



Testimony provided to the
Howard County Board of Education on
Policy 1080

August 18, 2020

Good Evening. I am Joan Driessen, Executive Director, of the Association of Community Services (ACS). We are proud to include the Howard County School System as an ACS Member and proud of the strong partnership that exists between the school system and our other 137 member organizations and 36 community advocates. Working together we can continue to make Howard County a place of opportunity for all residents. Toward this end, ACS has chosen to be an active participant in the Howard County Equity Collaborative.

This community believes in the power of education. Families move here because of our school systems' excellent reputation. The County commits 58% of its General Fund expenditures to HCPSS. Our teachers choose this profession because of the promise it holds to provide all of our children with the opportunity to live full, happy, and productive lives. It is the job of this board and administration to ensure that it is working for all of our children, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

A well-crafted Educational Equity policy has never been more important than now. Systemic racism exists at every level. It is our responsibility to correct it. This policy offers you a powerful opportunity to begin to address it in our school system.

We know there are significant disparities in our school system based on race. One of the most glaring included in the 2018 Making the Case for Equity Report by the Local Children's Board was that Black students in our school system were being suspended at a rate 5.75 times higher than White students. What are the factors that lead to this disparity and how can we address them to ensure that Black/African American students have the same access to opportunity in our school system as White students?

The Equity Collaborative has outlined in Section IV, the Data Reporting/Accountability section, the data that needs to be collected and how it should be used to identify gaps in educational outcomes, programming, supports, and interventions. Ensure that this is included in the implementation plan and that it is used to steer this highly respected school system to truly serve the needs of all our children

Data that is disaggregated by race must be collected, publicly reported, and used responsibly to find the cause of problems and how they can be addressed. Making this data easily accessible to the public will allow us to have well-informed discussions of needed changes and go a long way toward developing trust and confidence.

This data needs to be used at the aggregate level by the administration, but also at the school level by principals, counselors and teachers. There should be a feedback loop developed that monitors this. We teach our children to listen to what the data is telling you and use it to develop your strategy. We need

to model this. School improvement teams should be analyzing why racial disparities exist, honestly addressing how bias contributes to it and developing strategies to address them. **Yearly, achievable equity goals should be established, and progress regularly monitored. These goals should be established by a team that not only consists of school staff, but student representatives of groups that are disproportionately impacted and community leaders who represent their interests.**

Policy and Procedures are only important if you use them to steer you to the desired goal. Policy 1080 is designed to move our school system toward one that provides an equitable education for all children - regardless of the color of their skin. That means that we direct attention and resources to provide the supports needed to ensure that those children who need more support, get it. I am sure you agree, the measure of our success is not how well we do the easy stuff, but how we respond to the challenges

Implement the changes that our Equity Collaborative has so thoughtfully proposed. As they have always done, our ACS Members will continue to work with you to eliminate barriers and to ensure that, regardless of their race or ethnicity, that all children have the opportunities and resources they need to thrive. We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with you toward that goal.

Respectfully,

Joan Driessen
Executive Director
Association of Community Services of Howard County