Westwood Public Schools
Equity Audit Report

Public Consulting Group LLC

February 2023

Acknowledgements

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) would like to thank the many individuals who made this Equity Audit of Westwood Public Schools possible. We would like to acknowledge the commitment and support from Emily Parks, Superintendent, to this audit. This report would not have been possible without the support of Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent and Lateefah Franck, Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships, who, in addition to Superintendent Parks, met with PCG staff weekly throughout the duration of the audit, provided all the documents and data necessary to conduct our analysis, and supported the logistics to conduct community-wide surveys, focus groups, and interviews. In addition, we would like to thank all the parents, teachers, administrators, students, and school committee members who took the time to meet with PCG staff to offer their perspectives regarding educational equity in the district.

About Public Consulting Group (PCG)

Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) is a management consulting firm that offers technical assistance, strategic planning, professional development, financial management, systems development, and other management advisory services to public sector clients. Established in 1986, PCG has consistently delivered on its motto of "*Solutions that Matter.*" Our education practice is committed to helping schools, school districts, and state education agencies strengthen their performance, streamline their operations, and improve their programs and instruction so that all students have what they need to succeed.

Public Consulting Group (PCG) Commitment to Educational Equity

Equity demands that we consider the needs of each student with a discerning eye to the students who are historically marginalized or treated with low expectations, often due to cultural and linguistic diversity, identified disability, or gender identity. Our equity audit work is part of PCG's enduring commitment to supporting equitable practices in districts and schools.

For more information see [Equity Education Services: Assess, Implement, and Maintain - PCG | Public Consulting Group](#)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In June 2022, Westwood Public Schools contracted with Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) to conduct an independent, external Equity Audit. The audit in Westwood was designed to examine several areas of the school system's operations—its policies, practices, and programs—through the lens of equity with the goal to identify structural and programmatic barriers that inhibit an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

The equity audit supports the Westwood Public Schools Strategic Priority, to *"implement programs and instructional practices that recognize and support the needs of students and families in an increasingly diverse community."[1]* In order to advance WPS' efforts, the district sought a partner organization to conduct an external audit that would develop a set of customized recommendations, grounded in WPS' data, and help the system proactively foster a safe, supportive and inclusive education environment where each student feels valued, challenged and prepared for the future in a global society.

Westwood Public Schools has adopted the following definition of educational equity:

> At its core, educational equity means fairness or giving every student what they need; it means ensuring that each child's experience matches what we want for every child's experience. Since students bring different strengths, experiences, and challenges into our classrooms, an equity focus helps us be thoughtful about providing a range of supports, opportunities, and resources to make sure we don't leave any student behind.

This equity audit takes a step toward expanding the conversation within the district and builds on equity work undertaken in Westwood in recent years. These include launching the new position of Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships and subsequent hiring in February 2022, continued participation in and expansion of the State's Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity program (METCO), and supporting district wide professional development opportunities including Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) Diversity Professional Learning Community (PLC) Group.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION AUDIT FRAMEWORK

Equity and inclusion audits have gained momentum as a strategy for school systems to systemically examine their policies, programs, and processes, and determine actionable steps for the correction of potential inequities. A range of conceptual frameworks have emerged to guide this work.

The framework and guiding questions PCG used for this equity and inclusion audit is built from our synthesis of research-based evidence and extensive experience. The overarching question the audit seeks to answer is:

> **"How do the policies, practices, and programs in Westwood Public Schools promote and sustain educational equity?"**

The audit framework seeks to answer the broad question by examining WPS operations and education service delivery in four focus areas highlighted in the table below. Each area has been identified as a core domain in which to identify assets and gaps that propel or inhibit achieving system goals, driven by guiding questions specific to each focus area.

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[1] Westwood Public Schools (2021). "Curriculum Updates Supporting Diversity, Equity & Integration." *School Committee Meeting*.

Figure 1. Equity Audit Framework and Guiding Questions

Equity Focus Area	Guiding Questions
Leadership, Policies, and Practices	To what extent do **policies and processes** in WPS promote a diverse, equitable and inclusive district?
Student Access to Learning	How are **student outcomes and access to advanced learning opportunities** linked to student characteristics and demographics? How are **student discipline referrals** linked to student characteristics and demographics?
Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development	How do **human resource policies and practices** in WPS support hiring and retaining a diverse workforce? How does district **professional development** support equity, diversity, and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination?
Culture, Climate, and Partnerships	To what **extent do the stakeholders of WPS feel welcomed and supported** in Westwood Public Schools? How does WPS authentically engage community voices?

REPORT TERMINOLOGY

There are several terms used throughout this report that require definition and clarification within the WPS context. Some terms that appear throughout the report include:

Achievement Gap: The difference in academic performance between different ethnic and racial groups, income levels, gender, and special student groups.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

DEI&B: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

DESE: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Low-Income[2]: Defined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a student who participated in one of the following state-administered programs: SNAP (food stamps); TAFDC (welfare); DCF (foster care); MassHealth (Medicaid) in October, March, or June as well as students identified by districts as homeless and students the district confirmed had met the low-income criteria through the supplemental process and collected the required supporting documentation (SIMS DOE056).

Economically Disadvantaged[3]: Calculated based on a student's participation in one or more of the following state-administered programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC); the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) foster care program; and MassHealth (Medicaid).

EL: Any student in Pre-K to grade 12, whose home language background is a language other than English and whose proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English is not yet sufficient to provide the student with: a) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments; b) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or c) the opportunity to participate fully in the school setting.

ES: Elementary School

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[2] DESE (208). "Profiles Help - About the Data." School & District Profiles.
[3] Ibid.

HS: High School

HMI: Students and families of students who hold historically marginalized identities such as BIPOC students, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, students receiving Special Education services, students whose first language is not English, etc.

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

METCO: Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity

MS: Middle School

Opportunity Gap: The disparity in access to the inputs, experiences, and resources needed for each student to be academically successful.

PCG: Public Consulting Group LLC

PD: Professional Development

PLC: Professional Learning Community

Students with Disabilities: Student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in SIMS.

WPS: Westwood Public Schools

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The report is organized into 9 chapters and 3 appendices:

- **Chapter 1** introduces this report.

- **Chapter 2** describes the current context of Westwood Public Schools community including enrollment and population trends.

- **Chapter 3** lays out the five priority recommendations for immediate impact and implementation.

- **Chapter 4** describes the audit methodology including our approach to this work, our data collection and analysis.

- **Chapters 5-8** present key findings divided into the focus areas of the framework: 5. Leadership, Policies, and Practices, 6. Student Access to Learning, 7. Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development, 8. Culture, Climate, and Partnerships.

- **Chapter 9** contains a brief conclusion to the report.

- **Appendix A** contains an additional analysis of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data to support the findings from Chapter 6 (Student Access to Learning).

- **Appendix B** is a table of figures throughout the report.

- **Appendix C** is a bibliography of references.

2. WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMUNITY

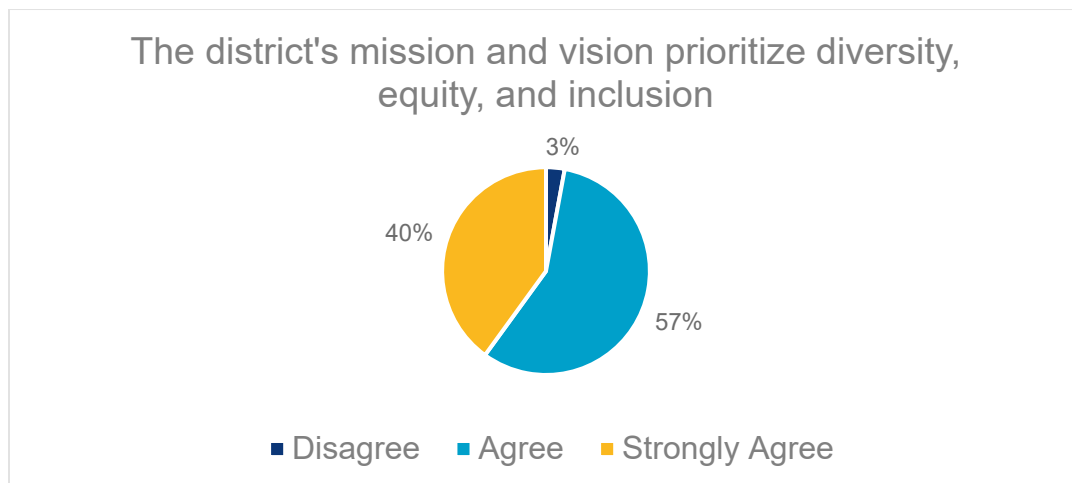## DISTRICT COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY

Over the past few years, Westwood Public Schools has been internally examining the district's current practices and how they are serving all students. In the 2018-2021 Strategy for District Improvement, Westwood Public Schools introduced its Strategic Priority 3.2: *"Implement programs and instructional practices that recognize and support the needs of students and families in an increasingly diverse community."*

The District has given attention to actions and activities aimed at building the necessary framework and infrastructure to better realize this stated priority. Actions and activities undertaken over the last two years include but are not limited to:

- WPS hired a full-time Director of Equity, Inclusion and Community Partnerships in February 2022.

- There has also been professional learning for instructional staff and school leadership including:

    - Supporting Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Students
    - Offerings through Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement
    - Teacher Diversification Professional Learning Community Group through DESE[4]
    - Teacher Diversification Pilot Program through DESE[5]
    - Building-based in-service Equity trainings

PCG saw ample evidence of Westwood Public schools' efforts in providing an inclusive and equitable education to each student. Over 97% of district leaders believe or strongly believe the district's mission and vision prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. WPS's willingness to undertake this audit is a testament to the interest of system leadership to begin this journey in earnest.

Figure 2. Leadership Equity Survey Responses to the District's Mission and Vision

The district's mission and vision prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

3%
40%
57%

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[4] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (June, 2021). Teacher Diversification Professional Learning Community. https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/community.html

[5] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (June, 2021). Teacher Diversification Pilot Program Grant. https://www.doe.mass.edu/csi/diverse-workforce/pilot-grant.html

CONTEXT

In recent years, two primary political action groups have emerged within the town of Westwood: One Westwood and Inclusive Westwood. These two groups represent opposing viewpoints about how the district should approach equity work. The One Westwood ideology centers on equality over equity, ending race-based teaching, and ending curriculum related to sexuality and gender identity at the elementary level.[6] Inclusive Westwood aims to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront of schools, and ensure that all students are represented in WPS curriculum.[7] With increasing divide amongst the Westwood community, as mentioned in teacher, district leadership, and family focus groups as well as school committee member interviews, Westwood Public Schools has been internally examining the district's current practices and how they are serving the needs of every student. District leadership hired Public Consulting Group to conduct an external audit of district practices through an equity lens. The goal of this audit is to deeply understand and identify steps needed to ensure equitable opportunities for successful outcomes for each student served by Westwood Public School District.

STUDENT, SCHOOL, AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

Westwood Public Schools serves a student population of 2,894 students in grades Pre-K through 12th grade in eight schools including the Westwood Integrated Preschool, five elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Westwood Public Schools neighbors five school systems of comparable size: Dedham (2,567), Needham (5,515), Walpole (3,667), Medfield (2,530), and Dover-Sherborn (1,160).

- Westwood Public Schools student body is majority White (75%), 12% Asian, 5% Hispanic or Latinx, 5% Multiracial, 2% Black or African American, less than 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and 0% Native American.
- Approximately 7% of WPS students are considered low-income by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education standards. At the state level, 44% of all students are low-income. Of the neighboring districts, Dover-Sherborn is the only district with fewer low-income students (6%) than Westwood Public Schools (Dedham – 30%, Needham - 8%, Medfield – 9%, Walpole – 17%).
- Approximately 20% of the district's students have an IEP. This rate is aligned to the Massachusetts state average of 19%. Neighboring districts have a wider range of students with IEPs: Dedham – 22%, Dover-Sherborn – 18%, Needham – 18%, Walpole – 15%, Medfield – 13%.
- Less than 1% of the district's students are English Language Learners. This rate is significantly lower than the state average of 11%. Of the neighboring districts, Dover-Sherborn is the only district with fewer English Language Learners (0.3%) than Westwood Public Schools. The remaining 4 districts also have fewer ELLs than the state average: Dedham – 5%, Needham – 3%, Medfield – 1%, Walpole – 4%.
- The district is governed by a five-member School Committee who are elected at-large.

A baseline step to understanding educational equity in Westwood Public Schools is to examine student racial and ethnic characteristics and high needs status across the district. PCG used data from SY2018-2019, SY2019-2020, SY2020-2021 and SY2021-2022 to provide a comprehensive district snapshot and identify enrollment trends over the previous four years.

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[6] https://www.onewestwood.org/
[7] https://patch.com/massachusetts/westwood/inclusive-westwood-works-bring-equity-forefront

It is important to note the changes that have occurred in Westwood Public Schools over the previous two decades. In 2000, the district was 96% White. In recent years, more families of color have moved to the district and in SY2021-22, the district was 75% White. Roughly ninety percent of students who live in Westwood attend Westwood Public Schools. The figure below represents elements of the demographic makeup of Westwood Public schools from 2019 to 2022.

Figure 3. Westwood Public School Demographics (2019-2022)

Year	N	African American or Black	Asian	Hispanic or Latinx	White	Native American or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	EL	Students with IEPs	Economically Disadvantaged
2019	3,084	2%	11%	4%	79%	0%	0%	4%	1%	17%	5%
2020	3,000	2%	11%	4%	77%	0%	0%	4%	1%	18%	5%
2021	2,952	2%	12%	5%	76%	0%	0%	5%	1%	18%	6%
2022	2,894	2%	12%	5%	75%	0%	0%	5%	1%	20%	7%

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

METCO PROGRAM

Westwood Public Schools has participated in the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program for 54 years creating a community comprised of Westwood and Boston Residents. There are currently 77 students enrolled at Westwood Public Schools through the METCO program.

The METCO program provides an opportunity for Urban and suburban students and families to integrate the school system and provide "students with a strong academic foundation rich in cultural, educational, ethnic, socioeconomic, and racial diversity," and "foster the opportunity for children from Boston and from neighboring suburbs to develop a deeper understanding of each other in an integrated public-school setting."[8] The only requirements to participate in the METCO program are permanent residency in Boston[9] and an interest in obtaining an education from "opportunity-rich" suburban school districts.[10] Academic experience, test scores, income status, and grade point average are not part of METCO program participation or requirements.

There is an intentional effort to create a sense of belonging within the Westwood community for Boston resident students who are away from their home environment. The Westwood METCO program offers academic support, hosts activities and events that foster integration, and provide supports for students, their families and teachers that create a sense of belonging within the Westwood Community. All supports and activities are offered through the METCO program as standard approaches to creating a positive school climate and equitable opportunities for students within the program.

While METCO is rooted in racial desegregation and busing students from schools with less resources to schools with more resources, the program as depicted by the image below, is now also about providing all

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[8] Westwood Public Schools. *Elementary faculty meetings sample presentation*.
[9] METCO (2022). "Required Documents;" Westwood METCO (2022). "Westwood METCO Info Session," slide 8.
[10] Westwood METCO (2022). "Deerfield Faculty Meeting," slide 3.

students opportunities to become globally conscious and culturally aware.[11] The expansion of the METCO program during the 2022-2023 school year into one elementary school at Westwood Public Schools speaks to a desire to create a sense of belonging for the purpose of creating more sustainable relationships between our Boston and Westwood school communities.

METCO TODAY...

Not just this kind of movement.
More than a busing program.

This kind of movement.
METCO provides equitable educational opportunities, diversity and inclusion for All children can learn together.

GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT, THEN AND NOW

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[11] Westwood METCO (2022). "Westwood METCO Info Session," slide 11.

3. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

PCG found ample evidence that Westwood Public Schools has strengths on which to build toward providing an inclusive and equitable education to each student that it serves. Its willingness to undertake this audit is a testament to the interest of district leadership to begin this journey in earnest.

Our recommendations are grounded in district data and are drawn from research-informed strategies and best practices recognized to improve equity and student outcomes. PCG believes that with a commitment to carry forward the recommendations in this report and the active engagement of a wide range of stakeholders with the planning process and implementation will position the district on a path for success to provide an inclusive and equitable education for every student.

The following five priority recommendations were identified as the highest-leverage next steps to move the district's equity work forward.

Priority Recommendation 1: Equity Communication Plan

Create an Equity Communication Plan to develop key messages around equity to share both internally and externally. This Equity Communication Plan should identify ways to include all stakeholders in hearing and understanding those key messages, including how messages will be presented to both internal stakeholder groups and the larger WPS community, including students and families. The Equity Communication Plan must include the following:

- A clear vision and common language for equity across WPS;

- An explicit definition of how WPS' existing vision, mission statement, tagline, and strategic goals relate to equity;

- Actionable goals around communication and community understanding of equity messages and concepts, along with measurable targets to track to determine progress towards those goals;

- Articulation of the Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships' role, responsibilities, and annual goals to help build awareness and understanding of their work;

- Identification of collaboration needs across departments, offices, and schools to meet the determined goals.

The Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships should lead and coordinate the collaborative development of this plan and its maintenance.

Priority Recommendation 2: Equity Decision-Making Framework

Select and implement an Equity Decision-Making Framework for all decisions made within WPS. Adopt an equity decision-making framework through which all decisions are reviewed. In order to end individual, institutional, and structural racism and bias in the district, all leaders must consistently and intentionally apply an equity-lens to every decision made. When making decisions within WPS, leaders should ask, "Who is being well served, and who is left out or harmed by the new policy, practice, or program?" It is easy to say that all decisions will be made with equity in mind, but without an explicit Equity Impact Analysis tool, protocol, or framework, it is highly unlikely that the district can stay true to the vision.

Within this work, there needs to be ongoing training for administrators and educators on how and why to use the tool in order to ensure fidelity of implementation. The Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships should lead development of this framework.

Priority Recommendation 3: Equity Data Collection, Tracking, and Reporting Plan

Develop an Equity Data Collection, Tracking, and Reporting Plan. This plan should be explicit in providing the district with an implementation roadmap for driving the district's equity work through data. The district should begin by determining what data are needed to track progress towards equity goals and taking inventory of existing data gaps. Once data needs and current inventory are defined, the district should fix any discrepancies in existing data and systems and then work to develop systems to collect and report newly identified data needs. This plan should also include:

- Regular disaggregation of student-level data by race and ethnicity, English Learner status, socio-economic status, and disability status as feasible and appropriate and consistent utilization of this disaggregated data to inform decision-making and establish follow-up actions;

- The creation of Student Equity Data Reports that are explicitly tied to the district's equity goals and allow educators and administrators to prioritize data-driven strategies to close achievement and opportunity gaps and ensure each student has access to the supports and services they need;

- Development of an anonymous and accessible reporting system for students, staff, and families to report instances of race-based harassment, incidents of bias, and bullying and access resources for help and support;

- Systems to collect and use data to guide the work of recruitment, retention, and hiring in the district including tracking the demographic information of all applicants to the district, the demographic makeup of the staff at each school, and the retention and advancement of staff members by demographics.

- Development of a system to address student discipline data collection and tracking. The creation of this system will assist staff by providing quantitative and qualitative data regarding discipline practices and which students are disproportionality affected by these practices.

This plan should explicitly emphasize the importance of continuous monitoring of all data sources and reports to inform actions. Reviewing data is key to ensuring that no group is being disproportionately affected by any policy, program, or actions and strategies should be continuously adjusted based on the review of data.

Priority Recommendation 4: Director of Human Resources

Hire a Director of Human Resources with an explicit focus on equity and workforce diversity. By establishing an internal role focused solely on the work of improving recruitment, hiring, and retention policies and practices in the district, WPS will be able to make intentional, consistent progress in these areas. This person will also be responsible for ensuring that tools and practices, such as equity-focused interview questions and protocols, are implemented with fidelity across the district and that resources are consistently shared across schools. The initial focus of this person should include:

- Setting explicit, measurable, value-aligned goals around the diversity of the WPS workforce that are built into district-wide data tracking and reporting systems;

- Monitoring progress towards those goals and developing strategies aligned with best practices in workforce diversity and equity;

- Designing and facilitating equity-focused professional learning on implicit bias for school and district leaders and hiring committees;

- Increasing the scope of teacher recruitment, including developing partnerships with a range of local educator preparation programs with diverse student bodies and alternative certification educator preparation programs that prioritize diversity in their cohorts;

- Developing community building and support opportunities specifically aimed at BIPOC staff members.

Priority Recommendation 5: Equity-Aligned Professional Learning Plan

Create an equity-aligned Professional Learning Plan to ensure equity and culturally responsive practices are embedded in every professional learning opportunity in the district. This plan should directly align with the priorities for equity determined by the district and include opportunities for educators to go deeper into key focus and content areas that will help meet the WPS professional learning and equity goals. Layering the trainings from foundational knowledge to more in-depth content will ensure staff have multiple opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills, and comfort level to meet the district's expectations and can apply what they are learning with confidence. This plan should include:

- Clear articulation of the district's professional learning goals and how they align to the overall priorities of the district;

- Metrics for measuring and tracking progress towards those goals, with expectations for continuous monitoring and adjustments based on data;

- Requirements for participation in trainings on implicit bias, cultural competence, and culturally responsive practices for all staff members in the district that are differentiated by role and learning needs;

- Expectations for evidence of learning and practical application of concepts covered in professional learning sessions through a variety of methods.

- Use of restorative discipline practices to provide students the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and make better decisions in the future.

Examples of additional topics for learning in WPS include coaching for educator evaluators on anti-bias evaluation practices and processes and professional learning specifically around human resources practices such as application screening, interviewing, and hiring through an equity lens.

4. METHODOLOGY

From July through November 2022, PCG conducted an Equity Audit of Westwood Public Schools using a mixed-methods approach. The findings and recommendations are based on our analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the course of the audit. These data sources and our approach are described in greater detail below.

AUDIT APPROACH

PCG's project management approach to the audit is collaborative—we act as an outside agent, with an objective perspective, working alongside WPS leadership to identify challenges and provide recommendations for improvement including a roadmap for future action.[12] PCG built frequent touchpoints into the project plan with project leaders from WPS to foster communication and collaboration, seek clarifications and additional information, share preliminary findings, and collect feedback.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To provide a comprehensive understanding of equity in WPS, PCG developed a research design for the audit that collected data from multiple sources. **Data collected from the individual interviews, from each of the community stakeholder focus groups, and from the community-wide survey were utilized across all the focus areas.** A complete list of other data sources reviewed can be found below.

Figure 4. Data Sources for WPS Equity Audit

Focus Area	Data Sources
Leadership, Policies, and Practices	- District Policies - Section I: Instruction - District Policies - Section J: Students - Student Handbooks: Elementary - Student Handbooks: Middle - Student Handbooks: High - Westwood Public Schools School Committee Online Policy Manual - July 25 Equity Dialogue with leadership - Leadership Equity Readiness Survey
Student Access to Learning	- PE304 MCAS District and School Results by Subgroup - Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Overview Document provided by WPS - District Wide IEP Data by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Income Status and English Learner Status - Retrieved from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education School and District Profiles website: - Disciplinary Referral Data - School and District Demographics - Advanced Coursework Completion - SAT Participation - Massacchuseets Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Achievement Results

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[12] Donis-Keller, C., Meltzer, J., and Chmielewski, E. (2013). "The Power of Collaborative Program Evaluation, A PCG Education White Paper."

Focus Area	Data Sources

Talent Recruitment, Retention, and Development	• Data and practices related to:
	  ○ Recruitment
	  ○ Applications
	  ○ Interviews
	  ○ Hiring
	  ○ Retention
	  ○ Job descriptions
	• WPS 2020-2021 School Opening PD Days Schedule
	• Westwood Nov 26 Workshop Descriptions
	• Talking About the Election in Westwood Public Schools
	• Professional Learning Time Calendar 2019-2020 – Overview
	• Professional Learning Time Calendar 2018-2019 – Overview
	• Professional Development and Faculty Meetings 2021-2022 - PD Days Overview
	• Professional Development and Faculty Meetings 2020-2021 - PD Days Overview
	• Professional Development Course Listings 2022-2023
	• Intro to PD session November 2020
	• District-Sponsored Courses (2007-Present)
	• Copy of Examining Curriculum Materials for Stereotypes and Bias
	• Professional Development Website
	• PD Questionairres for each equity PD
	• New Teacher Orientation Equity 2022
	• Westwood METCO - Community Presentation
	• Westwood METCO- Deerfield Faculty Meeting
	• Extended Day 2022 Presentation
	• Westwood METCO Information Session 2022
	• Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework For Culturally And Historically Responsive Literacy
	• Focus Group Feedback Forms
	• VC301 Views of Climate and Learning (VOCAL)

Culture, Climate, and Partnerships	• Equity Initiatives • Community Participation Overview Document: Inclusive Westwood *(document provided by WPS)* • Community Participation Overview Document: One Westwood *(document provided by WPS)* • Community Participation Overview Document: Westwood Youth and Family Services *(document provided by WPS)* • Community Participation Overview Document: Hale Education *(document provided by WPS)* • Family Engagement Overview • Student Engagement Overview • July 25 Equity Dialogue with leadership • Leadership Equity Readiness Survey

Please note: The above data sources were not limited to one focus area but were included where applicable.

Leadership Equity Survey

As part of the first phase of the project, PCG administered an electronic survey to all district and building leaders, during July - August 2022, to gauge participants' perceptions of current district practices and overall readiness to address institutional racism and equity. The Leadership Equity Survey was developed to probe the following five topics: Student Achievement; Disciplinary Practices and Procedures; High-Quality Programming and High-Quality Teachers; School Culture and Climate. The survey completion rate was 82% (23/28). The participant pool was 27.5% Principals and Assistant Principals, 17.5% District Office Staff, 22.5% District Curriculum Coordinators and 32.5% Other District Leadership positions. The survey included a series of Likert scale and open response questions to gather information on leadership views of challenges in improving equity in WPS and supports needed to improve equity in WPS. Leadership Equity Survey results are provided throughout the report where applicable.

Community Wide Survey

At the request of WPS, PCG also disseminated a web-based survey to hear from as many voices as possible across the district. The survey was developed by drawing from PCG's extensive knowledge of the research and practice literature in school climate/culture to solicit input from families, staff, students, and alumni. Items in the survey were clustered to address priority concerns of the district and were designed to acquire data from survey respondents regarding their perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Westwood Public Schools. The survey included common items across the respondent groups as well as items specific to the role/stakeholder group of the respondents. Additional open-ended questions allowed survey respondents to share specific concerns or experiences. There were over 1,600 responses to the survey. More than 1,000 students (64% of all students in grades 6 – 12) responded while 470 family members (27% of families who received the survey) and nearly 170 staff (24% of staff who received the survey) also submitted responses. Community-wide survey results are provided throughout the report where applicable.

Figure 5. Community-Wide Survey Respondents by Role
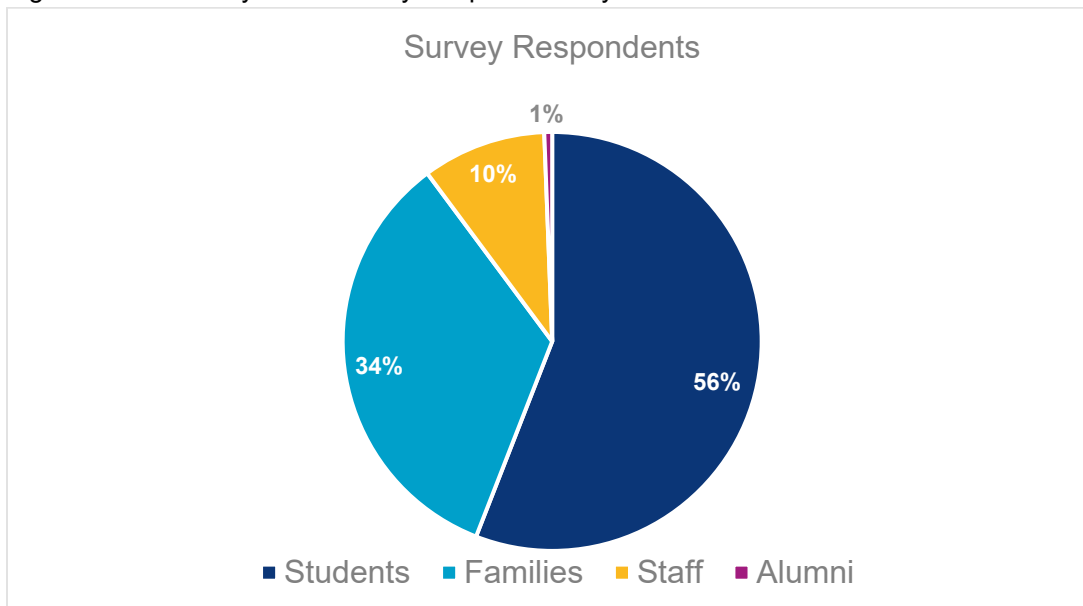
Data and Document Analysis

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis

PCG used a blend of a Case Study Approach and a Phenomenological Approach when analyzing qualitative data collected from interviews, focus groups, and open survey responses. With a Case Study Approach, researchers use case studies to investigate an unknown, contemporary issue or to find a better understanding of a process in which several variables are pertinent to the case.[13] Researchers use the phenomenological approach to grasp the stakeholder experience and the meaning making of the experience.[14]

The analysis of quantitative data in this equity audit is primarily contained to descriptive analyses. This means that PCG reports summary statistics (sums, averages) pertaining to pieces of quantitative data throughout this report.

Population Characteristics, Programs, and Achievement and Outcomes Analysis

PCG collected and analyzed a range of student, school, and district data. PCG retrieved school and district level student data including characteristics, enrollment, discipline, course taking, achievement outcomes, and socio-economic status from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Westwood Public Schools also provided PCG with additional data that was not publicly reported.

Population and program trends are important equity indicators of the extent to which there is overrepresentation of any group. Student performance data were analyzed to provide a comparative examination of performance by students disaggregated by demographic characteristics.

Document Review

WPS provided relevant district documents for PCG to better understand district operations and organization. An inventory of the documents collected for the study can be found in Figure 4.

District Human Resource Data

In addition to student level data, PCG collected human resource data such as recruitment efforts and strategies, applicant data, interview committee, and staff hiring and retention data. Data were drawn from district resources to develop a portrait of current district staffing and staffing over time.

Focus Groups and Interviews

PCG conducted interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders including students, families, teachers, principals, central office staff, school committee members, and community partners. PCG worked with district leadership to identify participants for interviews and to organize focus groups. PCG interviewed 15 members of school and district leadership and community members. Throughout the series of focus groups, PCG heard from 25 families, 10 teachers and teaching assistants, 6 school leaders and 5 students.

WPS invited staff, parents, and students to focus groups by role. PCG also organized focus groups specifically for students, staff, and families who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA or with another historically marginalized identity. Separate focus groups for BIPOC and HMI were created to encourage open dialogue. Research has shown having more homogeneous groups, like BIPOC groups and other historically marginalized identities, often allows participants to feel more comfortable discussing their experiences because other participants may have had similar experiences. Shared experiences may then lead to more

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[13] Glesne, C. (2010). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.
[14] Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

in-depth conversations among participants. Moreover, homogeneous groups are also used to minimize differences in status and authority which may limit or deter participation. "It is commonly recommended that participants within a focus group should be homogeneous, so as to minimize differences in status or power and to prevent the discussion being dominated by higher-status members of the group. However, if such differences in status or power nonetheless occur, they may further limit the ability of some members to influence the discussion." [15]

Interviews were primarily conducted virtually, while most focus groups were conducted in person in Westwood Public Schools buildings. Participants in the parent focus group were offered the option of participating in Spanish. Participation in interviews and focus groups was voluntary.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted during September and October 2022. Focus groups were organized by role-alike groups. WPS stakeholders participated in the following focus groups:

- High School Students, including a dedicated group for BIPOC, LGBTQIA and other historically marginalized identities

- Teachers and Teaching Assistants, including a dedicated group for BIPOC, LGBTQIA and other historically marginalized identities

- School Leaders

- Families, including a dedicated focus group for families of BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and other historically marginalized students

A middle school focus group was offered. However, no middle schoolers participated.

Focus group and interview questions were developed by PCG based on the equity audit framework. Each interview and focus group included general questions asked of all participants as well as questions specific to participants' roles. Interviews lasted 45 minutes and focus groups lasted 45 minutes – 1 hour. Questions focused on participants' perceptions of equity and the district educational experience. PCG took notes during these encounters. Interview and focus group notes were coded according to themes aligned with the equity audit framework. Individual responses to PCG's questions are confidential and will not be attributed to specific participants.

Risk Ratios Analysis

This risk ratio analysis method compares the likelihood of a student in a certain demographic subgroup to have a particular education outcome to the likelihood that students of all other demographic subgroups will have the same outcome. To calculate risk in educational settings, the risk of a particular outcome for students in one racial or ethnic group (numerator) is divided by the risk of that same outcome for children in all other racial ethnic groups within the same setting (e.g., school or LEA) (denominator). The example below illustrates this calculation using disciplinary referrals.

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[15] Focus Groups | Urban Institute Focus group methodology: some ethical challenges | SpringerLink Krueger, R.A., Casey, M.A.: Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, 4th edn. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks (2009) Morgan, D.L.: Focus Groups as Qualitative Research, 2nd edn. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks (1997)

Number of students from a subgroup with a discipline referral ÷ the total number of students in the data set from that subgroup

Risk Ratio =

Total number of students with discipline referrals excluding the same subgroup ÷ total number of students in the data set excluding the subgroup

Numerator
# of students from a demographic subgroup with a discipline referral ÷ the total number of students in the school from that demographic subgroup Ex: # of Hispanic or Latinx students with a disciplinary referral ÷ # of all Hispanic or Latinx students at the school
Denominator
# of students with a discipline referral excluding the same demographic subgroup ÷ total number of students at the school excluding that demographic subgroup Ex: # of students with a disciplinary referral excluding Hispanic or Latinx students ÷ # of total students at the school excluding Hispanic or Latinx students

A risk ratio of 1.0 means there is no association between the student's demographic group and their likelihood of receiving a disciplinary referral. A risk ratio of 2.0 or greater indicates a risk of overrepresentation in disciplinary referrals, while a risk ratio of less than 1.0 indicates possible underrepresentation. Student subgroups with fewer than ten (10) students in the sample were excluded from this analysis.

This method of analysis was also used in the section of this report that analyzes the demographics of students who have been assigned an IEP.

5. LEADERSHIP, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES

Guiding Question: To what extent do policies and processes in WPS promote a diverse, equitable and inclusive district?

LEADERSHIP, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

- Leadership across the district is committed to equity.

Across interviews and focus groups, stakeholders named the district leadership's commitment and intention to move equity work forward as an area of strength. Data from the Leadership Equity Survey showed 97% of district leaders agreed or strongly agreed that "the district's mission and vision prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion."

The members of the school committee we spoke to verbalized their commitment to developing a vision for equity for Westwood Public Schools.

Figure 6. Leadership Equity Survey, School Culture and Climate
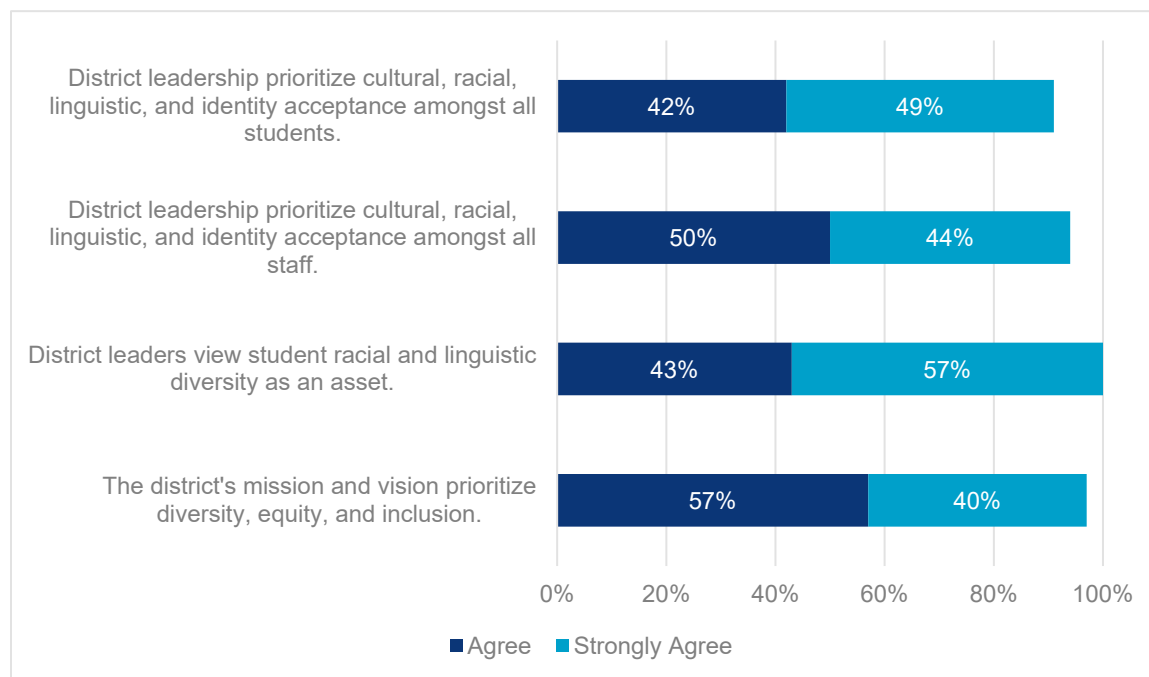
- Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnerships.

WPS created and hired for the full-time role of Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnerships in February 2022, which is a tangible demonstration of the district's commitment to and prioritization of the work of equity in the district.

- Equity and Inclusion Audit.

Conducting this equity audit in WPS is an important step in identifying equity issues and for equity throughout the district, it would be helpful to develop additional equity policies.

LEADERSHIP, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- There is a lack of shared clarity on the district's equity vision and plans.

While the prioritization of equity across district leadership was clear, a consistent theme across stakeholders was a lack of understanding of a clear vision for equity in the district. Several community survey responses referenced a need for district leaders to "walk the walk and not just talk the talk." Many participants shared that while WPS frequently talks about equity, there was not clarity among stakeholders around the overall vision or strategy.

Many stakeholders responded to the question "What do you hope comes out of this equity audit?" with desires for clarity of purpose and specific commitments when it comes to equity work. Students, families, and district staff all expressed concern for the perceived lack of proactive equity work, and shared a hope for a cohesive, clear, and explicit plan of action around equity moving forward.

Another common theme from both survey responses and stakeholder conversations related to a perceived sense of fear from district leadership to stand for something concrete when it comes to equity work. Multiple individuals referenced an equity-focused PD from Wee the People that was cancelled at the last moment due to community push back – the sentiment was that it appeared that the district prioritized appeasing community members over standing up for the equity work they said they had wanted. This response caused the school community to feel that district leaders were not capable of taking a firm stance regarding programming aligned with the districts plans for equity.

- Policies and decision-making do not reflect an equity lens.

Westwood, along with many other Massachusetts school districts, uses the MA Association of School Committees (MASC) to support policy development. In WPS, there is a total of six (6) policies that include the terms 'equity' or 'diversity' in the online policy manual. If the WPS School Committee is going to set expectations for equity throughout the district, it would be helpful to develop additional equity policies.

Notably, the district is currently engaged in a policy review through MASC that will bring the district's policies in line with MASC's equity policy model.

School committee members expressed a desire to incorporate equity more clearly into decision making but have not had the capacity for more intentional policy work due to the focus on COVID-related issues over the last few years. Many school committee members also shared that equity is not currently a lens through which decisions are consistently made nor is data specific to equity reported to them.

LEADERSHIP, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The five priority recommendations for WPS to implement in the immediate term are laid out in Chapter 3: Priority Recommendations. The additional recommendations below are ideas for strategies that could also support the district in moving equity work forward and could be explored further in the future.

- **Continue to engage with coaching and professional learning for district leaders.** The Superintendent and Superintendent's leadership team in WPS should continue to engage with leadership coaching and professional learning to continue to develop and deepen their skills in having courageous conversations about equity in the face of community pushback.

- **Expect accountability from all staff.** The district's strategic plan and building level plans should include expectations for all staff members holding any position in the district. This may be accomplished

by including goal setting or individual performance plans with a focus on equity as part of the annual evaluation process.

- **Develop an Equity Specialist staff position at each school building.** This is a stipend position that can be performed in addition to other duties. The Equity Specialist is responsible for supporting the development of culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist practices in their individual school building. They will work under the direction of the Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships and will meet regularly with other Equity Specialists from across the district to ensure implementation consistency. The role will likely include collecting and analyzing data, leading trainings, and facilitating their school's Equity Leaders Team.

6. STUDENT ACCESS TO LEARNING

Guiding Questions: How are student outcomes and access to advanced learning linked to student characteristics and demographics? Are student discipline practices consistent, transparent, and equitable for all students?

STUDENT ACCESS TO LEARNING ANALYSIS

In this chapter, PCG conducted quantitative analysis of the following elements:

- Student MCAS assessment outcomes
- Advanced coursework enrollment rates
- SAT completion rates
- IEP assignment rates and risk ratios
- Discipline referral rates and risk ratios (also includes some qualitative analysis)

Because of the nature of these analyses, this chapter is structured slightly differently, and all analysis and findings are included in the below section titled "Student Access to Learning Findings."

STUDENT ACCCESS TO LEARNING FINDINGS

Student Assessment Outcomes

Given the tremendous impact that COVID-19 has had on schooling across the country, PCG examined gaps in outcomes between all students and identified subgroups in the years prior to the pandemic, and in 2021. PCG examined proficiency data for 3rd through 8th grade English Language Arts and Mathematics MCAS tests from 2017 to 2021.[16] As the MCAS was not administered in 2020 due to COVID-19, the years analyzed were 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2021.

- On both assessments in 2021, WPS students demonstrated a drop in proficiency rates. However, this was not unique to the district. Students across the state suffered losses on the MCAS; state losses were more significant than the losses observed in Westwood Public Schools.

From 2019 to 2021, proficiency for all students in WPS dropped by 2-percentage points on ELA and by 13-percentage points on mathematics. Across all Massachusetts MCAS takers in grades 3-8 over the same time, proficiency dropped by 6-percentage points on the ELA assessment and by 15-percentage points on the mathematics assessment. An overview of proficiency gaps between student groups for the 2020-21 school year is presented below.

Figure 7. Proficiency gap between select student groups in grades 3-8 in comparison to all Students for the 2020-2021 School Year in Westwood Public Schools.

Student Groups	In Comparison to…	
	All Students, grades 3-8 2020-2021 ELA	All Students, grades 3-8 2020-2021 Math
White Students	+1	-3
Students with IEPs	-34	-34
EL Students	-25	-52
Economically Disadvantaged	-29	-30
Hispanic	-18	-17
Black	-40	-32
Asian	+10	+19
Multiracial	+8	+9

*Please note **positive numbers** indicate the number of percentage points this demographic is scoring **higher than all students**. **Negative numbers** indicate the number of percentage points this demographic is scoring **lower than all students**.*

The following longitudinal analysis examines differences in MCAS achievement across student subgroups. We include the analysis for English Learners, economically disadvantaged students, and Black or African American students in the following pages. The analysis for Hispanic or Latino students, Asian students, multiracial students and students with IEPs can be found in Appendix A. We present substantial evidence that English learners, economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic students, students with IEPs, and Black students have been consistently underperforming on standardized assessment in mathematics and ELA when compared with their Westwood Public Schools peers.

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[16] Data retrieved from: www.https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

White students, Asian students and multiracial students consistently score at or above the all-student proficiency rates on the MCAS assessment in both ELA and mathematics.

English Learners

The ELA proficiency rate for English Learners in WPS has been steadily improving over the past 3 MCAS tests and continued trending upwards despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The ELA proficiency gap between EL students and all students has shrunk by 26 percentage points since 2018. The mathematics proficiency gap has seen significant change in this time; the proficiency rate for EL students reached a high of 60% in 2019 and has since fallen to 10%, giving way to a 52-percentage point gap between EL students and all students on the mathematics exam.

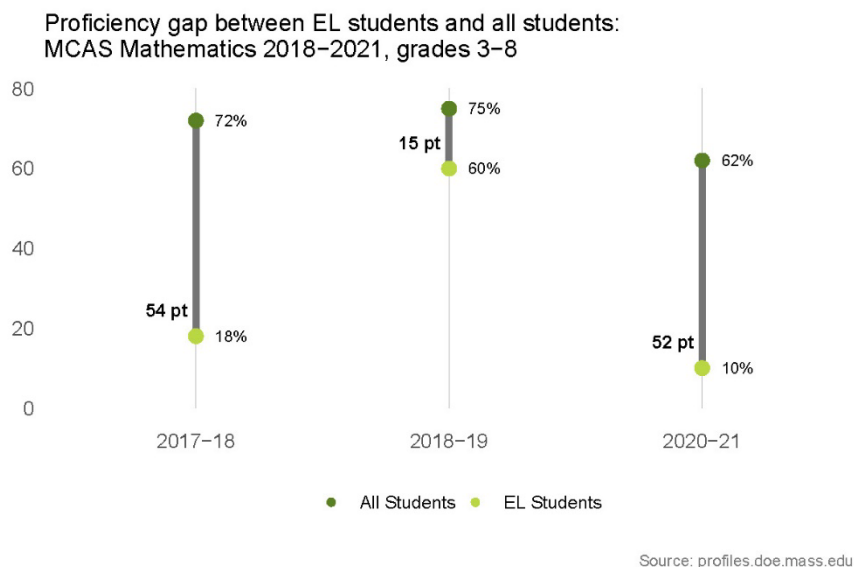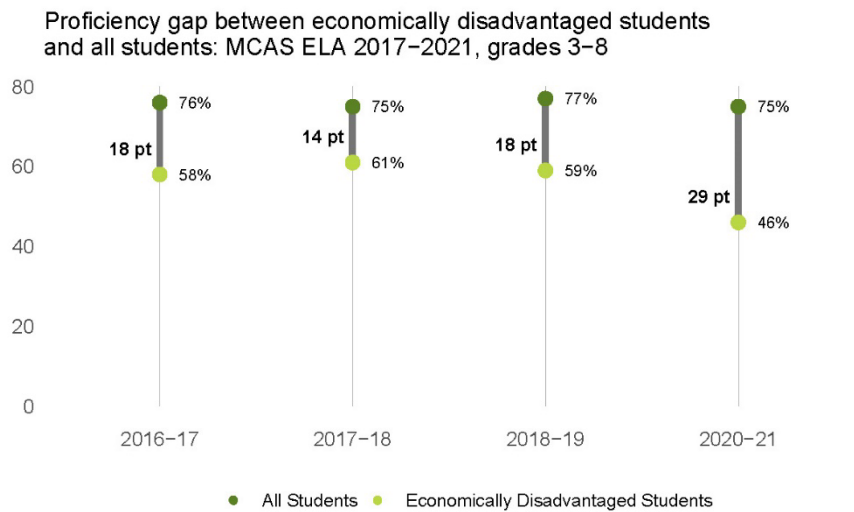Figure 8. Gap between EL students and all students: MCAS ELA 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between EL students and all students:
MCAS ELA 2018–2021, grades 3–8

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu
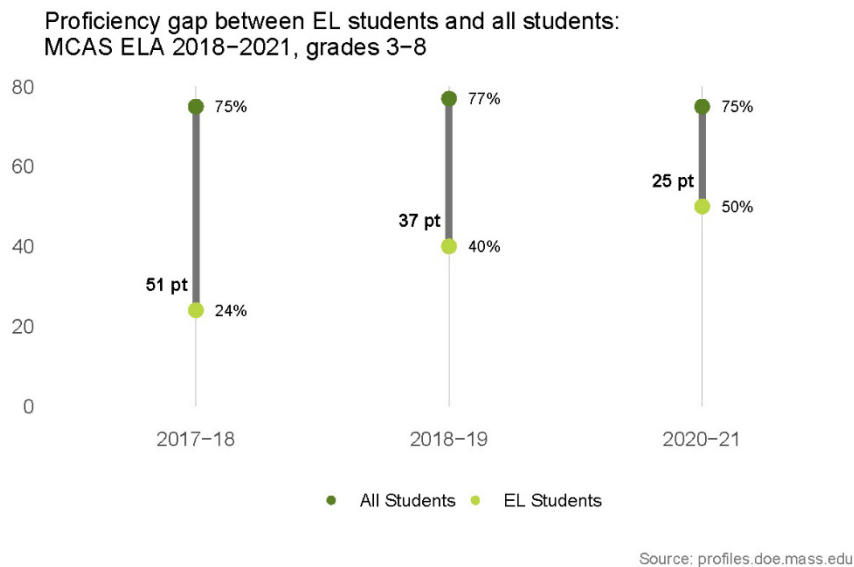
Figure 9. Gap between EL students and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2018-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between EL students and all students:
MCAS Mathematics 2018–2021, grades 3–8

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Economically Disadvantaged Students

In the years ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic, the gap in proficiency rates between economically disadvantaged students and all students remained relatively stable on both the ELA and mathematics exams. Prior to the 2021 assessment, the ELA proficiency gap had a 3 year high of 18 percentage points, and the mathematics proficiency gap had a 3-year high of 24-percentage points. In 2021, the ELA proficiency rate for economically disadvantaged students fell by 13-percentage points, leaving these students 29-percentage points lower than the all-student average. In the same year, the mathematics proficiency rate for economically disadvantaged students fell by 19-percentage points, leaving these students 30-percentage points lower than the all-student average.

Figure 10. Gap between economically disadvantaged students and all students: MCAS ELA 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Figure 11. Gap between economically disadvantaged students and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017-2021, grades 3-8
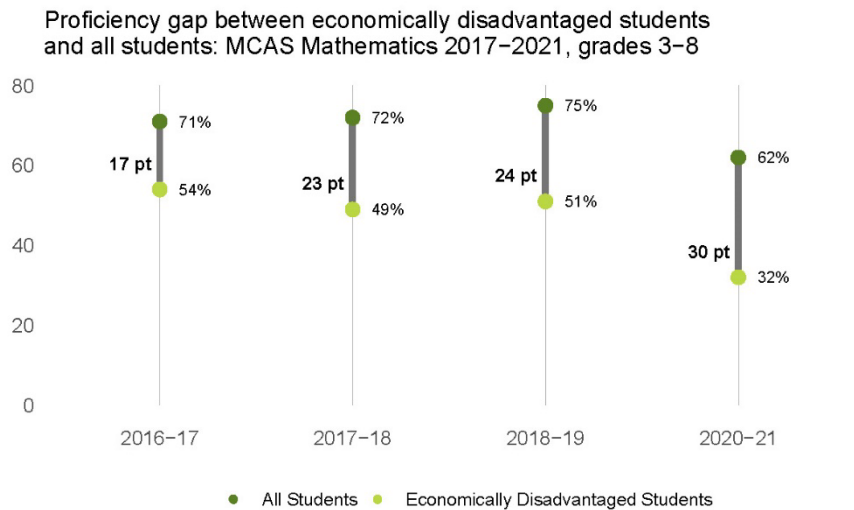
Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Black or African American Students

On the ELA assessment, differences in proficiency rates between Black students and all students more than doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, jumping from a 19-percentage point difference in 2019 to a 40-percentage point difference in 2021. This is a result of the ELA proficiency rate for Black students falling by 23-percentage points from 2019 to 2021. Math proficiency also suffered as a result of the pandemic. For all students, math proficiency fell by 13-percentage points from 2019 to 2021. For Black students, math proficiency fell by 11-percentage points, leaving Black students 32-percentage points behind the all-student proficiency rate in 2021.

Figure 12. Gap between Black or African American students and all students: MCAS ELA 2017-2021, grades 3-8
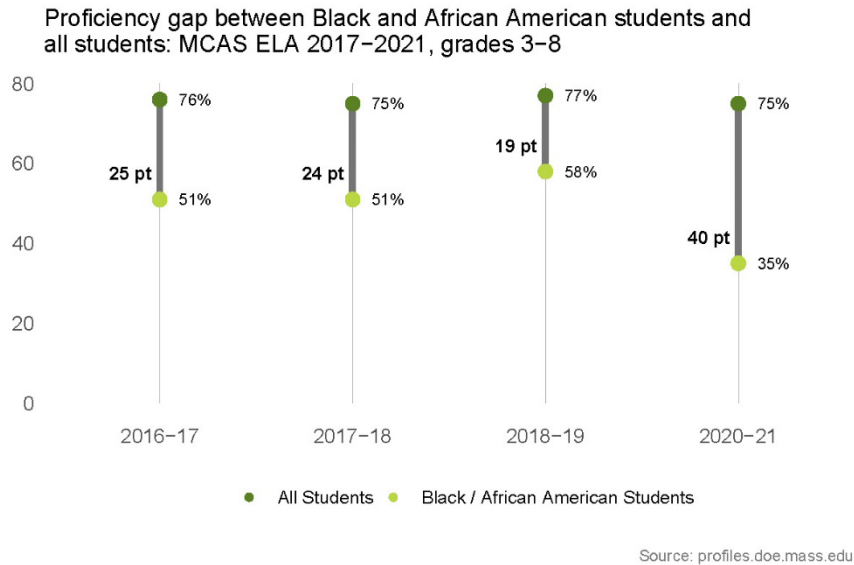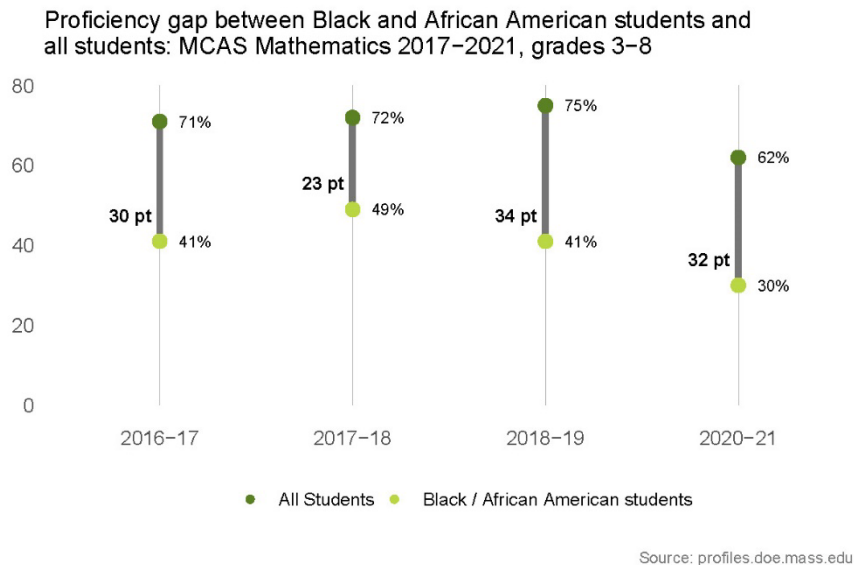

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Figure 13. Gap between Black or African American students and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Advanced Coursework Completion

The following data was retrieved from profiles.doe.mass.edu for the 2020-21 school year. Courses that are considered advanced include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, and other challenging classes in a variety of subjects, as defined by the Massachusetts State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

- Hispanic/Latinx students, African American and Black students, multiracial students, male students, students with disabilities and low-income students are underrepresented in advanced course completion at Westwood High School.

Figure 14. Advanced Course Completion by Student Demographics: Westwood High School (2020-21)

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent of Students Completing Advanced Coursework (2020-21)
All Students	74%
Asian	96%
Hispanic or Latinx	60%
African American or Black	41%
Two or More Races	50%
White	74%
Female	77%
Male	71%
Students with disabilities	23%
Low-Income students	43%

SAT Test Taking

The following data was retrieved from profiles.doe.mass.edu for the 2020-21 school year.

- White students, students with disabilities, and low-income students are underrepresented in SAT test takers at Westwood High School.

Figure 15. Proportion of SAT Test Takers by Student Demographics: Westwood High School (2020-21)

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent of 11th and 12th Graders	Share of SAT Test Takers
Asian	11%	14%
Hispanic or Latinx	4%	4%
Black or African American	3%	3%
Two or More Races	1%	1%
White	80%	78%
Female	55%	56%
Male	44%	44%
Students with disabilities	13%	6%
Low-income students	7%	4%

Special Education

In educational settings, when examining the rates of students who are assigned IEPs as a measure of educational equity, disproportionality occurs when students from one racial, gender, or other demographic subgroup are assigned IEPs at markedly higher rates than their peers. Overrepresentation and misidentification of students for IEPs poses a threat to a students' educational opportunities. Students who

are misidentified with learning disabilities are likely to be exposed to a less rigorous curriculum, lower expectations from teachers, and will have fewer opportunities to successfully transition to postsecondary education.[17] Misidentification can also have social consequences; students may suffer from lower self-esteem[18] and face racial separation in classrooms.[19] Additionally, once a student is misidentified for an IEP, they are unlikely to ever leave the special education program for the remainder of their academic career.[20] The following data comes from a risk ratio analysis on students with IEPs in Westwood Public Schools for the 2021-22 school year. We do not find evidence that any student groups are at serious risk of overrepresentation in assignment to IEPs in Westwood Public Schools.

Figure 16. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity, district level

Race / Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
Black or African American	61	16
Hispanic or Latinx	153	44
Two or More Races	150	25
Asian	359	31
White	2,184	462
Total	**2,910**	**579**

Please note totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 17. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity, District Level

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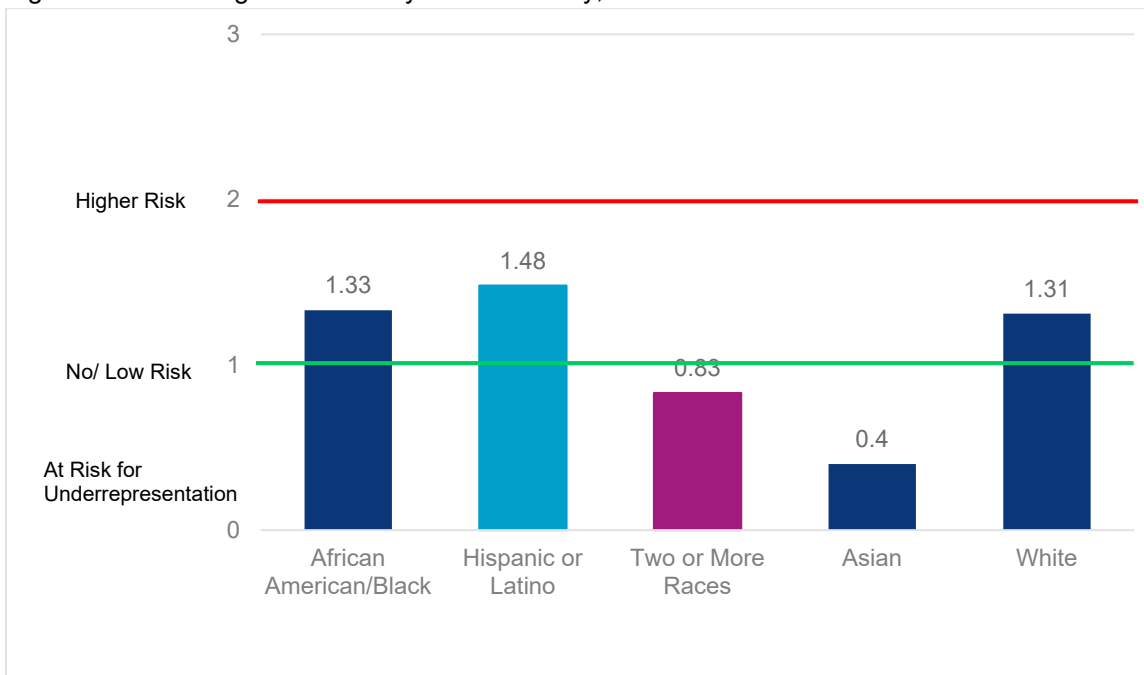
[17] National Education Association. (2007). "Truth in labeling: Disproportionality in special education."

[18] Pavri, S. and Luftig, R. (2001). "The social face of inclusive education: Are students with learning disabilities really included in the classroom?" *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 45(1), 8–14.

[19] National Education Association (2007).

[20] Ibid.

Figure 18. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender, District Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	1,388	210
Male	1,521	369
Total	**2,910**	**579**

Please note totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: gender non-binary students

Figure 19. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender, District Level
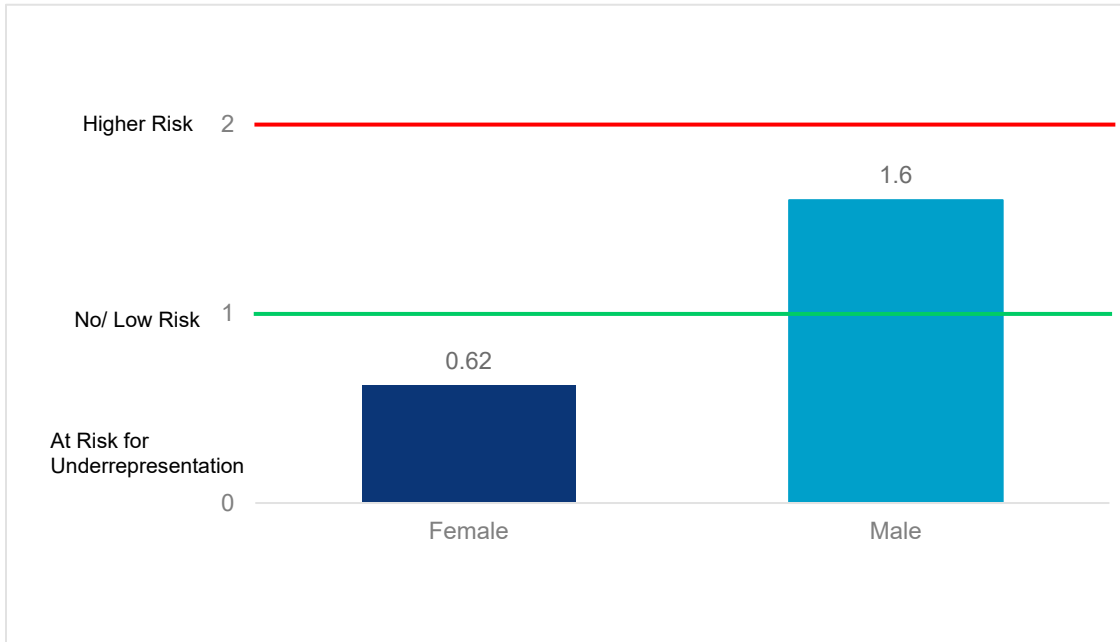
Elementary and Pre-Kindergarten

Figure 20. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
Asian	161	21
Hispanic or Latinx	63	13
Two or More Races	92	13
White	967	206
Total	**1,296**	**256**

Please note totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: Black and African American students, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

Figure 21. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity at the Elementary and Pre-K Level
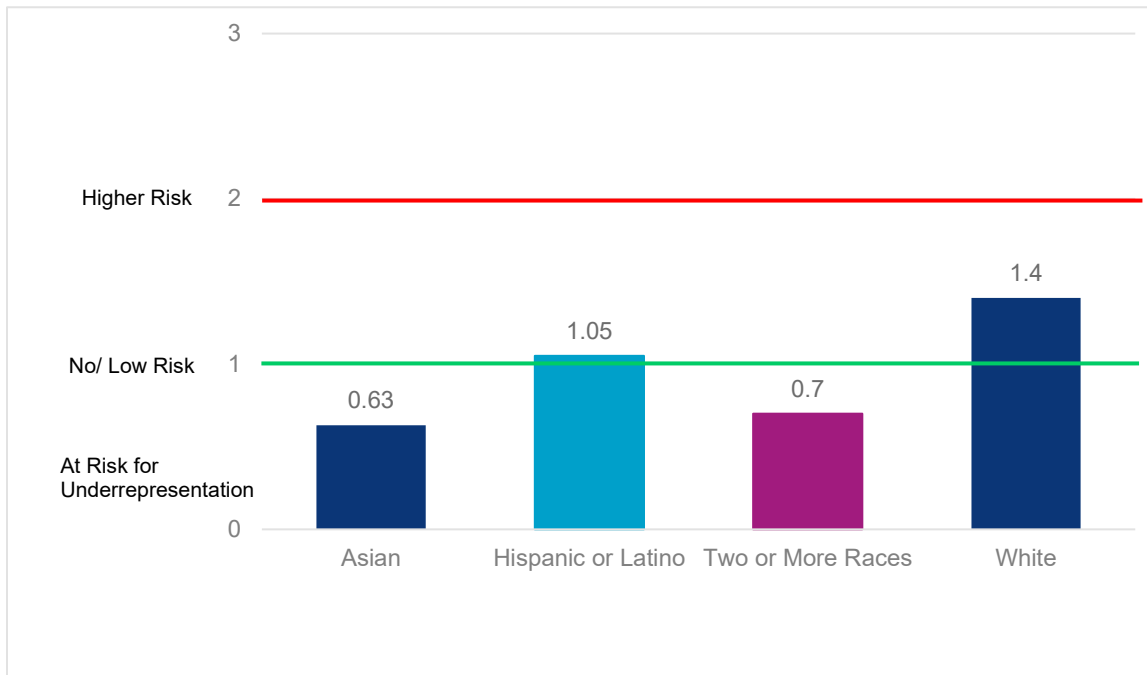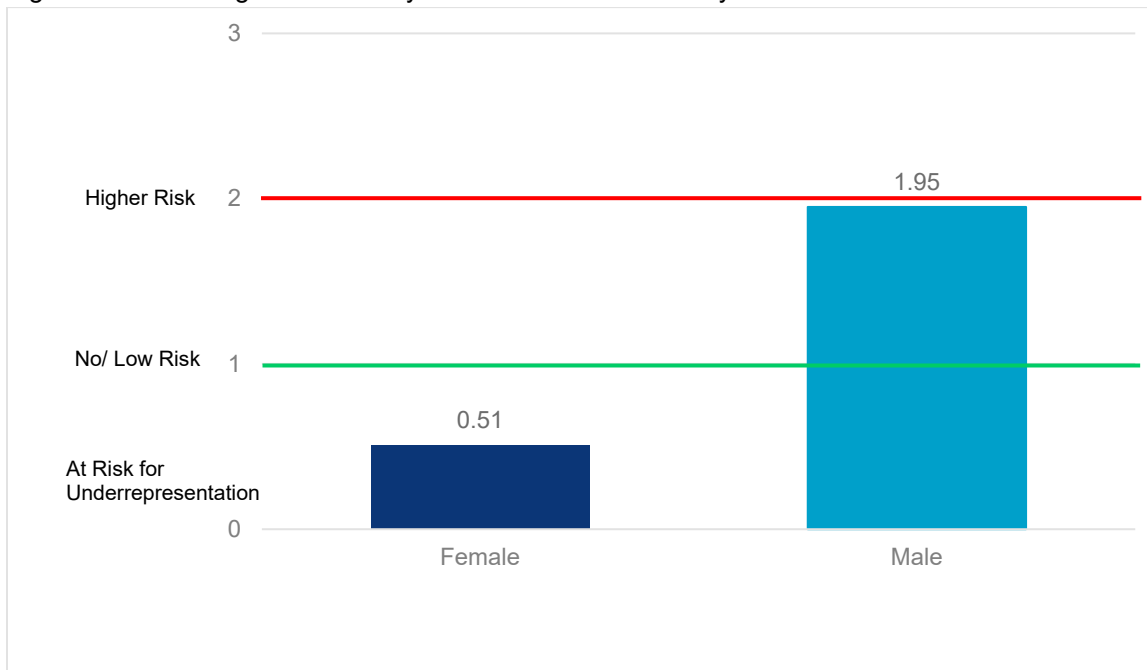

Figure 22. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	586	76
Male	710	180
Total	**1,296**	**256**

Figure 23. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Elementary and Pre-K Level

Middle and High School

Figure 24. Number of Students with IEPs by Race/Ethnicity at the Middle and High School Level

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with IEPs
Asian	198	10
Black or African American	49	13
Hispanic or Latinx	90	31
Two or More Races	58	12
White	1,217	256
Total	**1,614**	**323**

Please note totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

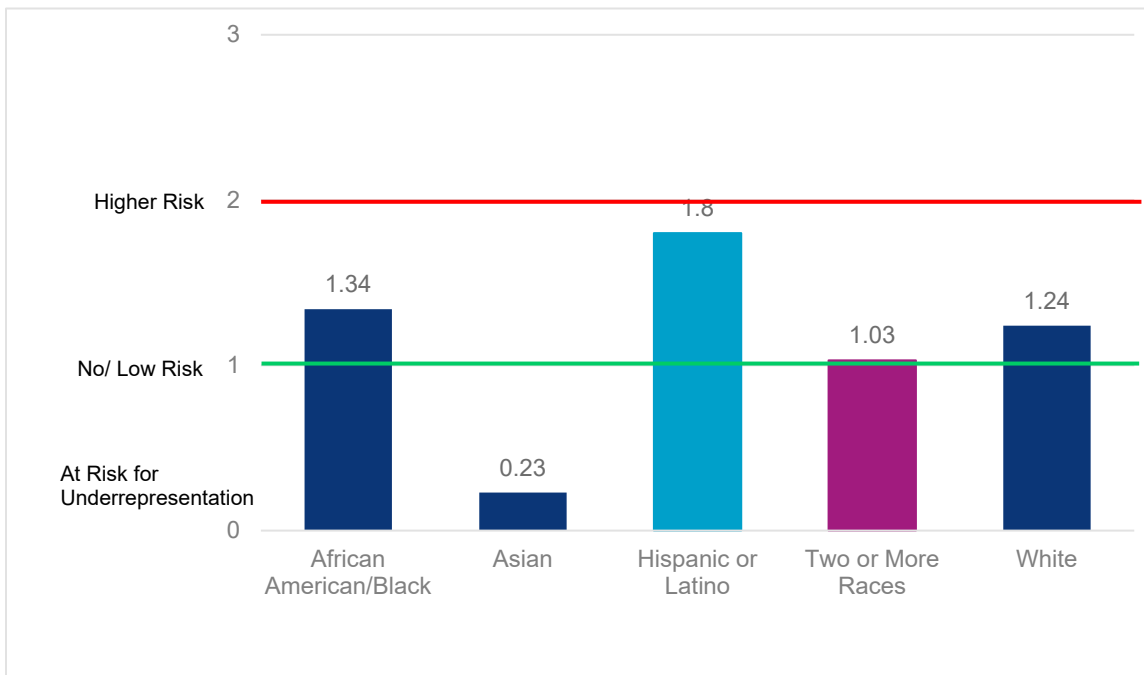Figure 25. IEP Assignment Risk by Race/Ethnicity at the Middle and High School Level

Figure 26. Number of Students with IEPs by Gender at the Middle and High School Level

Gender	All Students	Students with IEPs
Female	802	134
Male	811	189
Total	**1,614**	**323**

Please note totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are gender non-binary students.

Figure 27. IEP Assignment Risk by Gender at the Middle and High School Level
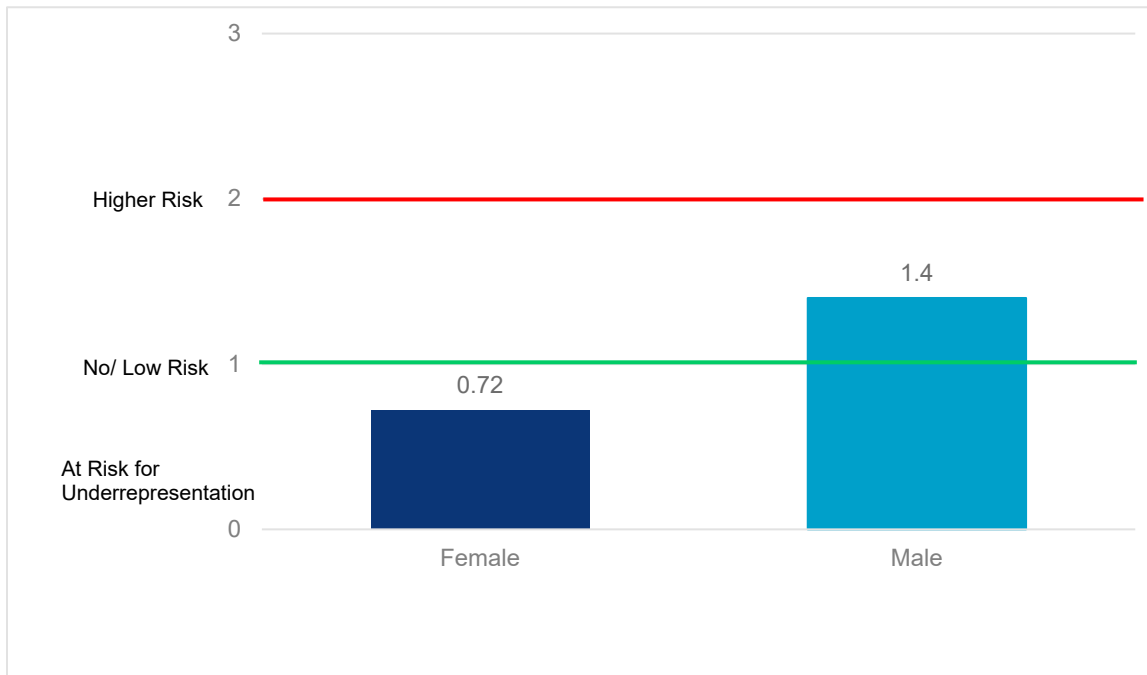
Student Discipline

The section below examines data on student discipline in Westwood Public Schools disaggregated by student characteristics of race, gender, IEP status, and income status. We conduct a risk ratio analysis which is used to compare student groups in discipline referrals to examine whether students from different subgroups are disproportionately represented.

The following data was retrieved from https://profiles.doe.mass.edu for school year 2021-22 and encompasses Westwood High School and Thurston Middle School. Disciplinary actions included comprise of all offenses reported in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education School Safety and Discipline Report (SSDR).

Figure 28. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Race/Ethnicity: 2021-22

Race/Ethnicity	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Students of color	741	21
White students	2,198	25
Total	**2,939**	**46**

Please note students of color were grouped into one category to protect the anonymity of students. The students of color data includes students who identify as: Asian, African American or Black, Hispanic or Latinx, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native.

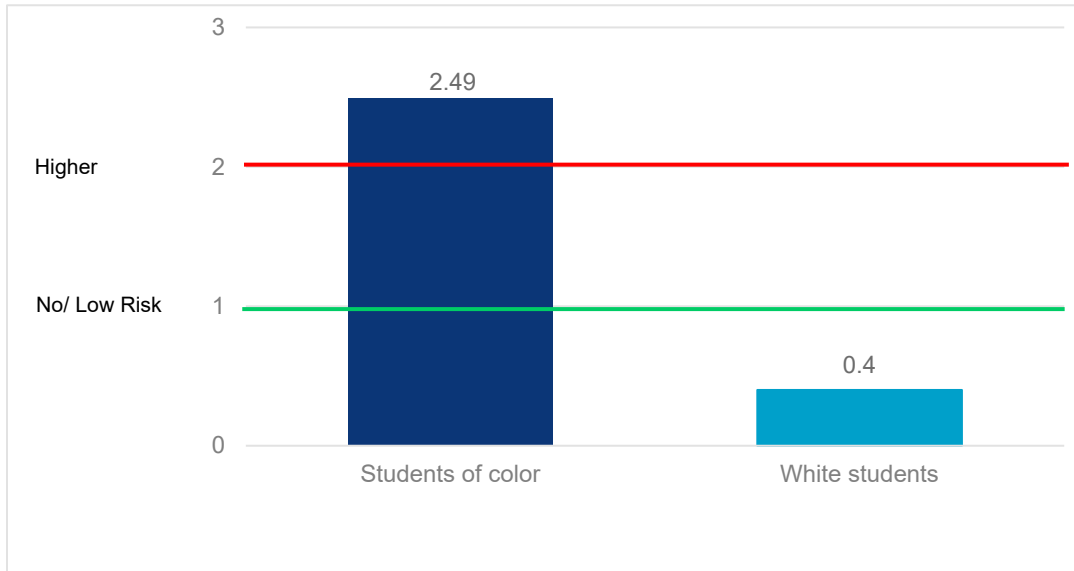Figure 29. Discipline Referral Risk by Race/Ethnicity: 2021-22

Figure 30. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Gender: 2021-22

Gender	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Female	1,399	11
Male	1,538	35
Total	**2,939**	**46**

Please note totals include students from subgroups not reported due to small numbers. Additional subgroups included in the totaled values are: gender non-binary students

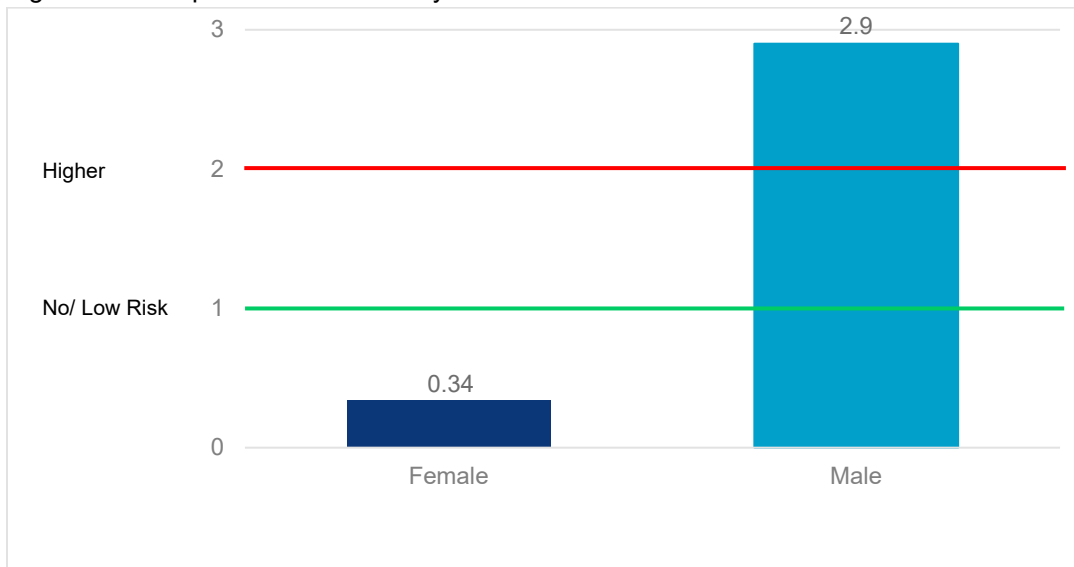Figure 31. Discipline Referral Risk by Gender: 2021-22

Figure 32. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by IEP Status: 2021-22

IEP Status	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Students with an IEP	675	22
Students without an IEP	2,264	24
Total	**2,939**	**46**

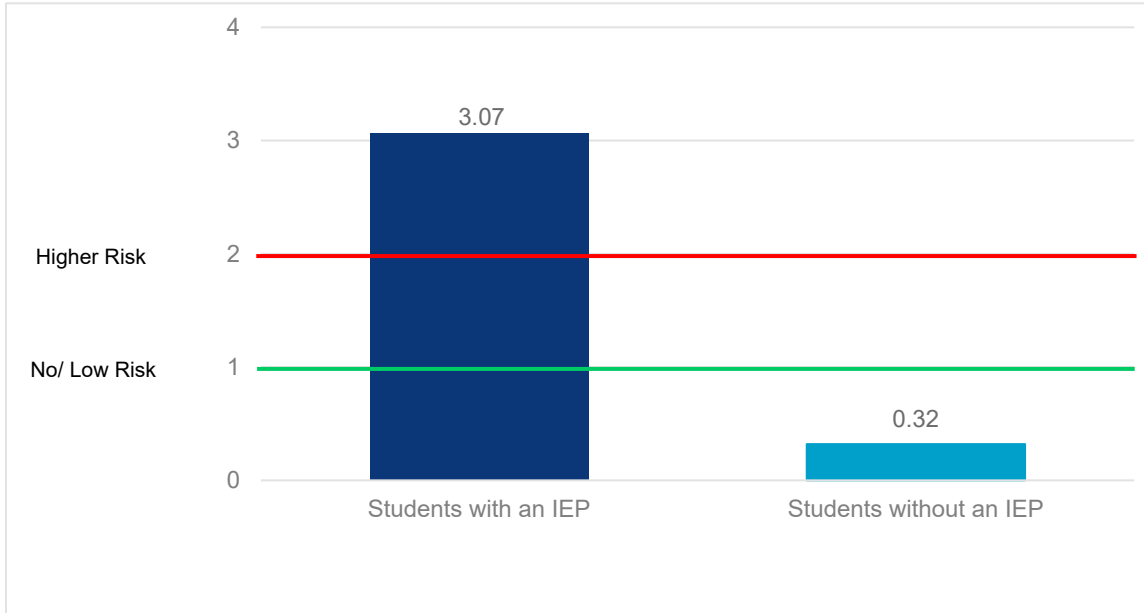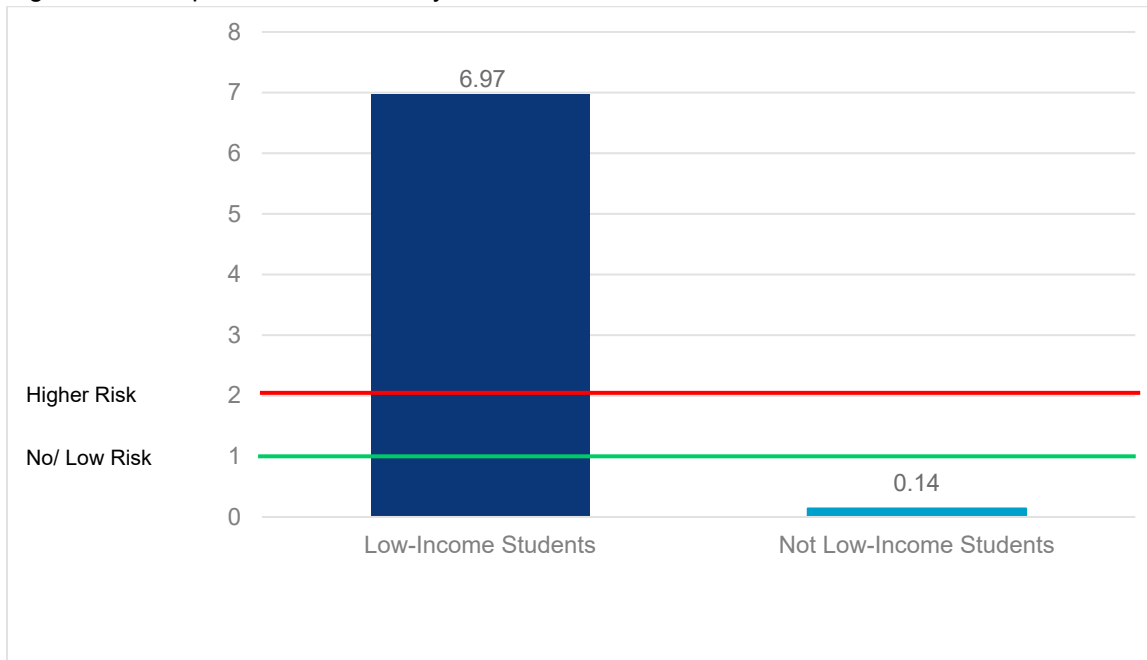Figure 33. Discipline Referral Risk by IEP Status: 2021-22

Figure 34. Number of Students with Disciplinary Referrals by Low-Income Status: 2021-22

Low Income Status	All Students	Students with Disciplinary Referrals
Low-Income Students	248	18
Not Low-Income Students	2,691	28
Total	**2,939**	**46**

Figure 35. Discipline Referral Risk by Low-Income Status: 2021-22

The above risk ratios look at the demographics of the individual students who received a discipline referral during SY21-22 at Westwood High School and Thurston Middle School, regardless of how many referrals each student received over the course of the year. This risk ratio looks to answer the question: "what is the risk of a student of a certain demographic group to receive at least one disciplinary referral over the course of the year as compared to his or her peers?" Another way to look at this disproportionality is to look at the total *number* of discipline referrals given across student demographic groups.

The below tables contain the percentage of discipline referrals given by subgroup compared to that subgroup's population in each school. Student demographic groups with fewer than 10 students are not included in the data below. This shows that students of color, male students, student with IEPs and low-income students are overrepresented amongst students who were disciplined in SY2021-22.

Figure 36. Proportion of Total Disciplinary Referrals by Student Demographics: 2021-22

Student Demographic Subgroup	Percent of Student Body	Percent of All Disciplinary Referrals
Students of color	25%	46%
White students	75%	54%
Female students	48%	24%
Male students	52%	76%
Students with an IEP	23%	48%
Low-Income Students	8%	39%

Student Discipline Qualitative Findings

Student discipline practices emerged as a significant theme across all focus groups, interviews, and email submissions.

- There is not clear description of the consequences for discipline infractions.

As referenced by the Student Handbook for Elementary Schools, "students will be subject to age-appropriate discipline. Depending on the nature and severity of the offense, the discipline imposed can range from a verbal warning to expulsion, in accordance with applicable policy, procedures and regulatory requirements. The Principal has the authority to exercise discretion in deciding the consequences for a student who has violated disciplinary rules."

The vagueness and breadth of consequences is problematic for students. In the high school student handbook it states: "The degree of discipline, (i.e. detention, suspension from extracurricular activities, suspensions or exclusions), rests in the sound discretion of the administration of the Westwood Public Schools, or the Westwood School Committee, where required by law. In imposing discipline, the decision-maker will consider any information which he/she/they feels is relevant. Such information may include some of the following: prior disciplinary record, academic progress, seriousness of incident, mitigating or exacerbating circumstances surrounding the incident." Discipline in the form of detention or suspension from any or all extracurricular activities does not require any particular procedure. However, it is stated that the student will know the reasons for the discipline prior to the discipline being imposed.

- Families and students expressed concerns about the fairness in which punishments are applied.

The percentage of persons who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The punishment for breaking school rules is applied fairly to all students" is as follows:

Figure 37. Community Survey Responses to Discipline-Related Question

Percentage of people by demographic group to agree or strongly agree with the statement: "The punishment for breaking school rules is applied fairly to all students"	
Non-binary Students	27.8%
Black Students	38.4%
White Students	61.6%
All Families	69.5%
Male Students	60.2%
Female Students	67.2%

STUDENT ACCESS TO LEARNING ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The five priority recommendations for WPS to implement in the immediate term are laid out in Chapter 3: Priority Recommendations. The additional recommendations below are ideas for strategies that could also support the district in moving equity work forward and could be explored further in the future.

- **Examine current disciplinary policies and practices from an equity lens** to detect for biases and inconsistencies. Eliminate or revise such policies to promote a clear, fair, and appropriate approach to determining consequences for misbehavior. School staff expressed a need for more training to ensure appropriate and consistent enforcement of disciplinary actions that do not disproportionately impact students of color. This could involve discussions around personal implicit bias and how it impacts decision-making about disciplinary action. Reviewing policies with staff would also help provide clarity about expectations for enforcing rules consistently and fairly.

- **Implement restorative discipline practices.** Restorative discipline practices shift the focus away from the mainstream punitive discipline which functions to create feelings of shame and embarrassment and restrict learning opportunities from students who act out by removing them from the classroom environment. Punitive discipline often backfires on students who are acting out, often amplifying the problems that led to the original infraction. Successful restorative discipline gives students the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, reflect on where their behavior came from and learn from the experience.

- **Create and Implement a Discipline Matrix.** To help address disproportionality in the discipline of students and reduce the perception of unfair treatment of students, a discipline matrix should be created with clear and consistent consequences for all actions against the code of student conduct. A discipline team, representative of all stakeholder groups, should be convened to create an initial draft. Members should be representative of the diversity of the student population and include guidance and adjustment counselors, EL educators/support staff, Special Education representatives, and other relevant staff members. Convene students to hear their perspectives about and experiences with the current disciplinary system. Solicit their opinions on which policies are unfair or biased and if they perceive that certain student groups are disciplined more or differently than others. Larger shareholder groups should then be involved with the final crafting and voting of a formal discipline plan.

- **Revisit course scheduling practices.** Staff participants in focus groups identified the middle school schedule as an obstacle to accessing certain electives and courses. Consider revising middle school course scheduling practices to allow for greater access to these opportunities for all students. As described by teachers and school leadership:

    "Tracking System is problematic: enrollment numbers for race is alarming – Black and brown students are typically level 2 and level 3 with very few if any minority students in the higher levels."

    "Tracking System is based on teacher recommendation, so hard to know where the problem starts from. Middle school data and teacher recommendations determine where they're placed; students do tend to move up the levels as they progress."

    "Would like a solution to the tracking system and reimagine the way classes are leveled, so that students have greater opportunity and there are less disparities."

In addition, be sure that the process of access to courses is clear and well-communicated. Review requirements that present barriers to enrollment in advanced courses, disproportionately impacting students of color, students with disabilities and ELs. Building leaders expressed an interest in understanding the process for access to courses to ensure students take diverse courses and have advanced options.

7. TALENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND DEVELOPMENT

Guiding Questions: How do WPS policies and human resources practices support hiring and retaining a diverse workforce? How does district professional development support equity, diversity and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination?

TALENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND DEVELOPMENT STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

Human Resources Practices and Policies

- WPS has a demonstrated commitment to diversifying the district's workforce.

Since 2019, Westwood has begun to execute several pieces of work that are strong steps towards building a more diverse workforce:

- o Revision of job descriptions to include specific language referencing equity and expectations for applicants to the district regarding DEI work;
- o Establishment of affinity groups for staff;
- o Development of interview questions and rubrics with an explicit equity focus, and accompanying trainings;
- o The work of the Talent Diversification Grant awarded by DESE.

In 2017 WPS joined the Greater Boston Schools Human Resources Network and in 2019 WPS joined the Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education – both of these professional organizations are strong networks aimed at expanding efforts to recruit, hire, and retain diverse educators.

From 2019 – 2021, WPS participated in the DESE Diversity Network – a partnership between DESE and TNTP to provide professional development and networking for districts aimed at diversifying the educator workforce statewide.

While all of these efforts are demonstrative of a district-wide commitment to increasing the diversity of Westwood's educator workforce, the district's leadership does not currently include a role, such as a Director of Human Resources, whose sole focus is on improving and implementing recruitment, hiring, and retention practices throughout the district. Without a staff member dedicated to these efforts, the positive steps outlined above are moving slowly and/or are not being implemented consistently across the district.

Professional Development

- Staff share appreciation for the PDs around equity, educator affinity groups, and the METCO program.

Staff survey respondents and staff interview participants noted the availability of professional development opportunities around equity. Efforts to build community capacity through district-wide book talks and guest speakers as well as efforts at the high school through the "Let's Talk about Race Culture and Ethnicity" Group, are appreciated by teachers and leadership, and regarded as positive contributions to the landscape of equity at WPS, as noted in district interviews and leadership focus group sessions.

- As described by District Leadership, WPS has provided several professional development opportunities for District Leaders.

These include: New Superintendents Induction Program, M.A.S.S.'s REDI Initiative (Race, Equity, Diversity, and Integration): REDI Foundations: District Learning Series, REDI Superintendent-DEI Director

Partnership, MASS Summer Executive Leadership Institute: "Promoting Equity, Wellness, Academic Achievement and a Culture of Care for All, and METCO leadership retreats. Professional development opportunities have also been provided for district and school leaders including participation in the METCO Directors Association Conference, book study on *Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism* and participation in "Anti-Racist Decision-Making" with external IDEAS consultants.

TALENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND DEVELOPMENT ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Human Resources Practices and Policies

- The district's workforce does not reflect the diversity of its students. Several studies have shown the postive impact of having diverse teachers on academic and social outcomes for students of color, but a recent study also shows significant positive impact on social-emotional development, academic performance, and school behavior for all students taught by BIPOC educators.[21]

Both the personnel data retrieved from the state database and the anecdotal data from stakeholders show that there are wide gaps in representation between the student body and the staff of the district despite 94% of district leaders agreeing or strongly agreeing that "the district prioritizes recruitment and employment of a racially diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of WPS students." Students, families, and staff all stressed the lack of diversity in both the school-based staff and leadership in the district.

The Westwood School Committee's Policy Manual has almost no language around the recruitment and hiring of diverse educators. In Section G of the manual (Personnel), there are five specific personnel goals for the district and the diversity of the district's workforce is not referenced in any of these goals.[22]

Figure 38. Districtwide Student Enrollment and Staff by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)

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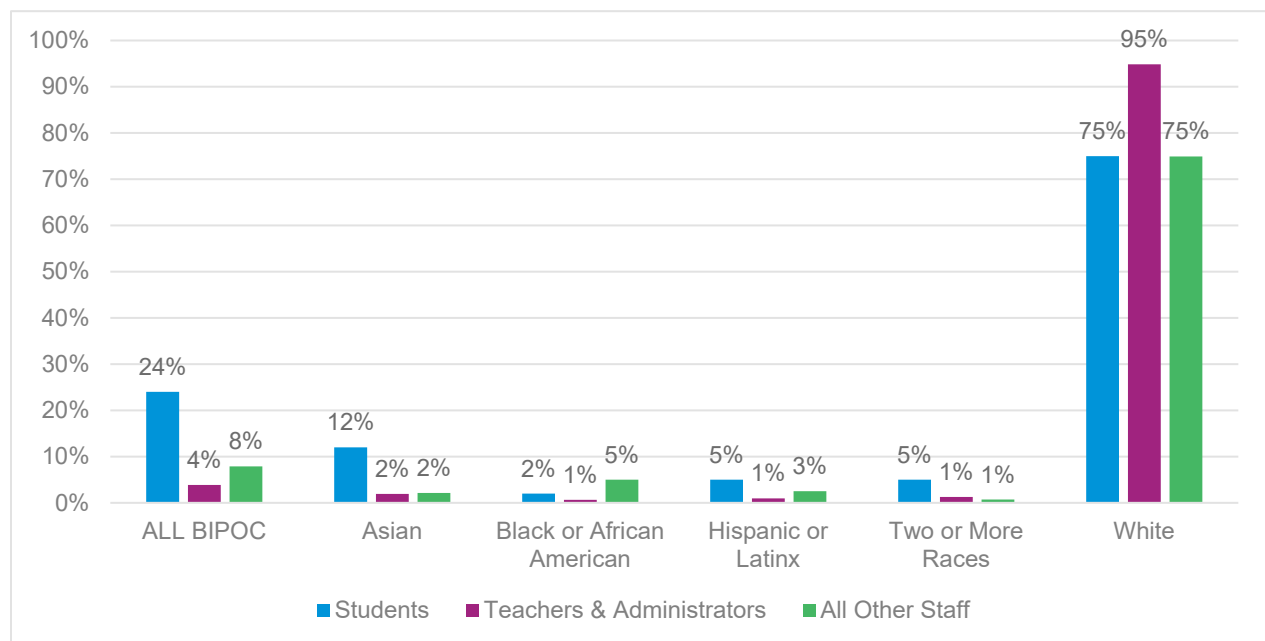
[21] Blazar, David. (December 2021). "Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes." *Annenberg Institute*.

[22] Westwood Public Schools. "GA – Personnel Policies and Goals." *School Committee Policy Manual*.

Figure 39. Percentage Point Gap Between Student Enrollment and Staff Role by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)
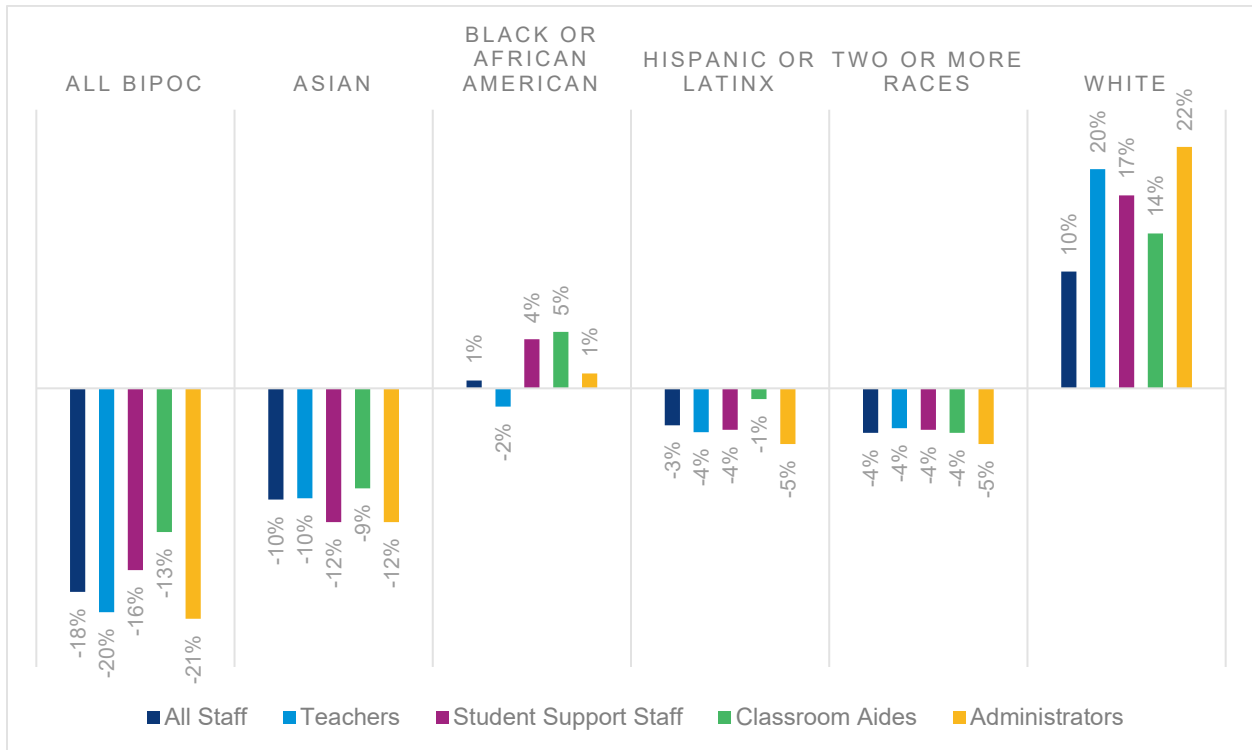
When looking at the representation gaps between BIPOC students and staff, the largest gaps are between students, teachers, and administrators. The smallest gaps across each of the demographic categories are between students and classroom aides.

The following data were retrieved from the Schools and District Profiles website.[23] The "Teachers and School Leaders" category is counted as any FTE whose position is classified as Teacher, Co-Teacher, Principal/Headmaster/Headmistress/Head of School, or Deputy/Vice/Associate/Assistant Principal in the MA DESE School and District Profiles database. The "All Other Staff" category was calculated by subtracting the numbers of Teachers and School Leaders in each racial category from the totals found in the MA DESE School and District Profiles database.

Figure 40. Teacher, School Leader, and Other District Staff by Race/Ethnicity by Full-Time Equivalents (2019-2022)

	BIPOC Teachers & School Leaders	White Teachers & School Leaders	BIPOC All Other Staff	White All Other Staff
SY18-19	4%	96%	5%	95%
SY19-20	4%	96%	7%	93%
SY20-21	5%	95%	7%	93%
SY21-22	5%	95%	8%	92%

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[23] https://profiles.doe.mass.edu

While the percentage of BIPOC staff members in the district has increased slightly over the last two years, the diversity of the student body in Westwood has increased at a higher rate. The representation gap between students and teachers and school leaders has increased 3 percentage points since the 2018-19 school year.

Figure 41. Percentage Point Gap Between Student Enrollment and Teachers and School Leaders by Full-Time Equivalents Over Four Years (2018-2019 through 2021-2022)
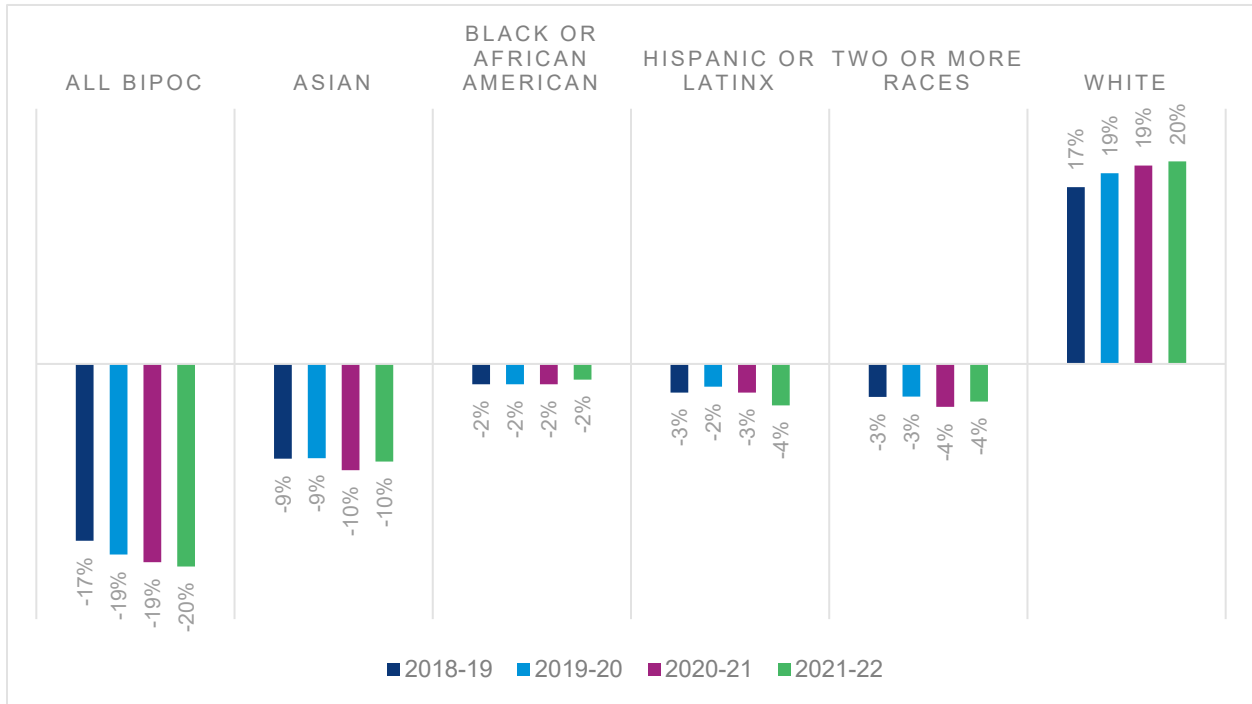
The biggest gaps in representation are between Asian students and the teachers and school leaders in the district.

- The percentage of racially diverse staff has remained stable.

As shown in the table below, the percentage of FTEs across the district by race/ethnicity has remained stable over the last four years. Due to the small numbers of BIPOC FTEs in the district, a single hire or resignation has an oversized impact on retention rates in the district. Because of this, we were unable to conduct a retention and attrition proportionality analysis.

Figure 42. Staff Percentage Point Change Between School Years by Race/Ethnicity and Full-Time Equivalents (2019-2022)

	Asian		Black or African American		Hispanic or Latinx		Two or More Races		White	
District Wide (All Staff)										
SY18-19	1%	--	2%	--	2%	--	0%	--	95%	--
SY19-20	1%	±0	3%	+1	2%	±0	1%	+1	93%	-2
SY20-21	2%	±1	3%	±0	2%	±0	0%	-1	93%	±0
SY21-22	2%	±0	3%	±0	2%	±0	1%	+1	92%	-1
Teachers & School Leaders										

SY18-19	2%	--	0%	--	1%	--	1%	--	96%	--
SY19-20	2%	±0	0%	±0	2%	+1	1%	±0	96%	±0
SY20-21	2%	±0	0%	±0	2%	±0	1%	±0	95%	-1
SY21-22	2%	±0	0%	±0	1%	-1	1%	±0	95%	±0

It is important to note that these data represent percentages of FTEs and not individual staff members. We have no way of knowing from this data whether an increase in percentage points for a certain group indicates that the existing staff members in that group were retained or were replaced.

- There is a lack of consistent or standard hiring practices, processes, and materials.

There has been a recent push to build and utilize consistent tools across all the schools for reviewing applications and conducting interviews, but these tools are new and are not adopted consistently. Use of standardized processes and multiple measures of evaluation for applicants are important elements of an equitable hiring process.

For positions such as teachers, guidance counselors, and all other school-based and district staff positions the district relies heavily on referrals, recommendations, and interview processes that vary by hiring manager. In addition, because the district does not have a consistent system to track applicant demographic data, we are unable to determine whether the current hiring tools or processes are impacting certain groups of applicants in disproportionate ways. Without organized demographic information about the candidates, the district is unable to adjust strategies or practices to increase the diversity of its applicant pool and, in turn, its workforce.

The lack of specific language around equity and diversity in the school committee's human resources policies limits the district's ability to set goals and prioritize the recruitment and hiring of diverse educators and staff, despite the known benefits and need expressed by almost all stakeholders interviewed.[24]

- The current recruitment reach in WPS is limited and does not engage the diverse educator candidates the district wants.

In the Leadership Equity Readiness Survey, 94% of district leaders agreed or strongly agreed that "the district prioritizes recruitment and employment of a racially diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of WPS students." However, in response to the question "what challenges do you see to improving equity in WPS?" on the same survey, 25% of responses mentioned a lack of diversity, a lack of diverse candidates, lack of recruitment of diverse faculty, and a lack of staff diversity that reflects that of the students. In interviews and focus groups school leaders and other hiring managers expressed frustration at the lack of diversity in the district's candidate pool and the perceived lack of intentionality in working towards improving it. District administrators shared a desire to be more strategic and to change how recruitment has worked in the past to move the needle on candidate diversity, which is a common focus across the state.

External job posting locations for open positions in the district are mostly limited to the district's website and on SchoolSpring. The district is a member of the Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education, which is an excellent resource for recruitment and job posting however, this is the only diversity-focused place where Westwood's current job openings are posted. A review of other hiring sites targeted at educators of color did not find any job openings for Westwood.

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[24] Westwood Public Schools. "GCE – Professional Staff Recruiting/Posting Vacancies." *School Committee Policy Manual*. Westwood Public Schools. "GCF – Professional Staff Hiring." *School Committee Policy Manual*.

Professional Development

- School leaders and teachers expressed a need for additional modes, levels, and times for equity-focused professional development.

BIPOC and HMI families, District staff, School Committee members mentioned current instructional staff-targeted trainings are excellent, however additional training is needed for all stakeholders (families, students, staff, School Committee members) on cultural competency and varying levels of the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging from fundamental definitions to the application of more-in depth principles and practices. School leaders and teachers focus group participants mentioned the need for differentiated trainings in equity. Different school personnel need varying levels of content based on varied understanding of equity and its application in classroom instruction and practice as well as students served (ES, MS, HS). As demonstrated by district-provided PD data, 67% of PD offered is foundational, and 33% is for more advanced levels of understanding.

While various PD has been offered by the district during the summer and school year, participants requested full day school trainings be offered to allow for greater participation as all faculty members may not be able to attend trainings outside of the workday, especially ones who may need the training the most.

- WPS leadership and staff want more action oriented, teacher-led PD.

Stakeholders asked for more internal, grass roots initiatives in which teachers who are familiar with the Westwood landscape could provide more trainings during the regulated Fall PD schedules (as previously done). Westwood has executed this successfully in the past as demonstrated by the PD summer schedule of 2022 – 2023 with offerings of courses for credits led by Westwood teachers. Instructional stakeholders requested more of these types of home-grown opportunities. Additionally, within individual interviews, persons suggested a positive reception to training conducted by students, particularly students of color, around topics concerning equity.

- Most of the equity-centric professional development is voluntary.

As documented in several PD offering schedules from 2019 through the current school year, several equity-centric courses are made available to instructional staff. Courses such as "Creating a More Culturally Inclusive Curriculum", "Anti-Racist Teaching in Action", "Building Classroom Culture: Success Through Strategies" offer teachers valuable information on ways to create a culturally responsive classroom and environment. Additional varied types of professional development have also been offered, such as critical analysis of frameworks like "Cultivating Genius" and the New Teacher Equity Orientation.

However, participation in many of these courses is voluntary. 78% of equity courses offered by the district are offered to all faculty who are interested in participating as noted by PCG's review of professional development offerings. As a result, persons who may need to hear the information for the benefit of their students, has the option to forego these necessary trainings. As echoed by all WPS staff focus groups, family focus groups, and among student survey respondents, equity-centric PD, more specifically anti-racist and culturally responsive practices PD, should be mandatory.

- Stakeholders across the district expressed the need for additional training on culturally responsive practices and how to work with students of color for district and school staff.

As described by all BIPOC and HMI stakeholder focus groups, members of WPS teaching staff have limited understanding of how to work with students of color and students of marginalized backgrounds. A lack of cultural competence from some staff results in bias language and attitudes towards students and families, including what was described as "White saviorism". While WPS has provided training for working with students of color, "Educating Students of Color: Hear me, See Me, Teach Me" in 2018 and offered voluntary

PD on building teacher capacity to work with students of color, stakeholders are vocal regarding the need for a greater understanding of how to support students of color academically and socially. As described in a WPS staff members focus group, well-intentioned personnel's bias and feelings towards children of color present as a misunderstanding of younger students' expressions, "conflating behavior with culture" or not wanting to offend Black students resulting in teachers not holding Black students to the same standards as their White counterparts.

On the Leadership Equity Survey, only 17% of school administrators agreed with the statement "District and school staff have received professional learning focused on engaging historically marginalized families into activities that respect their language(s), culture, concerns, and aspirations for their children." As further described in open survey responses from leadership and leadership interviews, building leaders need more professional development on culturally responsive practices for their individual practices as well as to inform and properly support their staff.

- Equity-centric PD does not have clear benchmarks towards an overall district equity goal.

Staff and leadership focus group participants named opportunities to participate in professional development but were unaware of an overall professional development goal or the school data used to support and/or inform the type of PD offered. WPS leadership staff described the need for a clear equity vision and a pathway to measure progress. As further demonstrated in the teacher focus group, participants, said there is not a clear way to gauge impact and accountability for equity PD because it does not have a greater landscape from which to judge. Because there is no larger roadmap, some WPS staff are unsure of what they are working towards, and unclear of the data they are using to support the practice and application of concepts taught in equity-centric PD.

- Methods to gauge the impact and application of equity-based professional development are needed.

WPS continues to present various offerings of professional development for instructional staff and building leadership in a myriad of ways, including in-person trainings, after-school workshops, and state-initiated professional learning communities. However, there is not a clear and current approach to gauging the impact and application of the trainings and learning sessions attended by WPS staff. Documented in the Professional Development questionnaires, 2 out of 3 trainings do not require a follow-up activity, such as a lesson plan, self-reflection journal, or student work to demonstrate proficiency. As such, WPS leaders and district personnel do not have a mechanism to gauge understanding or application of equity-concepts taught during valuable PD. Moreover, the absence of mechanisms to gauge the application of concepts taught, leaves a gap in data needed to create benchmarks for overall staff growth and development in equity, and more critically, classroom application of equitable practices.

TALENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND DEVELOPMENT ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The five priority recommendations for WPS to implement in the immediate term are laid out in Chapter 3: Priority Recommendations. The additional recommendations below are ideas for strategies that could also support the district in moving equity work forward and could be explored further in the future.

Human Resources Practices and Policies

- **Continue to act on and implement the work begun by the district over the last three years.** Since 2019, Westwood has begun to execute several pieces of work that are strong steps towards building a more diverse workforce:

- o Revision of job descriptions to include specific language referencing equity and expectations for applicants to the district regarding DEI work;
- o Establishment of affinity groups for staff;
- o Development of interview questions and rubrics with an explicit equity focus, and accompanying trainings;
- o The work of the Talent Diversification Grant awarded by DESE.

However, while these pieces of work were shared by the district during this audit, we found little evidence of their implementation. In interviews and focus groups, neither staff nor school leaders discussed these initiatives, and these initiatives appear nowhere on the district's website or in public-facing materials. Once hired, the Human Resources Director should be responsible for developing and implementing a communications and awareness strategy for sharing this work with stakeholders across the district.

- **Create an internal recruitment ambassadors program.** Westwood should also explore developing an internal recruitment program in which current teachers and leaders are given a stipend to serve as a point of contact for educator applicants to the district. These recruitment ambassadors could attend job fairs (as public health regulations allow), be tasked with posting jobs on social media and on job boards, could answer questions via email or live chats, host presentations on applying to and working for Westwood Public Schools, and more. The district does not have any full-time employees overseeing all HR functions for the district - these recruitment ambassadors could add crucial capacity to this work.

- **Explore research-based strategies and program models for increasing BIPOC educator retention.** One of the reasons why educators of color leave schools is because they are the only or one of the only BIPOC staff members and feel isolated.[25] Westwood can work to combat potential feelings of isolation by developing cohort models for hiring and staff placement at the elementary schools in WPS. Currently the School Committee's policy gives the Superintendent the responsibility for professional staff assignments and transfers. Using this leeway, the district should develop a policy to support cohorts of diverse educators in staffing assignments throughout the district.

  Setting up structures in which new educators of color can learn from the experiences of veteran educators of color can go a long way towards retaining and developing a more diverse workforce. The district could stipend a teacher leader to coordinate regular, offsite opportunities for educators of color to gather, network, discuss common struggles, and organize discussions about topics relevant to the community.

Professional Development

- **Provide trainings in multiple modes, levels, and times.** To help ensure maximum participation for trainings, PD should be offered at varying times, in different modalities (i.e.. online, webinar, in-person, etc.), for different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced), and more offerings through internal staff due to school community's familiarity with the staff members.

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[25] Bristol, T. (2014). "Black Men of the Classroom: An Exploration of how the Organizational Conditions, Characteristics, and Dynamics in Schools Affect Black Male Teachers' Pathways into the Profession." *Columbia University*.

8. CULTURE, CLIMATE, AND PARTNERSHIPS

Guiding Question: To what extent do the stakeholders of WPS feel welcomed and supported in Westwood Public Schools?

This section addresses key findings related to the perceptions of feeling welcomed and/or supported in WPS by three stakeholder groups of the Westwood community: students, staff, and family. Focus group participants, individual interviews, and open survey responses were collected to describe the shared experiences of members of the Westwood community.

CULTURE, CLIMATE, AND PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

Students

- Most students have positive feelings and perceptions about aspects of their educational experiences.

Ninety-one percent of all students surveyed feel at least one staff member cares for them. The percentage is the same among BIPOC and HMI students. Additional favorable responses were received when asked the following survey questions:

Figure 43. Student Survey Questions with Favorable Responses

Student Survey Questions	Strongly Agree/Agree from All students N=1105	Strongly Agree/Agree from BIPOC and HMI students N=251
I believe staff provides mentorship to support my academic and personal growth (beyond my classroom performance)	90.9%	90.4%
I feel that my teachers can meet my educational needs	90.6%	88.3%
I am learning 21st century skills (critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity) to solve problems.	82.4%	83.2%
I feel supported to be successful in each of my classes.	88.1%	88.0%

- Some students participate in affinity groups as a means of support and belonging.

BIPOC and HMI focus group participants described the need and appreciation for the affinity group "Supporting Black and Latino Student Group" to share experiences at school as persons of color. Often describing their daily interactions as singular, "the only person of color" in class or on the sports team, the affinity group provides an opportunity to belong to a space and group that allows participants to be their full selves while connecting with others who have shared experiences.

- Some teachers' use of preferred pronouns creates inclusiveness for students in the LGBTQ community.

There are teachers in Westwood who make concerted efforts to be inclusive by asking students their preferred pronouns, as articulated in student open-survey response.

- Westwood offers various programming to educate students on ways to foster an inclusive student culture.

Recent examples include: Weaving and Welcoming Project at all elementary schools for Pride Month, Peer Leaders trained by ADL (MS), Creation of and training for student "Community Builders" group (MS),

Westwood High School's Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) and Thurston Middle School's GSA, Asian American Pacific Islander Affinity Group, assemblies highlighting the experience of persons with historically marginalized identities, community events with student panelists entitled "Discussing Race, Culture, and Ethnicity," and a weekend Juneteenth celebration in collaboration with Hale.

- WPS offers student-run program of Let's Talk About Race, Culture, and Ethnicity (LTARCE) in which students created a "WHS Together" series in S-Block.

Recent events include:

- o Panel talk reflection on the experience of Latinx community members
- o Indigenous peoples experience panel with a local Native American educator (virtual with students)
- o Panel on the black student experience, as well as reflections on MLK and his work
- o Panel reflecting on the AAPI student experience
- o African American "read-in" event in the library

Families

- Many families describe feeling welcomed at and in schools.

Ninety percent of all families surveyed feel welcomed at school and at school events.

- Recent efforts in diversity and inclusion are appreciated by many families.

Within all family focus groups, appreciation was expressed for the upcoming Black History show, expansion of the METCO program into elementary schools, inclusion of diverse authors in the ELA program, and offering of Translation Services for multilingual families. Families are also appreciative of the shifts in curriculum and the conscious efforts to ensure school events are accessible to Boston-resident families. Several families, students, and staff members shared their appreciation of the district undertaking this audit and hope to see the report findings and recommendations for improvement in WPS.

- Most families had positive experiences with the district's responses to requests and input around Special Education services.

Within family focus groups, participants expressed appreciation for the school's responsiveness and inclusion when building new structures like the Hanlon school for the needs of Special Education students. Families also expressed gratitude for the wonderful Special Education teams supporting their children at various schools.

Staff

- Staff strongly agree or agree WPS is implementing equitable practices in access to advanced or challenging coursework.

As seen in the staff survey, 87% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "Each student has equitable access to courses offered at our schools" and 81% of staff respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "Our district has policies in place to help students take on challenging classes."

- There are excellent opportunities for students to self-select courses and receive support in school through flexible scheduling.

As seen in the MTSS memo regarding interventions at Thurston Middle School, the What I Need (WIN) block is an excellent method to provide students with additional support. Moreover, the self-selection of courses through J-term in high school allows students the opportunity to choose courses they are interested in. These efforts lend to the 90.9% of all students surveyed responding positively to the statement "I believe

the staff in my school provide mentorship to support my academic and personal growth beyond my classroom performance." Similarly, the Support block or "S-Block" as described in WPS course descriptions, is designed to "provide all WHS students with time within the school schedule to work on academic and/or social emotional growth."

CULTURE, CLIMATE, AND PARTNERSHIPS ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Students

- Black students report experiencing racism and/or marginalization during the school day.

Students in the BIPOC and HMI focus groups described racist behavior from staff members and students towards Black students such as unfair discipline practices. This sentiment is echoed by 38% of Black students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement "punishment for breaking rules is applied fairly to all" as opposed to 62% of their White counterparts. In addition, among open student survey responses, statements regarding overt and covert racist behavior were described by Black students: "Students are punished and watched more if they're a minority" and "People do racial things all the time. its *[sic]* too normalized".

- Students in the LGBTQ community and their families report not always feeling safe with other students.

As expressed in BIPOC and HMI student and family focus groups, LGBTQ students do not always feel safe in school. Students shared instances in which their classmates were causing harm or being hateful towards other students. Instances were named in which students were bullied, told to hurt themselves, or harassed based on their gender identity.

- There are gaps between student and families' perception and staff perception of student voice and whether it is included in decision-making processes.

Of all parents surveyed, 44.5%, believe students do not have "chances to help decide things like class activities and rules." Fifty-one percent of all students do not feel their voice and opinion are taken into consideration in decision making at school. Conversely, 82.8% of school staff and 86.3% of district staff agree or strongly agree with the survey question "students' voices and opinions are taken into consideration in decision making in WPS."

Several student responses named student experiences in which students were not part of the decision-making process. Notably, students who were part of student groups also stated they were unaware of some of the decisions being made and wanted a larger role in making school-wide decisions via student surveys, student polls, etc.

- Students and families expressed a desire to create more intentional opportunities for building community between Westwood-resident students and Boston-resident students.

Across the BIPOC and HMI student and family focus groups, participants recounted experiences in which students were able to have fun together on field trips and local activities. As such, students stated feeling included with a sense of belonging while participating in fun extracurricular events such as a pie eating contest, a trip to Washington, DC, and open-mic contests. Students described the ease at which they were able to connect to others: "You will talk to anyone when you are having fun." BIPOC and HMI family focus group participants also mentioned the importance of opportunities to join school clubs, teams, and school activities for building community between Westwood-resident and Boston-resident students.

- There is a perception among families, staff, and students that Black students are not challenged in the same way as their peers.

Open student survey responses, teachers, and families describe teachers as "kind" and "nice" but are not challenging Black students at the rate in which they challenge White students. Among all students surveyed, 77% of Black students agreed with the statement "my teachers encourage me to take on challenging classes." However, among all students surveyed, Black students had the lowest level of agreement with the statement; 87% of White students agreed with the statement.

Also, 20% of Black students disagreed with the statement "I am encouraged to persevere in especially challenging situations" as compared to their White peers at 10%.

- Boston residents expressed a lack of belonging to Westwood community.

Eighty percent of the BIPOC and HMI student focus group participants, specifically students who are part of the METCO program, described a lack of belonging to the Westwood school community. Participants expressed a feeling of divide between Boston-resident students and Westwood-resident students as seen in classes, lunchrooms, and social events. For example, while student choice is offered in choosing student council leaders or den leaders for football games, den leaders are typically friends and part of the same social group as their predecessors. As a result, Boston-resident students are left out of the Westwood school community even during social events. As expressed by one more persons in the BIPOC and HMI student focus group, Boston-residents do not feel like they are part of the Westwood community. Among all student survey open-responses, one or more persons requested diversity in student leadership to include students who were not necessarily labeled as popular by other students. One student suggested creating opportunities for students who are part of the METCO program to be part of student council.

The lack of belonging experienced by some students results in the lack of participation in advanced courses as illustrated by an interview respondent: "METCO kids would say they don't want to be in honors or AP classes because they don't want to draw attention to themselves and feeling like they don't belong in the higher-level classes. They are stifling their own education because they don't want to feel like they don't belong. They don't feel part of a community. When they do DEI things, they feel like they are being forced to do it, it's not natural."

- BIPOC students have a greater desire for more social events as compared to their White counterparts.

Among open-ended student survey responses, 24% of BIPOC students mentioned a desire to have more, school-wide events in which all students have an opportunity to participate, in comparison to 11% of White students. One or more respondents mentioned current feelings of isolation resulting in a desire to engage with other students and wanting to participate in more meaningful interactions with classmates, despite describing themselves as shy and introverted. As mentioned in a student focus group, "You will talk to anyone when you're having fun."

- Student handbook dress code and religious expression guidelines need clarity and inclusive language.

As described in the student handbook, "two of the core purposes of the Westwood Public Schools are academic excellence and promoting respectful and caring relationships. To that end, we expect students to refrain from wearing clothing that is *disruptive to the educational process*, poses safety concerns, and/or interferes with an individual's right to learn in a harassment-free environment." Open-response student survey responses from BIPOC and HMI groups and the open feedback form from Focus Group registrants mentioned concern about the school dress code saying they were told their bodies were "distracting." The language in the handbook is vague and should be further discussed with students and families with clear definitions of what can and can't be worn. Moreover, the handbook should include language about freedom of cultural and religious expression through dress as a permissible adjustment to the dress code.

Families

- There are families from historically marginalized background who describe not feeling welcomed at WPS schools.

Thirty three percent of BIPOC and HMI family focus group participants described instances in which they did not feel welcome and were not supported at school. One or more parents described instances in which

they reported their child was struggling and was met with a response to be more "resilient." Participants in the WPS staff focus group also echoed family's perceptions of being unwelcomed by stating the need for schools to be more inclusive and welcoming of all groups.

- There is a perceived lack of support and backing from district leadership regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices.

One or more members of the family focus group noted that teachers did not have the full support of the district in their actions thereby limiting support for their students. For instance, they expressed concern that the lack of a district-wide policy for the celebration of cultures and identities creates challenges for teachers to celebrate or outwardly support BIPOC and HMI students and families. Teacher focus group participants mentioned incidents in which staff was asked to remove materials that support certain groups like a Pride flag because opponents expressed discomfort with the flag in the classroom. As a result, staff grew frustrated with the lack of direction as relayed in the teacher focus groups. The staff group consensus was a district stance is necessary to inform teacher practices. Individual school leader interview participants also echoed a lack of cohesion and a clearly articulated vision leading to high scrutiny in their roles and making it difficult to meet student needs.

Families shared perceptions of a lack of sensitivity and cultural competence from school staff.

- According to BIPOC and HMI families, children have been marginalized through different instances of misgendering or intentional mispronunciation of names. During instances of mispronunciation, students were asked to abbreviate their names to appease adults. Some parents feel school staff (teachers and administration) are not well equipped for handling culture differences nor are they able to educate students on cultural competence. Moreover, interviews of parents revealed a perception of the lack of teacher understanding and/or awareness of religious differences or different family structures. Specifically, parents mentioned teachers assuming children are Catholic or Christian or come from a home in which one parent identifies as male and the other identifies as female. As such, school activities and school celebrations are sometimes rooted in these generalizations and assumptions.

Families shared perceptions of a lack of sensitivity and cultural competence from other students.

- According to one or more BIPOC and HMI families, children have been mistreated or denied their individuality. A family open survey respondent described an instance where a student asked an Asian student "if he eats a dog." The question according to the survey respondent was posed to humiliate the student.

Families shared the need for additional supports for students receiving special education services and challenges with expectations of some teachers.

Among the family stakeholder group, families describe the need for additional support for students classified as special needs.

   o Families in focus groups mentioned there is no fully accessible playground for children and caregivers with disabilities.

   o Parents feel they must advocate for any needs beyond the typically offered needs such as sensory friendly needs.

   o One family survey respondent mentioned low expectations from teachers for their autistic student.

- Families have conflicting perceptions of equity and WPS' role in equity initiatives.

Family open-survey responses included a wide range of ideas regarding equity as seen below:

Figure 44. Family Survey Questions with Conflicting or Differing Responses

In support of equity initiatives	In opposition to equity initiatives
District should purposefully create "an atmosphere where different thoughts and ideas can be expressed (respectfully)"	Equity breeds mediocrity; The focus should be on equality… not equity. Equity makes us all feel entitled to something bases on …differences…and it creates resentment.
The overt and systemic racism and general bigotry in WPS must be addressed…	Diminishing rigor in the name of equal outcomes; Equity is a dangerous goal
Gender identity should be discussed	Non-binary is not an acceptable gender; stop LGBT teachings
…when there is a student of a different race, sexual orientation, or religion, there is limited acceptance. More needs to be done to teach acceptance and tolerance	Stop teaching CRT, just teach 'treat everyone and anyone with respect' stop pointing out differences; stop focusing on all the differences…
More focus on educating both kids and parents about issues related to race/gender identity/sexual orientation, especially at the elementary school level.	Stop CRT and LGBT teachings. "Start educating and listen to parents…School levels have dropped…"
More education about diversity and inclusion	School is working too hard to please every individual student at the sacrifice of the majority. This has lowered standards and outcome measures.

Staff

- In all instructional staff and leadership focus groups, participants held the perception that instructional staff, at times, conduct themselves in a manner as if they are saving students of color, referred to as "White saviorism."

White saviorism is a deficit mind-set in which an educator, namely a White educator, believes students of color need saving because of the students' flaws, lack of resources, willpower, or intelligence.[26] Students also described this sentiment in open survey responses, such as "The people I have met have always been nice to me, but I feel as if they imply … that I can't do anything that I truly want."

- Students described instances of bias from teachers.

Student open- survey respondents stated there are teachers with overt bias towards girls resulting in unfair punishment and treatment of boys. Moreover, students stated teachers have preferences towards popular students and students who are doing well in class resulting in less assistance and support for students who need more support and are struggling with content or social settings.

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[26] Raypole, Crystal. (July 2021). "A Savior No One Needs: Unpacking and Overcoming the White Savior Complex." *Healthline*.

- Varied instructional practices and methods of identification are needed for WPS' diverse set of learners.

While 88% of all student survey respondents stated they feel supported in classes, open student survey responses described conditions in which student learning styles are not being met. Student survey respondents stated differentiated instruction is necessary for their individual success. For example, students mentioned the need for more one-on-one support from teachers and guidance counselors. Moreover, school staff survey respondents expressed a need to improve ways to identify students who need additional supports. WPS student body members who are not part of the Special education umbrella, as expressed by staff, may not be receiving needed resources because staff is unaware of which programs/interventions are most appropriate for these students. School leadership interviewees expressed similar concerns and the need for teachers to be aware of which students are excelling, struggling, and invisible.

- Stakeholders described the need for teachers and staff to be more proactive and responsive to homophobic, transphobic, and racist student behaviors.

Some students, 25% of family focus groups participants and family open survey responses mentioned specific incidents in which students were misgendered, called names and felt unsafe around other students who displayed homophobic and transphobic behavior. One or more family focus group participants also noted a staff attitude of "boys will be boys" as a response to homophobic slurs and remarks as opposed to clear set of consequences for the offenders or an appropriate level of concern. According to student and family focus group participants and student survey respondents, racist and homophobic behavior has occurred with perceived minimal attention and response from some teachers.

CULTURE, CLIMATE AND PARTNERSHIPS ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The five priority recommendations for WPS to implement in the immediate term are laid out in Chapter 3: Priority Recommendations. The additional recommendations below are ideas for strategies that could also support the district in moving equity work forward and could be explored further in the future.

- **Create policies and procedures to ensure all students can attend school events** by finding solutions to any foreseeable barriers, i.e., decreased participation from more introverted students, finances or risks involved in overnight field trips. For example, respondents mentioned engaging shy students using online activities to bolster participation or fundraising to help students who cannot afford to participate. Moreover, engage the community to help fund, host and/or plan these activities to create as many opportunities as possible for fun community, family, and student engagement.

- **Create opportunities for school participation from different student groups.** Several respondents made note of needing opportunities to represent themselves and their differences from the larger WPS population. They seek spaces in which their differences are recognized and appreciated. As such, WPS should seek additional representation of students from different cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, and ability groups to represent or participate in school events. To understand which groups seek representation, WPS can launch a survey among students, ask student council to have open forums, as well as allow students to nominate representatives for each group, as an improvement upon the current system of popularity-based representation.

- **Increase opportunities for student voice in areas valued by students.** Currently, school leadership and students have vastly different perceptions of when and how student voice is applied in decision making at WPS. Defining the current areas in which student voice is being used in comparison to where students want their voices heard is imperative to creating a more positive climate at WPS. A district-

wide student survey for middle and high school students can begin the process of creating alignment between student requests and leadership expectations of student voice.

- **Create district-wide practices around how to welcome students and families in culturally relevant ways.** WPS should launch a parent survey, periodically, asking parents the best ways to communicate and any needs each family may have. These responses can inform district-wide practices as well as provide a means to know what is preferred by each family. Moreover, welcoming students should have a similar approach in which students can be asked what makes them feel welcomed, i.e. being greeted by the door, playing music between classes, asking their input in classroom dynamics, etc.

- **Increase and build on community engagement events** to allow greater family, teacher, staff, and student involvement and connection to WPS schools. Creating spaces in which families can meet teachers and school leaders outside of the school building can assist with creating a greater sense of belonging to the Westwood community, not only for Boston residents but for other students who may not feel connected to the Westwood community. Offering persons different venues to connect may create spaces for more enjoyment and harmony.

  Families noted the previously held family listening sessions and forums as positive examples of opportunities to engage with the district. The practice of parent sessions with school committee members can be increased to include sessions with school leadership. Within these scheduled and frequent sessions, parents can have conversations with school and district leadership.

- **Revisit special education practices with staff** to understand any gaps in services between schools and supports received by families. Ensure all staff members follow federal, state, and district-produced policies and practices regarding all aspects of special education services, including students who may need services but are not yet officially identified as special education students.

9. CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by WPS related to equity and inclusion are those shared with many school systems across the country. Our recommendations are grounded in our analysis of the data collected for this audit and are drawn from research-informed strategies and best practices recognized to improve equity and student outcomes. We believe that a commitment to carry forward the recommendations in this report and the active engagement of a wide range of stakeholders with the planning process and implementation will position the school system on a path for success to provide an inclusive and equitable education for every student.

Enacting change, the kind of change that will fundamentally improve outcomes of all students, and especially those from historically marginalized groups, requires focus, a strong vision from the Superintendent and enacted by senior leadership staff, an appropriate allocation of resources, mandated professional development, and clear, non-negotiable, accountability measures. This type of reform will require the involvement and commitment of every staff person, families, and community.

APPENDIX A. STUDENT ACCESS TO LEARNING: FULL ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

MCAS RESULTS ANALYSIS

Hispanic or Latinx Students

The proficiency rate for Hispanic students on the ELA assessment has been slowly falling, from a high in 2017 of 68% proficient, to a low in 2021 of 57% proficient. The ELA proficiency gap between Hispanic students and all students remained unchanged after the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of both rates falling 2-percentage points from 2019 to 2021, remaining at an 18-percentage point difference. The proficiency rate for Hispanic students on the mathematics assessment has been falling since a high of 63% in 2018 to a 4-year low of 45% in 2021. Although the gap between Hispanic students and all students fell by 8-percentage points from 2019 to 2021, both the all-students proficiency rate and the Hispanic students proficiency rate both experienced harsh declines (13-percentage points, and 5-percentage points, respectively).

Figure 45. Gap between Hispanic or Latinx students and all students: MCAS ELA 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Hispanic / Latinx students and all students:
MCAS ELA 2017−2021, grades 3−8
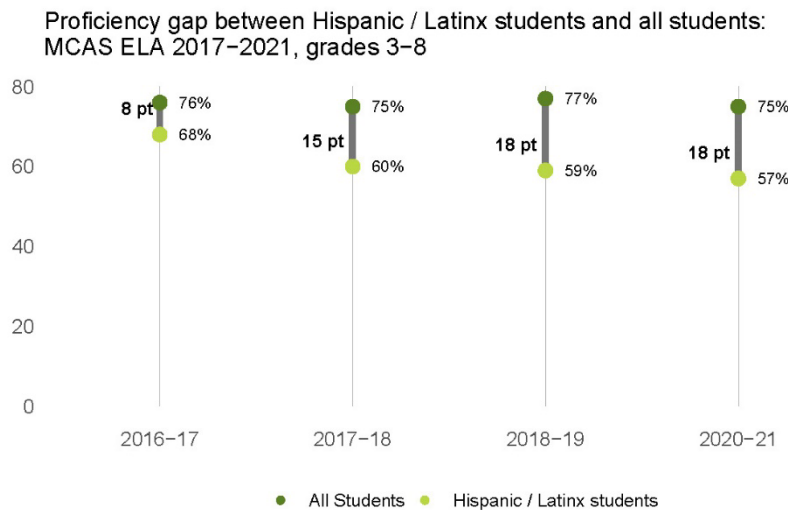
Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Figure 46. Gap between Hispanic or Latinx students and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Hispanic / Latinx students and all students:
MCAS Mathematics 2017–2021, grades 3–8
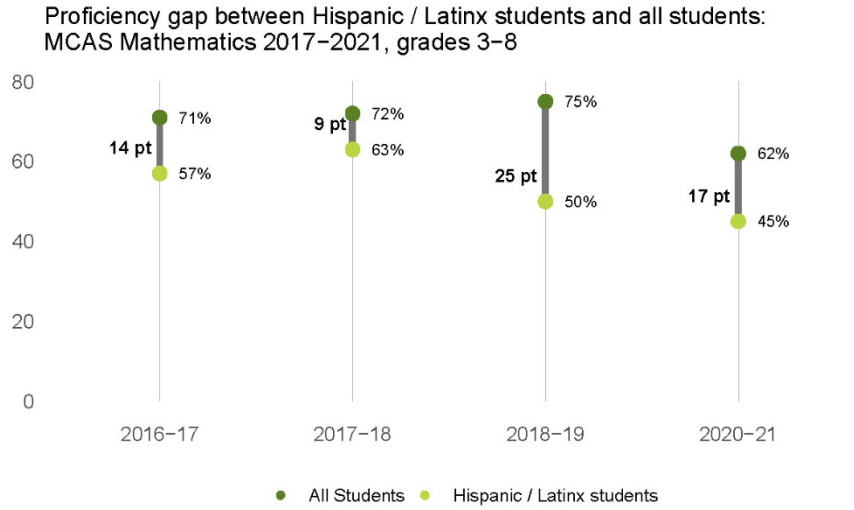
Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Students with IEPs

In the years ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proficiency gap between students with IEPs and all students was large but shrinking with each year as the proficiency rate for students with IEPs was quickly climbing. However, in 2021, the mathematics proficiency rate for students with IEPs fell by 9-percentage points, coinciding with a 13-percentage point drop for all students. In 2021, the proficiency gap on the ELA assessment shrunk by 5-percentage points; the proficiency rate for students with IEPs continued to trend upward, increasing by 3-percentage points.

Figure 47. Gap between students with IEPs and all students: MCAS ELA 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between students with IEPs and all students:
MCAS ELA 2017–2021, grades 3–8
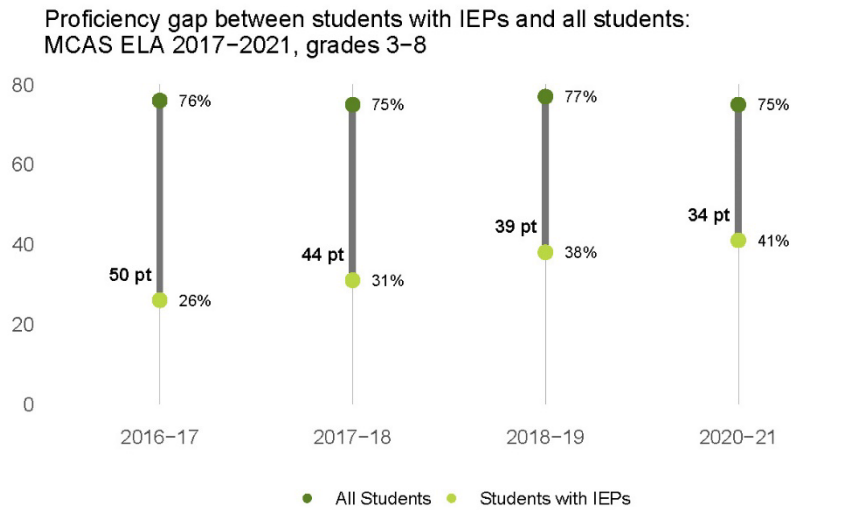
Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Figure 48. Gap between students with IEPs and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between students with IEPs and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017–2021, grades 3–8

	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2020–21
All Students	71%	72%	75%	62%
Students with IEPs	25%	31%	37%	28%
Gap	46 pt	41 pt	38 pt	34 pt

● All Students ● Students with IEPs

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu
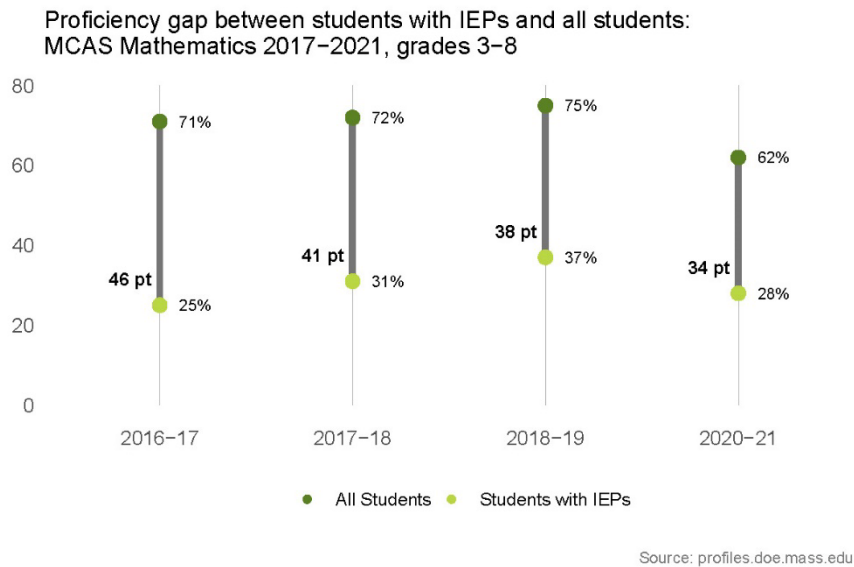
Asian Students

Over the past 4 years of the MCAS, Asian students have achieved a higher proficiency rate than the all-student rate on both the ELA and mathematics assessments. In 2021, the ELA proficiency rate for Asian students fell by 2-percentage points, mirroring the 2-percentage point drop in the all-students ELA proficiency rate. The proficiency rate on the mathematics exam showed a harsher drop; Asian students proficiency rate fell by 11-percentage points in 2021 but remained 19-percentage points higher than the all-students mathematics proficiency rate for that year.

Figure 49: Gap between Asian students and all students: MCAS ELA 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Asian students and all students: MCAS ELA 2017–2021, grades 3–8

	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2020–21
Asian Students	93%	88%	87%	85%
All Students	76%	75%	77%	75%
Gap	−17 pt	−13 pt	−10 pt	−10 pt

● All Students ● Asian Students

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

62
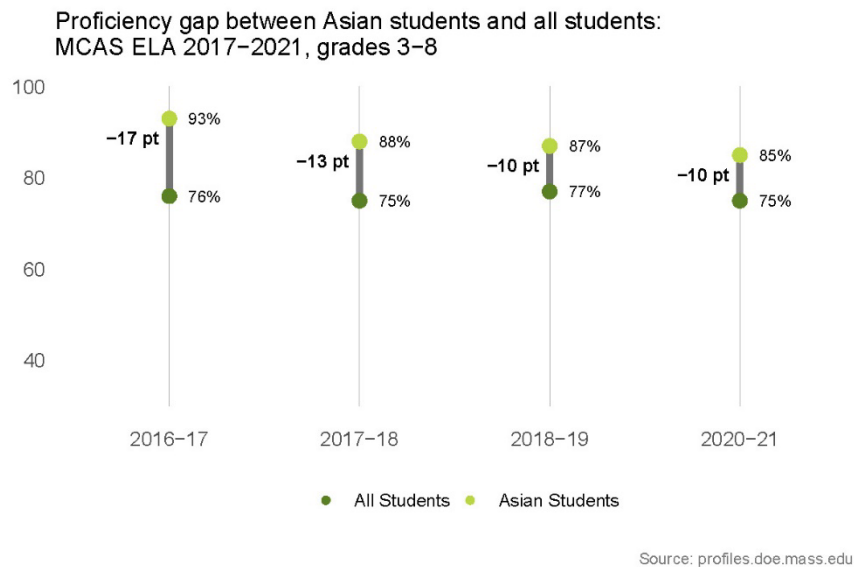
Figure 50. Gap between Asian students and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Asian students and all students:
MCAS Mathematics 2017–2021, grades 3–8
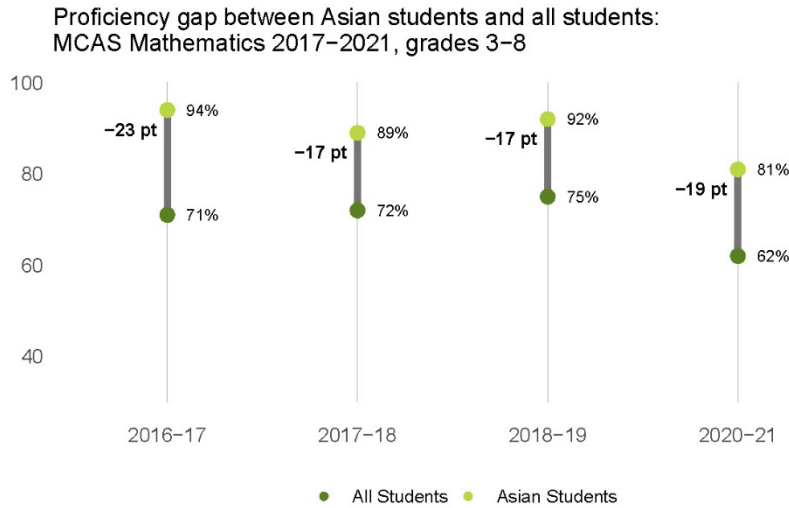
Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Multiracial Students

Over the past 4 years, multiracial students have demonstrated MCAS proficiency on the ELA and mathematics exams at highly similar rates to the district average. On the ELA exam, the gap between the two groups has ranged from 2-percentage points to 8-percentage points over the previous 4 exams. In 2021, the ELA proficiency rate for multiracial students increased by 1-percentage point, while the all-students ELA proficiency rate dropped by 2-percentage points. On the mathematics exam, multiracial students have demonstrated higher proficiency rates than the district average over the previous 4 exams. In 2021, multiracial students' proficiency rate fell by 11-percentage points, but still remained 9-percentage points higher than the all-students mathematics proficiency rate for that year.

Figure 51. Gap between Multiracial students and all students: MCAS ELA 2017-2021, grades 3-8.

Proficiency gap between Multiracial students and all students:
MCAS ELA 2017–2021, grades 3–8
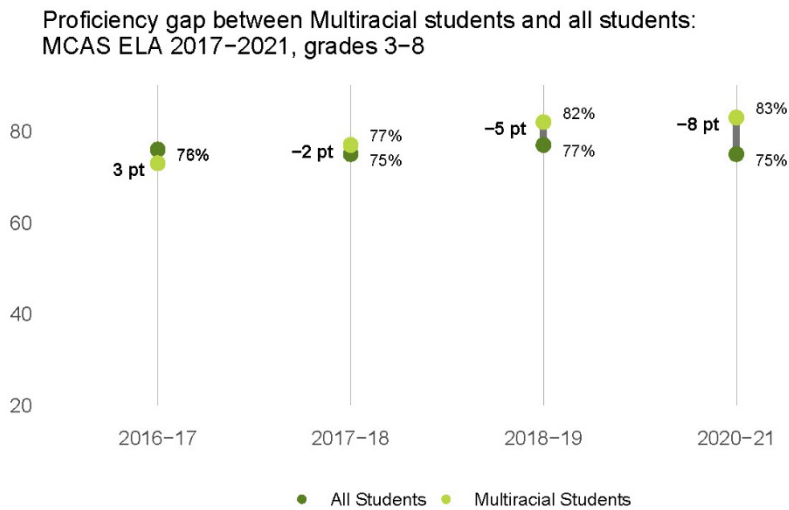
Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

Figure 52. Gap between Multiracial students and all students: MCAS Mathematics 2017-2021, grades 3-8

Proficiency gap between Multiracial students and all students:
MCAS Mathematics 2017–2021, grades 3–8

Source: profiles.doe.mass.edu

APPENDIX B. TABLE OF FIGURES

APPENDIX C. REFERENCES

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