

# EQUITY-FOCUSED POLICY SCAN

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# OVERVIEW OF THE WORK

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MEAC) has developed an equity audit tool which has been used to support the foundation of this report. This tool is used as a way of supporting the critical analysis of policies, programs, and practices that either directly or indirectly impact students and staff as related to their various identity markers (race, gender, sexuality, religion, language, age, etc.)

The MAEC equity audit tool was designed with the goal of helping educators to develop more concrete understandings of how to practice equity and to reflect on whether school policies, practices, and procedures are equitable to various groups. The school and district policy segment has been used exclusively for this report as its main area of analysis has been on the discovery of inequities in policy and practice at the school and district level.

This equity-focused policy scan has been completed utilizing interviews with relevant stakeholder groups, analysis of Atlanta BOE docs governing policies, and a policy analysis focus group. The participant pool of interviews included the following: CLL Staff, School Personnel, Student Advocacy Groups, and Parent and Community Organizations. All information arising from interviews was then connected to the MAEC framework and used to provide rankings across key areas arising from the focus groups.

## Stakeholder Engagements Informing the Policy Scan

- 25 interviews with CLL Staff Members
- 6 Focus Groups with APS Parent Advocacy Groups
  - 6 Districtwide Principal Focus Groups
  - 5 Districtwide Principal Focus Groups
  - 4 Districtwide Teacher Focus Groups
- 6 LGBTQIA-focused Discussion Groups
- Focus Group with APS Student Advisory Council
- Convening of APS Policy Analysis Focus Group
- Review Session with APS Senior Cabinet
- Review Session with APS Principal Advisory Council
- Participation in Equity Design Task Force
- Participation in 8 APS Equity Community Meetings

All engagements were conducted across a 10-month period beginning in June 2021 and concluding April 2022.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document includes analysis of key themes arising from the Equity Policy & Practice Scan. The report has been organized into the following sections: board policies, student assignments, special populations, curricular access, partnerships, engagement, and adult culture. Each section includes recommendations for district leadership to consider based on stakeholder perceptions and recognition of the district's commitments to growth and support of all of its students. Beyond this, each distinct section has been connected to the MAEC ranking system with a brief rationale for where the district's current practices or policies align with this validated tool.



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# OVERALL POLICY REVIEW

## MAEC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the school/school system have a specific educational equity policy in areas related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?				<b>X</b>
Is the educational equity policy monitored for consistent and complete implementation as well as amended if necessary?				<b>X</b>
Does the educational equity policy regarding racial equity address the harmful impacts of racial stress and trauma?				<b>X</b>
Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators in mitigating race-based disparities?		<b>X</b>		
Is the school/school system discipline policy written in a way to remove subjectivity and implicit bias from the discipline referral and suspension process?		<b>X</b>		
Is the school/school system dress code free of gender-biased consequences and does the policy allow for gender identity expression?		<b>X</b>		
Does the school/school system have a clear mission statement regarding educational equity?				<b>X</b>
Are updates to policies and procedures publicized to staff, students, and families in an accessible manner and on a timely and continuous basis?				<b>X</b>
Has the district developed an equity-focused plan of action based on the policy, mission statement, and analysis of its current equity needs?			<b>X</b>	
Did all relevant stakeholder groups (staff, families, students, and community members) participate in district decision-making and the development of the district action plans?		<b>X</b>		
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding accommodations for students with disabilities and English Learners?				<b>X</b>
Are there policies and procedures to assure that no student is denied participation in extracurricular or co-curricular activities (as health and safety guidelines permit) because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, or transportation limitations?				<b>X</b>
Does the school/school system have a clear and equitable attendance policy that takes into consideration, and does not penalize students, for barriers (e.g., technological issues, families' schedules, etc.) they might face during learning?			<b>X</b>	
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding using names so that students identify as their preferred name and personal pronouns?	<b>X</b>			
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding bathroom and locker room use by transgender students?	<b>X</b>			

# EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE & RATIONALE:

The Board has made a strong commitment to equity, including articulating a strong Equity Policy (Policy BBB), as well as policies around ELL, SWDs, EEO, etc. Though the board has these policies, it is recommended that these policies be reviewed and updated in accordance with its current commitment equity and more recent data. The Atlanta BOE's commitment to equity is highlighted in the clear number of policies which have met the emergent and advanced categories across the MAEC ranking scale. As the board continues to monitor and refine these goals, it may consider extending its commitment by further investigating the ways an increased focus on gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic diversity and the impacts these varied identity markers have on student experience inside of Atlanta Public Schools' classrooms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policies should also be reviewed to ensure current language outlines necessary coordination of supports and delineation of responsibility of APS staff members.

- For example, policy JGIA which concerns domestic minor sex trafficking has no attached standard operating procedure. The policy notes that instances of abuse must be reported to the school care team but there is no relevant information regarding what members of the school staff comprise this team.
- District grading policy should also be reviewed for clarification as several participants noted the ways varying interpretations as it relates to student attendance has led to discrepancies in grading practices across the district.
- District policies around child abuse are currently missing language necessary to coordinate student supports. Language should be included to list specific individuals in the school building responsible for aligning wrap-around supports for children experiencing abuse including school social workers, Office of Victims of Crimes, etc.
- Consider drafting an explicit policy regarding district protections for LGBTQ+ students.
- Revisit the recommendations of the Office of Student Discipline around amendments to the dress code.
- Consider developing a comprehensive district stakeholder engagement strategy.
- At current, several APS board policies may appear out of date per the board website. Governance best practice recommends revision of board policy every 3 to 5 years. Policies listed may actually be in compliance as the board policy chair may have reviewed policies within the past 5 years and this designation has not been highlighted on the website. Ensuring reviews are listed on the website will ensure the public is aware of the APS board's consistent work to monitor and review policies as needed.

# THEME 1: DISCIPLINE

## MAEC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the educational equity policy clearly explain the procedures for reporting complaints, investigating complaints, and appeals?			X	
Does the educational equity policy regarding racial equity address the harmful impacts of racial stress and trauma?			X	
Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators in mitigating race-based disparities?		X		
Is the school/school system discipline policy written in a way to remove subjectivity and implicit bias from the discipline referral and suspension process?		X		
Is the school/school system dress code free of gender biased consequences and does the policy allow for gender identity expression?		X		

## EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE & RATIONALE:

Atlanta Public Schools has made significant advances in terms of addressing its commitments to transforming the process of student discipline. This has included an increased focus on restorative practices, a deepening awareness of the importance of social emotional learning and its impacts on staff and students, and the reorganization of the office of student discipline. These efforts are to be commended and elevated as important steps in ensuring equity in disciplinary processes can become a reality across the district. While these efforts are important steps, participants also highlighted key challenges which may need to be addressed to ensure APS is able to further extend its desire to avoid the over suspension of its students, and despite these efforts, stakeholders continue to report some level of bias in disciplinary implementation and there continues to be disparities in the discipline rates across all areas.

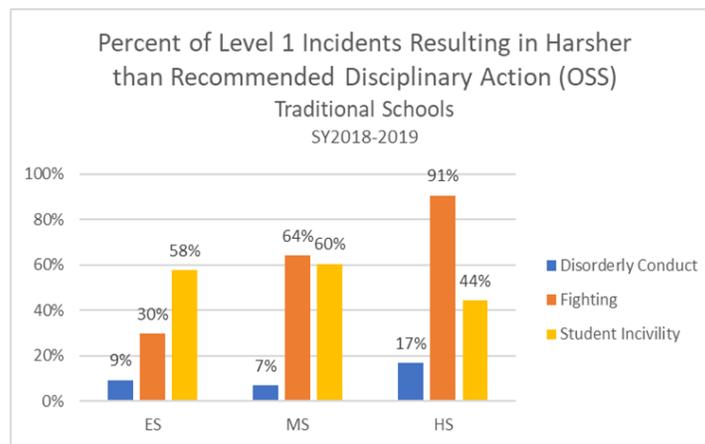
- Stakeholders noted concern that discipline practices in the district may not always align with guidance provided in the APS policy manuals.
  - Multiple assistant principals had mixed opinions on the amount of flexibility allocated to them by the current disciplinary code's ranges that can lead to subjective decision making.
- Concern for school reputation among principals may lead to school leaders avoiding placing infractions into the infinite campus system.
- In August 2021, the Office of Student Discipline elevated concerns around the dress code given that quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates disparities in dress code enforcement among female students, particularly female students of color, and transgender and non-binary students.

*“There is a range of consequences. The consequences should be spelled out related to what to do in a given situation. It needs to be standardized practice. Principals in schools can’t feel like they’re going to be penalized. They used to put our numbers up on screen and we were shamed for the number of suspensions we have. Our climate rating at one point was based on suspensions coupled with attendance. Then schools just decided to start not putting it in Infinite Campus and just call the parents. You’re incentivizing poor behavior from the leaders. If I’m scared to put it in Infinite Campus, then I’m looking at the APS graphs to make sure we aren’t the highest discipline in the district.” – SCHOOL LEADER*

*“Even though there are policy mandates for handling disciplinary issues, the principals are not following them. Administrators putting in codes for referrals based on their anger at the moment. They don’t refer to guidance around the policy.” – CLL STAFF*

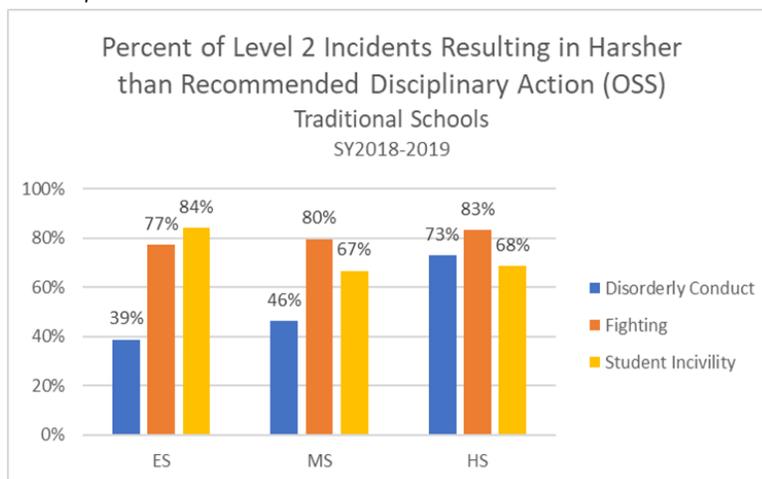
- There is a need to ensure Infinite Campus disciplinary codes are in alignment with the disciplinary manual.
- There is no procedure to ensure students who are sent to Hank Aaron Alternative school return to their school of origin once their time at Hank Aaron has expired, nor is there a mandate for students to enroll at Forest Hills once they have been removed from their assigned school.
  - o Progress Update: The Office of Student Discipline is working to create an administrative regulation for mandatory attendance for students assigned to Hank Aaron.

The following graphs shed light on how closely school administrators are following the APS Student Code of Conduct when making disciplinary decisions. As per the APS 2021-2022 Student Code of Conduct, a student who commits a Level 1 offense should receive a maximum of 1 day ISS or 1 day Detention. An elementary school student who commits a Level 2 offense should receive a maximum of 3 days detention, and a middle or high school student should receive a maximum of 3 days ISS or 3 days detention. However, in SY2018-2019 more than half of all Level 1 student incivility incidents and over 75% of Level 2 fighting and student incivility incidents committed by elementary school students resulted in a harsher than recommended disciplinary action, defined here as 1 or more days of Out of School Suspension. This pattern is similar among middle and high school students. Notably, 91% of Level 1 fighting incidents committed by high school students resulted in Out of School Suspension. The proportion of Level 2 Student Incivility incidents committed by middle and high school students resulting in Out of School Suspension is also high – at 67% for middle school students and 69% for high school students. This suggests that, in many cases, administrators’ categorization of the severity of an incident does not align with the severity of the disciplinary action, and that considerations other than the APS Student Code of Conduct factor into their disciplinary decisions.



Source: Student Safety and FTE Files (FY19)

Notes: This analysis includes Level 1 incidents committed by students enrolled in a traditional Elementary, Middle or High School (a total of 60 schools) as reported in the October 2018 FTE. Analysis is restricted to the three most common incident types (disorderly conduct, fighting and student incivility). Each student involved in an event is included separately. In the case of multi-incident events committed by a student, this analysis includes only the first reported incident. Harsher than recommended disciplinary action is defined here as one or more days of Out of School Suspension.



Source: Student Safety and FTE Files (FY19)

Notes: This analysis includes Level 2 incidents committed by students enrolled in a traditional Elementary, Middle or High School (a total of 60 schools) as reported in the October 2018 FTE. Analysis is restricted to the three most common incident types (disorderly conduct, fighting and student incivility). Each student involved in an event is included separately. In the case of multi-incident events committed by a student, this analysis includes only the first reported incident. Harsher than recommended disciplinary action is defined here as one or more days of Out of School Suspension.

# THEME 2:

# STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

## MAEC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the school/school system have a specific educational equity policy in areas related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?				<b>X</b>
Does the educational equity policy clearly explain the procedures for reporting complaints, investigating complaints, and appeals?			<b>X</b>	
Is the educational equity policy monitored for consistent and complete implementation as well as amended if necessary?				<b>X</b>
Are updates to policies and procedures publicized to staff, students, and families in an accessible manner and on a timely and continuous basis?				<b>X</b>
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding accommodations for students with disabilities and English Learners?				<b>X</b>
Are there policies and procedures to assure that no student is denied participation in extracurricular or co-curricular activities (as health and safety guidelines permit) because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, or transportation limitations?				<b>X</b>
Does the school/school system have a clear and equitable attendance policy that takes into consideration, and does not penalize students, for barriers (e.g., technological issues, families' schedules, etc.) they might face during learning?			<b>X</b>	

# EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE:

Coordination across various departments at APS have worked to ensure access to opportunities for students attempting to connect with the wide array of curricular offerings and supports offered to students across the district. In particular, the transfer team has begun utilizing SchoolMint software to allow families to receive real time updates and to see schools with available capacity which has connected more families to information regarding the school transfer process. Increased advertising in combination with a renewed focus on family engagement from district leadership has set the groundwork for ensuring a future where more equitable access to school communities are available to APS students across the district.

- The administrative transfer process has been noted as being difficult to navigate, opaque, and confusing. The process was noted as leaving families with less means few options in being able access particular schools.
  - Some of the issues related to the administrative process were connected to district wide challenges with family engagement generally. More deeply engaged families tend to be aware of opportunities, while families who cannot / are not as engaged may miss vital information even if sent home with their student.
- In addition, several stakeholders noted a practice of counseling students with behavioral and academic issues away from the city's higher performing schools.

*"Big issue in placement between schools. Since Carver High was transitioned to Carver Early College and Carver STEAM, one is run by the district and one by partners. Students from Forest Hills or Special Ed students are often placed at STEAM. Students tracked to early college have less issues with attendance and behavior. This is a practice not policy but impacts student opportunities."*

*"If you live in South Atlanta and you want to go to school in the North Atlanta cluster, if they have room, your parent could apply for an administrative transfer. What I've come across is there are unspoken rules and a culture that prevents kids from administrative transfer."*

- There is currently a CLL based practice which affects whether students may enroll in schools with dual campus structures. This may limit opportunities for students to access APS schools even if there is open space.

# THEME 3: SPECIAL POPULATIONS

## MAEC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the school/school system have a specific educational equity policy in areas related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?				X
Does the educational equity policy regarding racial equity address the harmful impacts of racial stress and trauma?		X		
Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators in mitigating race-based disparities?				
Is the school/school system dress code free of gender biased consequences and does the policy allow for gender identity expression?		X		
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding accommodations for students with disabilities and English Learners?				X
Are there policies and procedures to assure that no student is denied participation in extracurricular or co-curricular activities (as health and safety guidelines permit) because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, or transportation limitations?				X
Does the school/school system have a clear and equitable attendance policy that takes into consideration, and does not penalize students, for barriers (e.g., technological issues, families' schedules, etc.) they might face during learning?			X	
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding using names students identify as their preferred name and personal pronouns?	X			

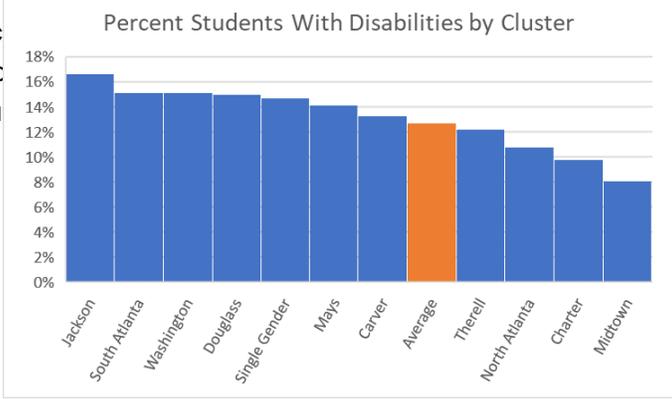
Does the school/school system have a policy regarding bathroom and locker room use by transgender students?	<b>X</b>			
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# EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE

The APS Board has made a clear commitment to supporting its students in special population categories. This is evident in not only the board equity policy but also in discrete policies meant to provide targeted support to English language learners, students with special needs, gifted students, as well as students experiencing homelessness. Varied supports meant to provide targeted assistance to these groups have been clearly outlined and expressed across APS governing documents which are used as tools to support administrators and staff in ensuring the highest quality experiences for the districts’ diverse student population.

- Several respondents noted variability in the level of supportiveness among school level administrator’s willingness to create necessary supports of special populations.
  - o School leaders noted the difficulty in keeping highly qualified staff in special education units due to the intensity of the work in combination with an undesirable pay scale.
  - o Several leaders noted hesitance in housing centers as special needs students who might not be zoned for their schools and do not qualify for alternative statewide assessments, scores will be assigned to the school housing them and not their school of origin.

o Multiple participants from the special education department for the CLL Special Education assigned to work in the



the CLL Special Education assigned to work in the

Source: GADOE Student Level Record SY2018-2021

This graph highlights the percent of students within each cluster that are considered students with disabilities.

- Currently, centers for special education students are not housed in all APS schools meaning some special needs students experience undue burden of bus rides to and from school which can potentially be 2 hours long.

- o Progress Update: APS Special Education Department has begun considering plans to increase the number of special education units across clusters.

*“Districts leave it up to principals if they say yes or no to whether they want the SPED program in their building. These are our most vulnerable kids, so when we master a plan,*

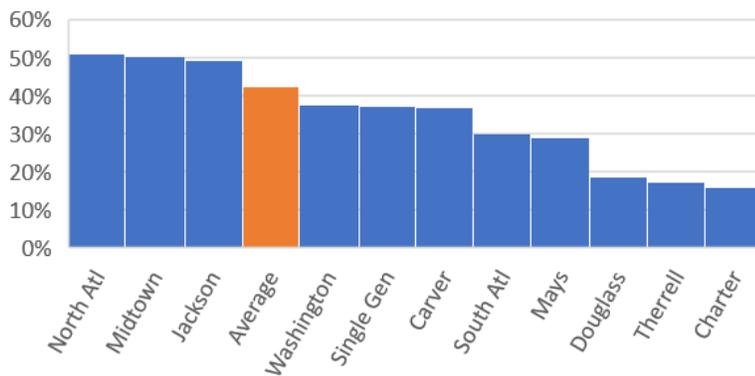
they should be the ones taken care of first. The master plan will help to optimize the placement of our special needs programs. In my mind, where I've seen the most success is concentrating the centers in the central city, so students won't have to cross the entire city to get to school." – CLL STAFF

- Participants noted the uneven distribution of access to gifted coursework and the implications that students being assigned gifted labels in elementary school have access to such programs.
  - Chances for receiving a gifted label in middle and high school tend to decline.
  - Schools receiving lower numbers of gifted students into their population pipeline may lose access to gifted allotments which are used to ensure specialized opportunities for students needing them.
  - Coursework for teachers receiving gifted credentials noted as being cumbersome which may discourage some teachers from applying.

"I think the gifted endorsement that's offered is so overwhelming for teachers even though

ale. The only people getting the kload is like being in college and t of people." – School Leader

Percent of Gifted High School Student's Course Work Considered Gifted Delivery in SY2021



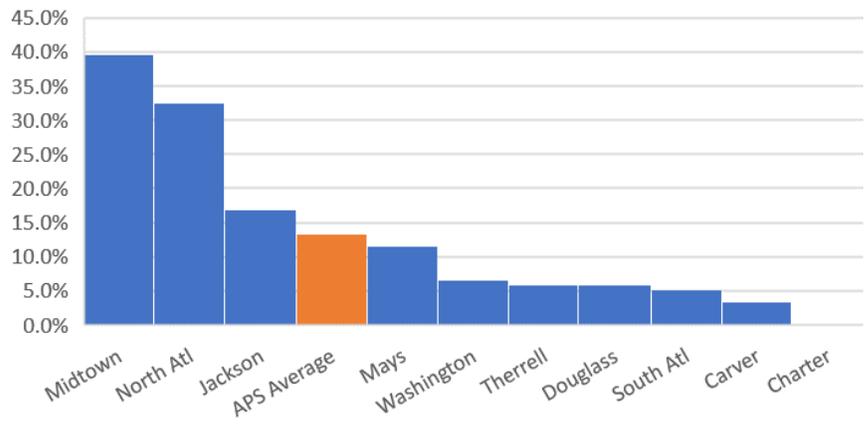
This graph highlights the percent of a gifted high school student's coursework that is considered gifted delivery by GADOE. Gifted high school students at North Atlanta, Midtown, and Jackson receive an average of about 50%

Source: GADOE Student Level Record SY2021

gifted coursework while gifted high school students at Douglass and Therrell receive an average of less than 20%.

This graph highlights the percent of elementary and kindergarten students in each cluster who were referred to the gifted program in

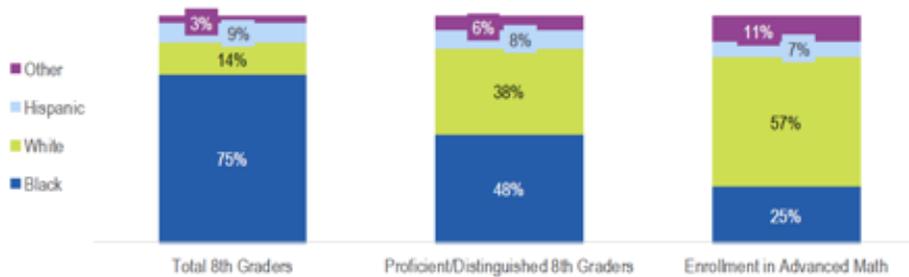
Percent of ES and K Students That Are Referred, by Cluster



Source: GADOE Student and Class Level Record SY2021

## Black 8<sup>th</sup> grade students testing at a “proficient” or “distinguished” level are less likely to be enrolled in advanced math than their other proficient peers.

*Proficiency and Enrollment Rates for 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students by Race/Ethnicity*



*Rates of Enrollment in Advanced Math for Proficient/Distinguished 8<sup>th</sup> Graders*

	District Overall	Black	White	Hispanic	Other
# of Prof/Distinguished Students	1,000	477	377	83	63
# Enrolled in Advanced Math	387	96	221	28	42
% Enrolled in Advanced Math	39%	20%	59%	34%	67%

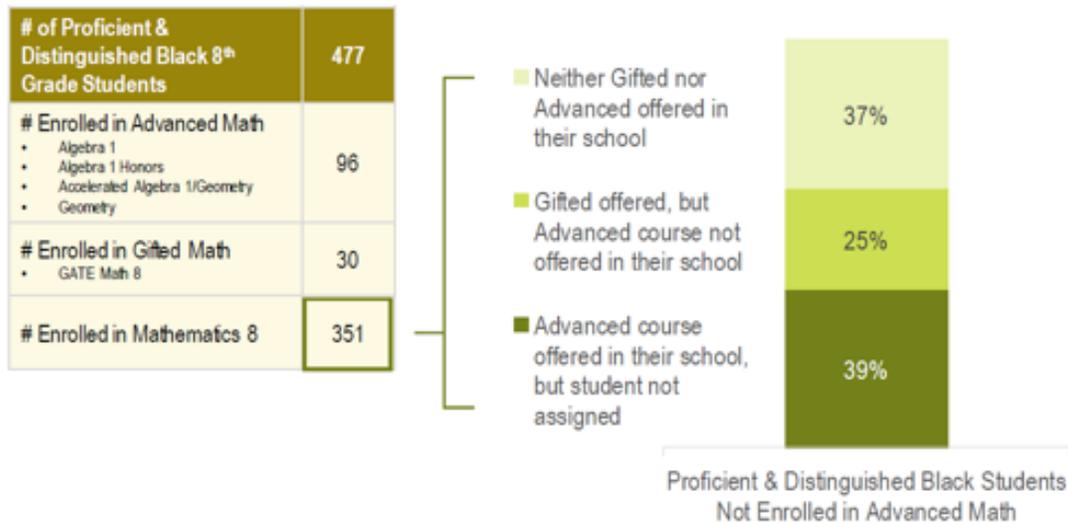
Sources: APS Course Schedule Data SY19-20, APS Student Proficiency Data Georgia Milestones Assessment SY18-19

SY2021. Some clusters refer a much higher percentage of elementary and kindergarten students to the gifted program than others.

This graph highlights that only 20% of the 477 proficient/distinguished Black 8<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in an advanced math course. Alternatively, 59% of the 377 proficient/distinguished White 8<sup>th</sup> graders were enrolled in an advanced math course. Black students represent 75% of the total 8<sup>th</sup> grade population but only 48% of proficient or advanced 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 25% of students enrolled in an advanced math course. Among proficient students, enrollment in advanced math

## Of the 351 proficient and distinguished Black students not enrolled in advanced or gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, 62% attend schools that do not offer an advanced math course.

*Course Opportunities for Proficient & Distinguished Black 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students*



Sources: APS Course Schedule Data SY19-20, APS Student Proficiency Data Georgia Milestones Math Assessment SY18-19

varies significantly by race –where White students and students of other races are disproportionately likely to enroll in advanced math compared to their peers.

This graph highlights that almost 2/3 of proficient and distinguished Black students not enrolled in advanced math attend schools that do not offer an advanced math course. At schools where no advanced or gifted course is offered, there are on average 16 proficient or distinguished Black 8th Graders enrolled. Potential reasons why individual schools may not offer advanced math courses in 8th grade include: Teacher certification constraints, perception of limited quantity of proficient students, and desire to serve advanced students through gifted math course

- There is currently no process in place for serving gifted students who attend schools with higher percentages of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in the district as the school may not have access to gifted teachers. Schools with low populations of gifted students may not have a full-time gifted teacher who can support the curricular needs of this student group.
  - o The under-representation of students of color in the Gifted and Talented Education program and advanced studies is a current issue addressed in Board Policy BBB.

## TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

- There are currently no standard operating procedures or policy guidance to support school leaders and staff in addressing the needs of transgender youth in schools.

- o This includes processes for allowing students access to restrooms and facilities as well as individual representation of students through their preferred names/pronouns.

# THEME 4: CURRICULAR ACCESS

## MAEC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the school/school system have a specific educational equity policy in areas related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?				X
Does the educational equity policy clearly explain the procedures for reporting complaints, investigating complaints, and appeals?		X		
Is the educational equity policy monitored for consistent and complete implementation as well as amended if necessary?				X
Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators in mitigating race-based disparities?		X		
Are there policies and procedures to assure that no student is denied participation in extracurricular or co-curricular activities (as health and safety guidelines permit) because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, or transportation limitations?			X	

## EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE

Atlanta Public Schools has developed clear objectives related to providing high quality access to curricular experiences for students. This is noted in the development of both the APS 5 as well as the district’s development of equity commitments connected to academic achievement for all students. In addition, the district has provided autonomy to school leaders to allow them the ability to make site specific decisions to ensure they can provide targeted instructional opportunities based on the needs of their particular student groups. These efforts are to be recognized and commended as crucial steps in ensuring each student is able to connect with the resources they need in order to thrive in school and beyond. While this is true, some effort to reorganize access may be needed to ensure the board and superintendent’s commitments are fully realized.

- Participants noted the variations in curricular decisions being made at the school level has some impact on the type of access to educational resources available to both students and teachers.

*“Different clusters are using varying curriculums for their students. The question lies in what’s the connection between the curricular resources. If the district offers PD to support us, they are just providing a framework and not professional development geared toward those particular resources because different schools are using different programs. Schools should have some choice but that does impact equity in curricular offering in each school.”*

*“I think the core curriculum should be standard and then the supplemental resources are able to be specific. Then the district can provide us with support for those resources and then the people at the curriculum department don’t have to be stretched. If everyone was using the same curriculum, then you can break things up by instructional need. Then we can make sure that the supports are there because we have one general curricular resource that is used.”*

- There is some concern that CTAE courses are inequitably distributed across the geographic zones in the city. There is a perception that there is a heightened access to career and college readiness courses opportunities in the North side of the city versus work skills training being geared toward school communities on the south side of the city.
- Several participants noted concern that Dual Language Immersion programs meant to support English Language Learners may have shifted priorities away from English learners to support native speakers accessing advanced language coursework.
- Lack of district provided transportation opportunities noted as being a hindrance for families desiring to exercise school choice and for students enrolled in dual enrollment courses to access their desired school.

*“The kids at my school don’t necessarily have access to all of the dual enrollment opportunities. We mostly go to Atlanta Metro because there isn’t transportation to some of the other schools like Georgia State.” – Student*

- Some are concerned that student withdrawals may be used as a punishment for students with poor attendance records.

*“I think withdrawals are a major challenge. We must make sure withdrawals that we make are in compliance with what the regulations are. There could be pockets of families who are not aware of the policies and their student can be withdrawn inappropriately. Right now, state regulation allows APS to withdraw a student without permission of guardian if there are 10 days of consecutive absence or more.”*

*“There are supposed to be attempts to follow up. The spirit of the law is that the student might have moved outside the district and need to be removed. What we see are instances where we’ve withdrawn the kid after 5 days. Schools are using it to be punitive, almost like an attendance strategy.”*

# THEME 5: PARTNERSHIPS

## MEAC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Is the educational equity policy monitored for consistent and complete implementation as well as amended if necessary?				X
Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators in mitigating race-based disparities?		X		
Does the school/school system have a clear mission statement regarding educational equity?				X
Did all relevant stakeholder groups (staff, families, students, and community members) participate in district decision-making and the development of the district action plans?				X

## EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE

The APS Partnerships team represents a key office for ensuring access to unique opportunities and support of the district’s efforts to engage community partners. Critical work has been done to deepen APS’ relationship to community businesses and organizations. This includes but is not limited to the creation of THEO, a unique collaborative opportunity which has worked to engage area faith-based leaders in connecting with schools to provide targeted support to families and students across the district. In addition, the APS partnerships team has been highlighted as a critical resource for connecting schools with necessary supports.

- There is a need to develop a framework to support the partnerships team in prioritizing their work for specific school communities and their needs.
- APS currently is lacking an evaluative process in place to understand the efficacy of partnerships so there is no way to understand what is working and what is not. There is also some concern that partnerships may lead to schools working to meet the concerns of partners without partners meeting the true needs of the school community.

*“Partnerships all have great intentions but are they helping us to move the work forward in terms of what the school needs are? Sometimes it’s a hindrance because you are trying to satisfy the needs of the partners versus the partner satisfying the needs of the school.”*

- There is a perception among multiple participants that development support is uneven across geographic zones. Some of this is credited to resources housed in specific communities (businesses, PTA’s, foundations), while some of this issue is attributed to the levels of self-advocacy on the part of specific school administrators.

*“I also think of equity in terms of partnerships. Some of us in the revitalization zones have access to the partners in the community where they can get those. Some of us only have drought areas with only small businesses. How can the partnership office work to establish some sort of corporate partnership for the clusters or for the individual schools? It could work at the cluster level. I think it’s just left to the principal to have to do that on their own and we might not have that skill set.”*

# THEME 6: ENGAGEMENT

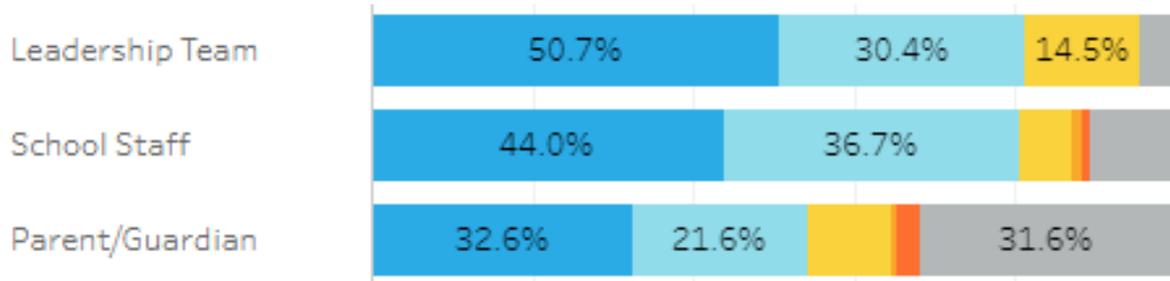
## MEAC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the educational equity policy clearly explain the procedures for reporting complaints, investigating complaints, and appeals?			<b>X</b>	
Is the educational equity policy monitored for consistent and complete implementation as well as amended if necessary?				<b>X</b>
Are updates to policies and procedures publicized to staff, students, and families in an accessible manner and on a timely and continuous basis?				<b>X</b>
Did all relevant stakeholder groups (staff, families, students, and community members) participate in district decision-making and the development of the district action plans?				<b>X</b>

## EVALUATIVE RATIONALE AND EVIDENCE

APS Board Policy BBB states the district will be responsible for creating robust cluster and school-based communications plans. The APS Communications team has worked diligently to ensure processes for communication and outreach to community members are consistent with the board’s directives and in line with goals of various departments and school leaders. The development of Go-Teams and various school level processes to ensure increased engagement across the district have provided direct opportunities for family engagement in decision-making processes inside the school building. While these efforts are ongoing, multiple stakeholders noted difficulty in accessing various communications distributed both at the level of CLL and individual schools.

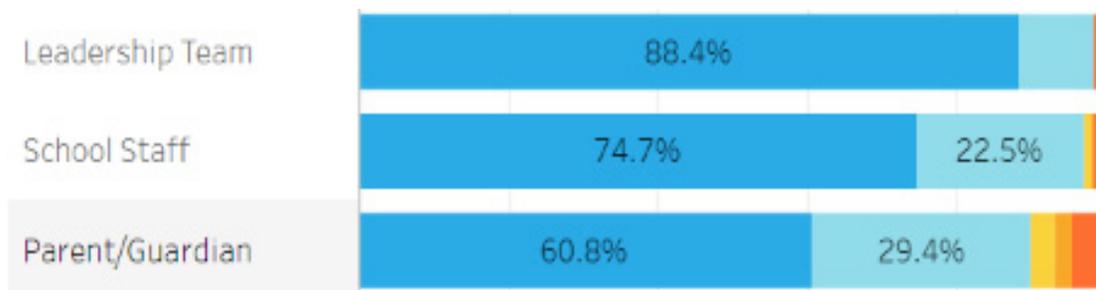
- Communications sent out from CLL and schools may be written at a high level which is not always accessible to families who may not have advanced literacy skills.
  - Some concerns also arose that Spanish speaking families may not always have access to translated materials.
- School level communications plans may not be easily understood or accessible by parents.
  - Some schools require families to sign up for email lists to receive outgoing communications which means some parents may not be receiving pertinent information if they are unaware of the need to sign up for such listservs.
- School websites and the information available on them are inconsistent across schools, leaving some families with less access to necessary information to support their learners.
- Multiple participants noted a less than desirable level of responsiveness from APS staff members when attempting to navigate various school/district related issues.



(n: Leadership Team = 10; School Staff = 46; Parent/Guardian = 109) Source: APS Graphs: Family Engagement Diagnostic

This graph represents the answers to the **2021 Family Engagement Survey Statement 9**: “It is easy for families to get interpretation and/or translation services if they need it.” Parent/Guardians responded “Strong” or “Rising” far less than leadership teams or school staff. However, ignoring those who responded N/A, the remaining parent/guardians responded “Strong” at a rate of 48%.

(Responses were only collected from Mays and Jackson Clusters.)



(n: Leadership Team = 1; School Staff = 14; Parent/Guardian = 72) Source: APS Graphs: Family Engagement Diagnostic

This graph represents the answers to the **2021 Family Engagement Survey Statement 7**: “The school communicates with families in multiple ways (i.e. phone, website, e-mail, REMIND, Class Dojo, Infinite Campus, fliers, person to person) about important issues and events.”

Parents/Guardians responded “Strong” or “Rising” far less than the leadership team. (Responses were only collected from Mays and Jackson Clusters)

**Question Rating Scale**

- Strong - Respondents believe that this is occurring throughout the school/classroom.
- Rising - Respondents believe that this is occurring throughout the school/classroom but needs minimal improvement.
- Developing - Respondents believe that this is occurring at the school/classroom but needs improvement.
- Focus - Respondents believe this needs significant improvement and receives minimal emphasis at this school/classroom.
- Priority - Respondents believe that this is rarely or not occurring at the school/classroom.
- NA - Respondents are not sure if this does or does not happen at the school/classroom

# THEME 7: ADULT CULTURE

## MEAC RANKINGS:

Criteria / Question	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
Does the educational equity policy clearly explain the procedures for reporting complaints, investigating complaints, and appeals?				X
Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators in mitigating race-based disparities?		X		
Did all relevant stakeholder groups (staff, families, students, and community members) participate in district decision-making and the development of the district action plans?				X

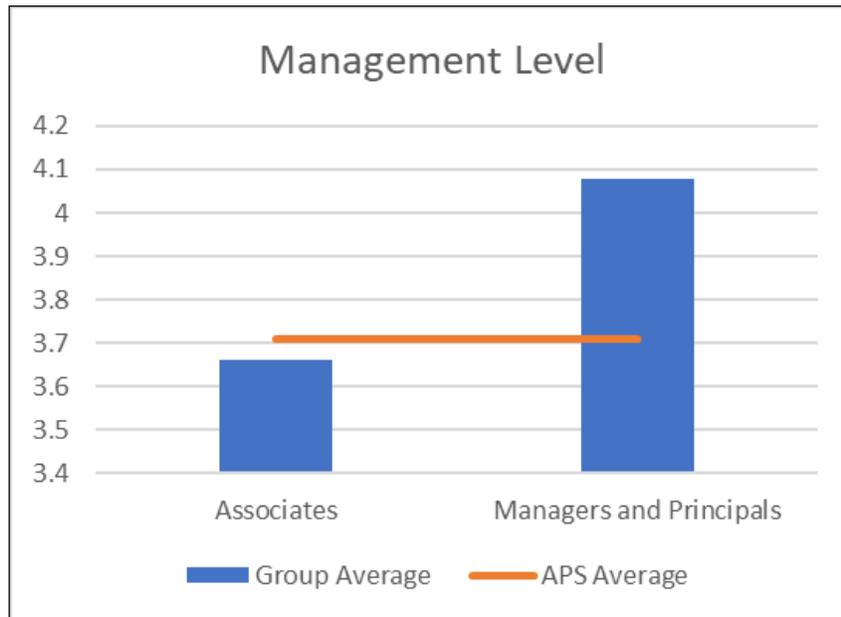
## EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE

The APS Board has highlighted a commitment to supporting not only the students of the district but to ensure a healthy and productive working environment for its adult staff members. This can be highlighted in the intentional work of the Strategy Team and Human Resources teams to engage employee voices through the administration of the Gallup survey. It is also noted in the work of the APS Wellness Office and Social Emotional Learning Departments which work to create unique learning and wellness opportunities to provide staff with access to chances to manage mental and physical wellbeing. These efforts have provided great benefit to the entire APS staff. While important, some concern related to staff ability to interact with superiors was elevated across focus groups and in internal data sources.

- Several internal stakeholders noted the likelihood for staff to avoid speaking about inequities in their school community for fear of reprisal from building level administrators. While this occurred, participants also highlighted their deep appreciation for the district’s efforts to survey employees and include their voices in the decision-making processes of the district.
  - Progress Update: Superintendent Herring’s Office has specifically taken on the task of supporting culture change which would address staff feelings of belonging and connectedness.

*“You may need to speak to HR about retaliation and bullying from administrators toward staff. There are admin who are listed in cases of bullying and retaliation. Are things actually fair in the district? Can people speak up? Are the claims actually being followed up on?” -CLL STAFF MEMBER*

*“I really like that APS does focus groups like these and allows space for the teachers’ voices to be heard. It was not like this in my former district” - TEACHER*



Source: Gallup Access: Atlanta Public Schools Fall 2021 Employee Engagement Survey

This graph represents the answers to the **Atlanta Public Schools Fall 2021 Employee Engagement Survey** statement: "I feel free to express my thoughts, feelings, and disagreements to my supervisor – (Likert 1-5)" There are large differences in the average response between associates and managers. Managers are recorded as any employee with direct reports and associates are recorded as employees with none.

(n: Associates = 3,652; Managers = 346)

- Several school leaders noted their perception of a disconnect between the work of the school leaders and the staff at the central office and the implications this has for the workflow.
  - o "People in the Central Office need to be in the schools a few times a month. There isn't any way to decide what's happening when the people don't come. Being admin at CLL and admin in the school is different. In order to make decisions, you have to know what's going on at the ground level. If you haven't been in a school-based setting, then how can you know what's happening? We aren't just sitting at our desks. The workload isn't equitable. We are asked to do a whole lot and to be able to deliver the information and so administrative staff having knowledge of what we have to do on the ground is important." – School Leader

# Most Common Equity Related Challenges

- Stakeholders noted the amount of flexibility and autonomy allocated to school leaders represented one of the key challenges confronting the district in creating an equitable environment.
  - While stakeholders recognized the importance of flexibility in allowing principals to make decisions geared toward the needs of their community, they also believed flexibility without guard rails has led to inequities as it relates to the types of opportunities offered to students at different school communities.
- General confusion around the practical components of equity were also consistently noted as a challenge. Stakeholders highlighted having a general understanding of the term equity but discussed the need for more guidance around how equity would have practical implications for their work.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Does Infinite Campus have the capacity for increased functionality to provide school leaders with an array of disciplinary options associated with common referral types?
2. What sort of tool could be created to allow staff to express their ideas on how to address inequities without placing them in a situation where they might be retaliated against?
3. What sorts of training could be undergone to support APS staff in their efforts to utilize plain language when crafting public facing communications?
4. How might a framework be created to support the APS partnerships team in prioritizing development support for schools with the most need? How might an evaluation plan be put into place to ensure the efficacy of current partnerships?
5. What policies or procedures are needed in order to make the administrative transfer process more accessible to APS families? How might this process be connected to the district's current work around family engagement?
6. What sorts of supports are most necessary for school leaders as they attempt to serve the needs of their various special population groups?



# APPENDIX

# Equity The Forefront

*\*Attribution: This tool was adopted from the Puget Sound Educational Service Districts' Racial Equity Policy Review Worksheet.*

**Equity Policy Analysis Tool Objective:** To support the APS's goals of eliminating inequity and closing the opportunity gap, we will incorporate an equity analysis when creating and/or revising agency policy. The following five best practices guide the user through a process of collaborating with historically marginalized communities to ensure all agency policies are in alignment with agency goals.

We Agree:

- That the importance of training and capacity building within our organization, departments, and internal and external programs is paramount. Increasing the number of trained and skilled employees, including leadership, staff, board members, etc. will not only help to make improvements supporting equity, but will also help to develop an anti-racist culture within our organization.
- That in order to eliminate racial inequities, it is essential that race be clearly called out and institutional and structural racism be addressed within our own organization as well as in the broader systems with which we interact.
- To explore and develop a shared understanding relating to equity, and we also recognize that we and our external partners are all at different places as individuals, programs, and departments. We are committed to move forward with a focus that is intentional and strategic within our organization and our external partners. We will openly share challenges, successes and lessons learned to help move the sum of our equity work forward.
- To have collective buy-in to equity best practices, we will each take responsibility for using the policy equity tool.
- That how the policy equity tool is implemented and used will differ from program to program, department to department and across our organization. Accountability for implementation and use within our own organization and to our respective communities (children, students, families and schools) will be essential.
- To approach equity analyses from an evaluative / continuous improvement perspective, as opposed to a checklist. We will seek to strengthen programs, policies and procedures until inequities are eliminated.
- That if the strategy, practice, policy, or procedure works for our most vulnerable communities, it works for everyone. The reverse, however, is not true.
- That we will not let the perceived barriers such as (time, agendas, schedules, etc.) prevent us from interrupting patterns of inequity.
- That use of the tool may not be linear. For example, users may want to start with question 3 in order to ensure they have a clear understanding of the community conditions that may be impacted by the implementation of this policy.
- That after use of the tool, changes in policy may not be needed. However, the procedures associated with that policy may need to be created or enhanced to ensure equity can be achieved.

**Policy Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reviewer/Reviewers:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Racial Equity Tool – Using Best Practices

### 1. How does the policy promote inclusive collaboration and engagement?

#### DIVERSITY EQUITY BEST PRACTICES

#### LOOK-FORS

1. Which community does this policy impact? The APS internal community? External community? Both?
2. How will you identify the diverse groups potentially affected by this policy?
3. What process will you undertake to collaborate and engage in a dialogue with diverse communities (BIPOC, SPED, LGBTQ, Religious Minorities, etc. internally and/or externally) who have traditionally not been involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of this policy?

### 2. How does the policy reflect a consideration of community conditions and set goals for eliminating racial inequity? (Assessment and goal setting should be a process with community involvement.)

#### RACIAL EQUITY BEST PRACTICES

#### LOOK-FORS

1. Are the community conditions and/or agency racial inequities that may manifest as a result of this policy clearly documented? If not, what is your plan for assessing the community conditions?
2. Are there goals and measures for eliminating racial inequity, if so, what are they?
3. How will goals be adjusted regularly to keep pace with changing community needs and racial demographics?
4. What additional information could be added to strengthen the policy?
5. What additional information could be added to other policies which are cross-referenced with this policy?

## Racial Equity Tool – Using Best Practices

### 3. How will the policy expand opportunity and access for the APS internal and/or external community?

INCLUSIVE EQUITY BEST PRACTICES	LOOK-FORS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the policy increase opportunity and/or access for those who historically have been excluded? This means, more explicitly, who benefits from and/or who is harmed by the policy?</li> <li>2. What are the strategies to improve access for ethnically diverse communities, including immigrants and refugees? Are interpretation and translation policies helping to improve access?</li> <li>3. What additional information could be added to strengthen the policy, or the policies cross-referenced with this policy?</li> </ol>	

### 4. How will the policy affect systemic change? (An analysis of power and gatekeeping is critical. How are issues of internalized superiority and inferiority being attended to?)

SOCIAL JUSTICE EQUITY BEST PRACTICES (RACIAL EQUITY)	LOOK-FORS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the policy make changes within the organization to eliminate institutional racism?</li> <li>2. How does the policy work to address and eliminate structural racism?</li> <li>3. How will strategies be adjusted regularly to keep pace with changing community needs and racial demographics?</li> </ol>	

### 5. What strategies for eliminating racial inequity does the policy suggest?

SOCIAL JUSTICE BEST PRACTICES (ACCESS)	LOOK-FORS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the overall goals and outcomes? What are the specific strategies for decreasing inequity and/or increasing student achievement? How do the specific strategies work to decrease inequity and increase student achievement?</li> <li>2. Does the policy make provisions for accountability? If so, what are they?</li> <li>3. Is there any additional information that could be added to strengthen the policy, or the policies cross-referenced with this policy?</li> <li>4. Is there any additional information that could be added to strengthen the policy or the policies cross-referenced with this policy?</li> </ol>	

**After conducting the analysis: What are the lessons learned?**

**What resources are needed to make changes? What are the next steps?**