members. Students, staff, or other individuals may file a complaint or provide positive feedback about an officer by contacting the commanding officer of the unit or by visiting a police station to register their comments/complaint, however, this information is not readily available to the general public. Additionally, it limits accessibility for communities that are more hesitant to interact with the police (as referenced in Police Chief Newsham's address to the Commission and comments by various community organization) and for students that may not have the resources to file a complaint outside of the school building. Student, administration and community feedback is also not incorporated into a School Resource Officer's performance review which is already, according to the MOU, conducted solely by the unit commanding officer. Public comment time and community organization listening sessions held by the Commission have already shown that Prince William County residents have valuable feedback to share about the School Resource Officer program.

### Recommendations

- Further study of jurisdictions that have implemented alternatives to School Resource Officer programs for impacts on racial disparities, discipline issues and climate surveys

(Source 1)

- Evaluate the impact of SROs on school safety
- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of data on non-criminal incidents where school resource officers were involved
- Evaluate impact of SRO presence on school climate (Source 2)
- Increase transparency in MOU review process by inviting stakeholders to participate in drafting process
- Increase diversion programs available to schools/ SROs without a complaint being made
- Delineate roles of SROs and school safety specialists and administrative staff
- Formalize feedback process from community (students, teachers, parents, etc.) on SRO performance
- Increase diversity of SRO pool to reflect the populations that are served (to include linguistic capacity)
- Formalize SRO curriculum in schools to be more standardized across the district

## **Priority 2: Prince William County Public Schools Discipline**

### Best practices

The PWCS Equity Scorecard (which will be discussed in its own section below) has led to increased transparency in the data available to the Prince William County community at large. The data includes exclusionary discipline for percentages for elementary, middle and high school students and is further disaggregated by race, gender, socio-economic status or student group type (English Language Learner or Special Education). Additionally, there is also a section for percent of students with discipline referrals overall. In light of some of the disparities that are highlighted by this data (and will be discussed in the growth areas section), progress has been

made at the state and district level to address these continuing trends which disproportionately negatively impact Black and Hispanic students. The 2019 conference for Prince William County middle school administrators allowed for insightful discussions about the impact of exclusionary and other discipline practices that impact student learning and well-being. The detailed program included sessions on supporting positive behavior, holistic approaches to supporting students, building a culturally responsive environment and multiple sessions on restorative justice practices. This, specifically, was highlighted as another best practice currently for the district that certain schools have implemented restorative justice practices as a part of their disciplinary program. Relatedly, there were 774 fewer individuals suspended at the middle school level between 2016-2019.

Prince William County has also been an early adopter of some of the changes that have been issued at the state level with regard to student discipline. Namely these include updating behavior categories for leveled administrative responses and discipline coding so as to be more supportive of student social and emotional welfare and preventative to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, the 2020-2021 Code of Behavior was updated to align with the Model Guidance issued by the Virginia Department of Education. This includes flexibility in dress code for students, inclusion of culturally responsive language and practices and proactive approaches and interventions. Additional efforts by the school district, such as, strengthening capacity to provide trauma informed professional development to staff, sponsoring student groups like No Place for Hate and truancy diversion programs are also best practices that should be studied further for impact and expanded upon.

## Growth Areas

While the availability of some data related to disciplinary actions is available and was highlighted as a best practice in the preceding section, there remain vast areas of growth in this arena. The data that is available is not disaggregated beyond the usual categories that assign singular identities to students (ELL or special education or Black, etc.). The data is also provided in percentages and on a district level which does not account for individual school populations or include a composition index nor a relative risk ratio for any of the subgroups. This approach to data collection and presentation will be discussed further in the Equity Scorecard section of the report as the discipline data was presented as a part of that report. From the data that is available, there remain deep disparities along racial lines that persist year over year. The percentage of Black high school students with exclusionary discipline was at least three times the percentage of White and Asian students from 2016-2020. The percentage of Hispanic high school students with exclusionary discipline was also over two times the percentage of White and Asian students from 2016-2020. While middle school data shows a decrease in overall exclusionary discipline (as highlighted in the best practice section), the disparity between Black and Hispanic students and the White and Asian populations remains. A smaller percentage of the overall elementary level students have exclusionary discipline, but these groups also see similar disparities. Further analysis is necessary that takes into account the composite index of each school site, as well as, other factors that may contribute to these disparities which are present regardless of the student's level of study. In fact, sharing of the discipline data in such a manner is reserved for a limited audience (administrators who may or may not share it with their community) and is not available to the general public. There is, therefore, a lack of transparency on what categories of reporting are mandated and at what level. Whereas some schools might use this data to proactively prepare

their discipline strategies and programs for the coming years (by including staff and community partners), other schools may not be using their available data in similar manner. There does not appear to be a platform or protocol for sharing best practices across the division; especially, best practices that effectively reduce the need for disciplinary actions in schools. This highlights the final point that there does not appear to be a universal urgency in pursuing preventative measures for disciplinary issues.

### Recommendations

- Conduct an equity audit of Prince William County Public Schools systems of discipline (Source 3)
- Review PWCS exclusionary discipline process/data to evaluate it for benefits in student academic, social and behavioral outcomes (Source 4)
- Increase reporting categories to include relative risk ratios, composition indices and relative difference in composition in discipline disparities (Source 5 & Source 6)
- Use data to inform policy and practice by implementing P-D-S-A like processes at the school and district levels to understand and reduce disproportionalities in discipline data (Source 7)
- Assemble stakeholders from the community and school staff and students to identify gaps and select which key indicators to measure and track (Source 8)
- Share findings on climate, discipline and safety data across the division (develop policy on data sharing and to whom and when) (Source 8)
- Use data on discipline in conjunction with other academic and safety indicators (Source 8)

- Collect anecdotal evidence to evaluate the impact of strategies that are being put into place to target disparities in discipline (Source 8)
- Develop overall district and school specific strategies to expand social-emotional learning programs/restorative practices (Source 9)
- Make sharing best practices between schools easier, more transparent and regularized

### **Priority 3: Prince William County Schools Equity Scorecard Data**

#### Best practices

The existence of an annual Equity Scorecard (starting with the 2018-2019 academic year) for the Prince William County school division is a promising start to looking into where disparities exist and what patterns can be derived from the data presented. This living set of documents allows for some measured comparisons between various data points across school years and can help establish certain benchmarks for PWCS. The commitment introduced in the Digital Equity Plan (also referenced in the 2018-2019 Equity Scorecard) for 1:1 computer access for students was realized in part due to the environment brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic response but also due to it being a stated goal of the school division. This practice is a step towards alleviating some of the equity issues surrounding access to technology for students.

The school division has also made impressive strides in increasing on-time graduation rates for most population subgroups identified in the Equity Scorecard (with the notable exception of Hispanic students). This rate appears to have been impacted slightly by the 2020-2021 school year numbers but there is an upwards trajectory when viewing the numbers in five years increments from 2009-2019. The increase for Black students in this period was ten

percentage points, for Asian students seven percentage points and for White students seven percentage points.

Another identified best practice is a downward trend in disciplinary data. This most notably includes decreases in the percent of elementary and middle school students with exclusionary discipline across ethnicity and other demographic groups (economically disadvantaged, ELL and SPED). The percentage of Black students with exclusionary discipline went down two points while each of the other identified ethnic groups saw a one percent decline between 2017 and 2019. The numbers for 2019-2020 were reduced as well but due to a much-shorter academic year they do not represent the same breadth of time as the other years and are therefore undoubtedly impacted by this fact. Conversely, high school student rates either stayed constant or increased during the same time period. Between 2017 and 2019 the overall percentage of students with discipline referrals also decreased by one point across virtually all student population subgroups.

### Growth Areas

The public availability of the Equity Scorecard has increased transparency with regard to academic performance, participation, demographic and discipline data from the school district. However, the presentation of this data is not multi-dimensional and relies on categorizing students within one group alone as opposed to approaching data analysis from an intersectional lens. For example, students are either categorized by race or by special education or economic or English language status and not broken down further. There are also no geographical considerations in the presentation of the data considering the size of Prince William County. While it would be impractical to include every cross-section of the population in the Equity Scorecard, the data analysis that goes into preparing the information should involve a

consideration of the above-referenced information. Also absent from the data presentation are relative risk ratios, which would provide a clearer picture of the risk of students of color (particularly Black and/or Hispanic students) to experience disproportionate discipline and academic outcomes in comparison to all other subgroups.

Racial disparities are present in almost all of the data categories included in the Equity Scorecard. These disparities show themselves not just in performance but also in program participation and demographic representation. Despite making up 72 percent of the student population in 2021, non-White individuals only make up 26 percent of the instructional staff and 31 percent of the administrative staff. There is also an underrepresentation of non-Asian students of color in the gifted program at the elementary, middle and high school levels, with the rate of Black and Hispanic students being almost half of Asian and White students. This underrepresentation is also present at the high school level in advanced and dual enrollment programs. Black and Hispanic students are, however, participating in Career and Technical Education programs at a higher rate than other racial subgroups. Black and Hispanic students also continue to be overrepresented in all discipline related categories (referrals and exclusionary discipline) as has been highlighted in the discipline section of this report.

One of the strengths of PWCS has been in increasing the overall graduation rate of students and for almost all subgroups that are included in the Equity Scorecard. Despite this, we see that while the Hispanic student graduation rate increased sixteen points between 2009 and 2019, that increase was limited to the period of 2009-2014 and the number stayed at 84 percent until 2019 (with a two-point increase since then). The opportunity gaps in math, reading, writing, science and history SOL scores range from ten to twenty percentage points for Black and Hispanic students when compared to Asian and White student populations. This trend continues

despite significant advances having been made in math SOL scores for the 2018-2019 school year for Black and Hispanic students. While changes in the number of verified SOL credits needed for graduation may continue to help increase graduation rates, the type of diplomas awarded also show significant racial disparities. An Advanced Studies diploma is an important predictor of student enrollment and success in postsecondary institutions. When compared with a Standard diploma, a Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) study found that a graduate with an Advanced Studies diploma is 33 percent more likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution and twice as likely to graduate after four years (Source 10). While Asian and White students earned Advanced Studies diplomas at rates of 70 and 62 percent respectively, only 47 percent of Black students and 39 percent of Hispanic students graduated with an Advanced Studies diploma in 2021. These disparities remain relatively consistent for the previous years reported in the Equity Scorecard. Any evaluation of the success of graduation rates must also take into account the type of diplomas that students are graduating with. It is also noteworthy to include that the percent of students not making it to graduation is drastically higher for Hispanic students than any other racial group included in the reporting. The 2019-2021 overall dropout rate was five percent yet for Hispanic students that rate was eleven percent. This rate is nearly four times higher than that for Black students and eleven times higher than the rate for White students.

Finally, while the annual presentation of data through the Equity Scorecard is critical to increasing transparency for the school district, it is also equally important to be transparent about the actions taken to alleviate the disparities brought to light by the data. The reporting categories are not consistent year over year and comparisons are not easily apparent to community stakeholders. There is no inclusion of accountability measures for reporting the data nor of how the district holds itself accountable to improving performance for the categories included in the

Equity Scorecard. While this information may be included in other presentations to the School Board or in internal documents, it remains uncoupled from the presentation of the Equity Scorecard which is where many of the community stakeholders witness the opportunity gaps and racial disparities.

### Recommendations

- Quarterly updates on Equity Scorecard progress to identify benchmarks and report on implementation of programs to alleviate disparities
- Identify accountability measures for improving data included in the Equity Scorecard
- Include breakdown of data into subcategories of demographic groups (i.e. English Language Learner (ELL) data broken down by special education, race, etc.)
- Additional reporting on Title 1 funding allocation and what steps are being taken to drive outcomes (i.e. teacher placement)
- Increased transparency in how and where teachers are placed in schools within the school district
- Explore establishing teacher incentive programs at lowest performing schools (Source 11)
- Assemble stakeholders from the community and school staff and students to identify gaps and select which key indicators to measure and track (Source 8)
- Increase reporting categories to include relative risk ratios, composition indices and relative difference in composition in academic disparities (Source 5 & Source 6)
- Study how student and staff mind-sets impact student academic outcomes through focus groups, updated school climate surveys and data analysis (Source 12)

- Conduct an audit of school-based resources to assess level of inequity in facilities, technology and instructional materials (Source 13)
- Establish new (and expand on existing) partnerships with higher education teacher preparatory programs to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to specifically address school climate and instructional strategies for diverse students (Source 14)
- Develop monitoring benchmarks and strategies for each area of disparity identified in the equity scorecard at the school and district levels (Source 14)
- Provide specific interventions and services to support students who have increasing/continuous attendance and discipline problems to reduce the amount of dropouts in Hispanic and other populations (Source 14)
- Evaluate success of “Growing Our Own Program” in placement and retention of educators of color in Prince William County Public Schools (Source 15)
- Include specific references in Equity Scorecard on how COVID has impacted the disparities (positively or negatively)

## References

These references are not formatted (depending how uniformity will work across the entire general report) and are just listed here and refer back to the in-text citations listed as “Source #.”.

Source 1 : [https://dailyprogress.com/news/local/education/county-schools-plan-to-replace-resource-officers-with-safety-coaches/article\\_54c04514-8209-11eb-87b8-dfb3f7bd09c3.html](https://dailyprogress.com/news/local/education/county-schools-plan-to-replace-resource-officers-with-safety-coaches/article_54c04514-8209-11eb-87b8-dfb3f7bd09c3.html)

Source 2 : <https://strategiesforyouth.org/sitefiles/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/How-Do-SROs-Impact-Racial-Equity-in-Schools.pdf>

Source 3 : [https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/BCZUWL7C75CE/\\$file/External%20Expert%20for%20Equity%20Report-FCPS.Discipline%20report.Final.6.9.19.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/BCZUWL7C75CE/$file/External%20Expert%20for%20Equity%20Report-FCPS.Discipline%20report.Final.6.9.19.pdf)

Source 4 : <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/events/resources/school-discipline-data-indicators.pdf>

Source 5 : [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL\\_2017240.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2017240.pdf)

Source 6 : <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/perspectives/understanding-disproportionality-part-2-measuring-disproportionality-2019>

Source 7 : [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL\\_2017240.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2017240.pdf)

Source 8 : <https://healthysafechildren.org/sites/default/files/Data-Collection-Brief-508.pdf>

Source 9 : <https://mychesterfieldschools.com/family-and-community-engagement/equity-in-ccps/>

Source 10 : Jonas, D. L., & Garland, M. W. (2014, June). *High school graduates' four-year college enrollment, persistence, and completion*. Virginia Longitudinal Data System.

[https://vlds.virginia.gov/media/1032/why\\_diploma\\_types\\_matter\\_06-30-2014.pdf](https://vlds.virginia.gov/media/1032/why_diploma_types_matter_06-30-2014.pdf)

Source 11 : <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22146>)

Source 12 : <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/how-to-improve-student-educational-outcomes-new-insights-from-data-analytics>

Source 13 : [https://www.capss.org/uploaded/2014\\_Redesign/Leadership\\_Development/Student-Centered\\_Learning\\_NEWSLETTERS/44\\_june\\_2018/Kamm-Solutions\\_Equity-and-Opportunity\\_Closing-the-Achievement-Gap.pdf](https://www.capss.org/uploaded/2014_Redesign/Leadership_Development/Student-Centered_Learning_NEWSLETTERS/44_june_2018/Kamm-Solutions_Equity-and-Opportunity_Closing-the-Achievement-Gap.pdf)

Source 14 : [http://www.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/sites/cts.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/files/documents/afam\\_achievement\\_gap\\_report.pdf](http://www.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/sites/cts.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/files/documents/afam_achievement_gap_report.pdf)

Source 15 : <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2018-11-23/black-teachers-improve-outcomes-for-black-students>

## Appendix

### Exhibit A: List of Presenters to the Racial and Social Justice Commission Education Committee

1. Office of Student and Professional Learning, Prince William County Public Schools
2. Denise Huebner, Associate Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services
3. William Bixby, Associate Superintendent for Middle Schools
4. John Wallingford, Associate Superintendent for Finance and Risk Management
5. Ron Crowe, Director of the Office of Risk Management and Security Services
6. Dara Dugger, Director of the Office of Student Management and Alternative Programs (OSMAP)
7. Tom Payne, Hearing Officer for OSMAP
8. Joseph Murgo, Principal of Potomac Shores Middle School
9. James Dutrow, Principal of Lake Ridge Middle School
10. Richmond Hill, Supervisor of Secondary Counseling and Student Support Services
11. Deborah Ransom, Supervisor of Elementary Counseling and Related Services.
12. Education Committee, Prince William County National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
13. Paul Lott, National Society for the Advancement of Black Americans
14. Abdullah Usufzai, Prince William County Public Schools Student

Additional exhibits will be added if the Chair wants graphs to represent data