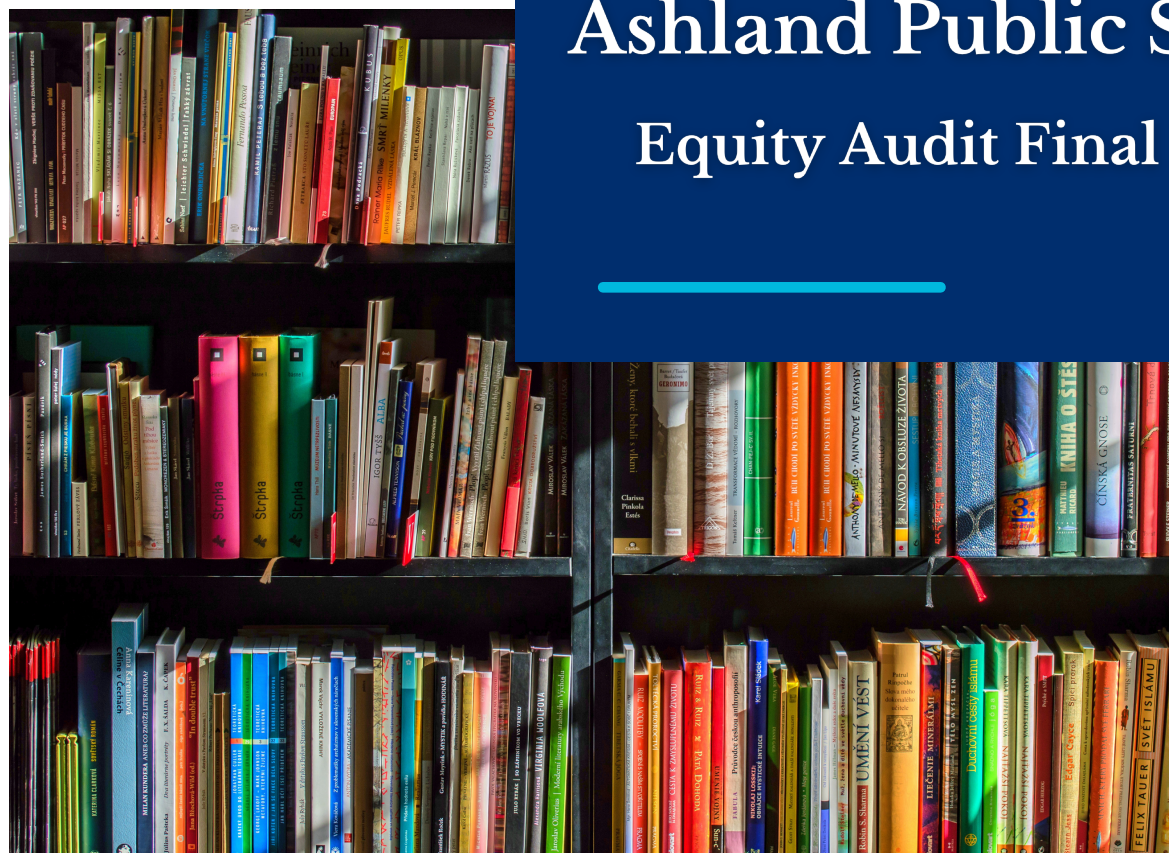


# Ashland Public Schools Equity Audit Final Report

August 2022



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## Contents

About L&P Educational Services .....	4
Introduction	
Why Conduct an Equity Audit? .....	5
Overview of Equity Audit .....	7
Equity Audit Framework .....	9
Overview	
District Context .....	11
Methodology .....	11
Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes .....	16
Student Learning and Development Outcomes: Practices that Support Equity .....	34
Student Learning and Development Outcomes: Practices that Limit Equity .....	39
High Leverage Recommendations for Equitable Student Learning and Development Outcomes .....	41
Domain 2: Leadership, Management, and Accountability .....	42
Leadership, Management, and Accountability: Factors that Support Equity .....	43
Leadership, Management, and Accountability: Factors that Limit Equity .....	45
High Leverage Recommendations for Leadership, Management, and Accountability .....	51
Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment .....	54
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Practices that Support Equity .....	54
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Practices that Limit Equity .....	57
High Leverage Recommendations for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment .....	60
Domain 4: Family and Community Engagement .....	62
Family and Community Engagement: Factors that Support Equity .....	63
Family and Community Engagement: Factors that Limit Equity .....	64
High Leverage Recommendations for Family and Community Engagement .....	65
Supporting Literature and Promising Practices .....	66
Additional Resources for District Reference and Review .....	74

### **About L&P Educational Services**

The L&P team is primarily comprised of educators who currently serve within school districts and institutions of higher education. Given the challenges of our country's educational system, our daily experiences as practitioners give insight and fortitude needed to help redefine educational communities. L&P works in partnership with Pre-K-12 school and district leaders and state officials who are conscious of the roles race and culture play in pedagogy and leadership practices, and provides the tools, skills, and knowledge for educators to challenge and disrupt the patterns and policies of systemic inequities. L&P Educational Services helps to build the capacity, confidence, and expertise of educators to teach, lead, and sustain equitable and culturally responsive classrooms and institutions.

### **Philosophy**

L&P aims to promote equity, culturally responsive teaching and leading, social and emotional learning, and antiracist practices in educational settings. We strive to create opportunities that assist educators in instilling the work of equity and antiracist practices into the fabric of an institution. All professional growth plans and equity audits are customized based on the unique needs and goals of our clients.

Our mission is to improve school climate and culture, and student learning outcomes, with particular attention to racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students and families. Our goal is to provide the district's schools opportunities for collective and focused engagement in self-reflection, and lead the faculty, staff, and greater community to recognize inequitable policies and practices, then adjust these policies and practices to improve inclusivity, relevance, and equity for all.

## **Why Conduct an Equity Audit (EA)?**

Conversations related to equity have increasingly extended beyond a dialogue about building cultural competencies to focus on how existing systems, policies, and practices may disadvantage racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse learners, learners with learning disabilities, and other groups.

Addressing these inequities presents districts not only with a challenge, but also an opportunity — to create a truly diverse and inclusive environment for teaching and learning. Yet, systemic problems require systemic solutions. Even where districts are committed to this vision, educators may not know which steps to take to achieve it. School district central office leaders must provide support and monitoring to ensure that schools and classrooms are implementing solutions reliably and consistently.

An equity audit can help educators understand the inequities that exist in their district and schools, and inform development of the policies and practices needed to address them, so that equity is not just something that appears in documents with a (possible) check mark next to it, but becomes woven into all parts of the school community, impacting thoughts, words, actions, and outcomes.

Ashland Public Schools selected to conduct an equity review to provide baseline data that will support the updates to their long-term strategic plan and infuse equity throughout all improvement efforts. This equity audit is an evidence-based, objective evaluation and assessment of Ashland Public School (APS) district's work and qualities.

## **Understanding Systemic Equity and Educational Equity**

L&P Educational Services defines systemic equity as the intentional approach to which systems and individuals consistently operate, through a lens that ensures every scholar — regardless of their learning profile, culture, race, and other identities -- is respected, recognized and valued, ultimately providing each scholar the same opportunity and access to achieve academic excellence.

L&P Educational Services defines educational equity as the necessary instruction that reduces the predictability of who succeeds and who fails, interrupting the policies and practices that conversely and negatively impact student performance, which limits their success.

## **What is an Equity Audit?:**

The EA process is designed to:

- ❖ Enable all levels of leadership and staff in the district to gain a shared understanding of the quality of education currently being provided in relation to clearly articulated equity standards that define a quality school;
- ❖ Guide a process of self-reflection and directed practice;
- ❖ Develop a shared understanding within the school community of the areas that promote equity and the priorities for improving equal access to student learning.
- ❖ Identify needs using a structured process with reference to a clear rubric;
- ❖ Enable the district to identify common patterns of professional practice across schools so that they can better support improved student outcomes for all.

The EA is designed to be a positive and constructive process that helps the district, school staff, and community know their schools better. It acknowledges good practice, identifies areas that could be more effective, and enables the consistent implementation of improvement plans with purpose and fidelity.

L&P Educational Services' equity audit will allow the district to have an overview of the quality of education and educational experiences across the district so that district leaders can make informed and strategic decisions going forward with regard to support and funding. The district will also be able to collaborate with school leaders and staff to ensure that there is a shared understanding of results and action plans to be reliably implemented across the district.

An EA is a snapshot in time and can only address what is in place and seen at the time of the review. Therefore, while the report can acknowledge planned work or work in the early stages of implementation (meaning there has not been sufficient time to produce data to confirm whether that work is making a difference), it will not ultimately “count” that work toward arriving at an outcome where support is concerned. For example, someone new to their position may not have had time to implement everything they have planned, and therefore the sections of the EA that relate to their work and role may simply reiterate what is already known. In these cases, the report can help to inform and confirm proposed/future plans and provide a set of priorities to work from.

*The EA is not an evaluation of the performance of individual employees or schools, but an overview of the whole district.*

The resulting report will guide APS through a process of self-reflection. School and district leaders and staff will develop a shared understanding of the areas within the school community that promote effective student learning as well as the priorities for improvement. The EA process is structured to identify needs with reference to a clear rubric. This can confirm existing knowledge and, in some cases, help the district identify common patterns of professional practice across schools so they can better support school improvement.

### **Overview of Equity Audit**

L&P Educational Services facilitated the equity audit process using an equity framework that addresses three overarching questions:

1. What does current district data reveal about achievement in Ashland Public Schools?
2. What factors do staff, students, and parents/caregivers identify as contributing to achievement in Ashland Public Schools?
3. What initiatives (district-level, school-level, classroom-level) can be implemented to build cultural competency and enhance the schooling experiences of all students, staff, and families in Ashland Public Schools?

L&P Educational Services' review process goal is to help APS understand how their actions, efforts, culture, structures, systems, and policies impact student learning, family engagement, and support educators with the overarching goal to improve school performance.

To provide these insights, reviewers focused on five areas:

#### ❖ Antiracist School Culture

- Does the district take a proactive approach to teaching all stakeholders including students, staff, and parents/caregivers about the harm of racism? What strategies are used to create equitable and antiracist school cultures? How does the district support school staff and students in creating antiracist and equitable school cultures where all students and staff thrive academically and emotionally?

#### ❖ Teacher and Staff Diversity

- Does the district hire for quality, expertise, and diversity? What recruitment, hiring, and retention practices are used to ensure teacher and staff diversity? How are



culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse staff supported in the district? How are diverse voices sought and heard throughout the district? What opportunities are there for moving into leadership roles?

❖ Healthy and Positive Working Conditions

- Does the district have workplaces that acknowledge and address the complexities around racial equity, diversity, and inclusion and how these factors impact one's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being? Do the students benefit from a healthy school environment where adults model healthy, respectful, and inclusive relationships and environments?

❖ Culturally Responsive Curriculum

- How does the district's curriculum provide interconnected and interdisciplinary learning experiences for students PreK-12 that strengthen students' sense of racial, ethnic, and tribal identities, help students understand and resist systems of oppression, and empower students to see themselves as change agents in pursuit of racial and social justice?

❖ Family and Community Engagement

- How is the district reaching, including, and engaging all community stakeholders to hear their needs and perspectives? Is the district effectively working with our community to meet the needs of the students we serve?

These areas were examined through a comprehensive framework that explores equity in different domains.

## Equity Audit Framework

The framework explores equity in four different domains:

- ❖ Student Learning and Development Outcomes
- ❖ Leadership, Management, and Accountability
- ❖ Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- ❖ Family and Community Engagement



The assessment process considered Student Learning and Development Outcomes as evidenced by:

- ❖ State Achievement Tests (proficiency rates)
- ❖ Drop/Push Out or Graduation Rate
- ❖ High School Tracks/Curricula (enrollment in leveled courses: i.e. standard, advanced)
- ❖ College Admission Testing (scores on SAT, ACT, and/or AP exams)
- ❖ Academic Enrichment Programming for Students
- ❖ Social and Emotional Learning Opportunities, Resources, and Data
- ❖ Discipline Data
- ❖ Attendance Data

The data are disaggregated for groups of students based on gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education status, and English learner status.

The process considered Leadership, Management, and Accountability in support of equity by examining:

- ❖ School and district vision and culture
- ❖ Data-informed systems and decision-making
- ❖ Governance
- ❖ Accountability
- ❖ Structure
- ❖ Professional capacity of school and district leaders
- ❖ Hiring and retention of staff, as well as the diversity of staff
- ❖ Resource availability and allocation
- ❖ Appropriateness and availability of ongoing professional development for staff
- ❖ Opportunities for appointment to leadership roles

This process also included a look at the district's Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment practices to determine:

- ❖ Effectiveness of teaching practices
- ❖ Opportunities for rigorous instruction
- ❖ Cultural relevance of curriculum
- ❖ Use of data to inform instruction and decision-making
- ❖ Instructional monitoring
- ❖ Culturally responsive teaching practices
- ❖ Professional development opportunities
- ❖ Consistency of practice across all schools

In addition, Family and Community Engagement opportunities are evaluated to see how the district:

- ❖ Values and considers the voices of families and students
- ❖ Develops and maintains productive partnerships with businesses, higher education, faith communities, cultural organizations, and other community groups
- ❖ Generates backing from the community for providing the resources and support needed for all students to succeed

To assess district performance across the domains, the L&P team employed the following constructive three-point scale, which is based on the level of support required to improve equity:

1. Initiating
2. Developing
3. Established

*Initiating* (1) is characterized by some strengths but also some key areas for improvement. These areas for improvement are seen as currently having a negative impact on the quality of learning experienced by all students. *Initiating* identifies a level of proficiency that is below the minimum acceptable standard; it also implies the need for specific interventions and adjustments on the part of the schools and district. Districts characterized as *Initiating* should address these areas for improvement to ensure consistent and embedded improvement for equitable practices across schools.

*Developing* (2) is characterized by several strengths, which are consistent and embedded. While there are some minor weaknesses, they do not have an adverse impact on students' learning experiences to a significant degree. Districts characterized as *Developing* should address their minor weaknesses and continue to take advantage of opportunities to improve.

*Established* (3) is characterized by major strengths that have a significant and positive impact on student learning for all learners. The few minor weaknesses that may exist do not diminish the students' learning experiences. While *Established* represents a high standard, this should be achievable in all schools. It implies that a school, with support from the district, should continue to review and revise its priorities and take advantage of opportunities to continuously improve.

## **District Context**

The Ashland Public Schools (APS) is a high-performing district that is committed to:

1. Cultivating a school culture that ensures the well-being of students, faculty, and staff by teaching strategies to maintain and support social-emotional health;
2. Promoting academic excellence by improving achievement by providing equitable access and opportunity to all; and
3. Engaging families, students, and community partners in the teaching and learning of APS.

The district is well resourced with high-quality, experienced teachers and administrators in every school. Teachers have high expectations and provide rigorous instruction. Student outcomes on standardized tests, as well as graduation rates and student growth, exceed state averages. Parents and caregivers are fully engaged, highly involved, and supportive of the schools and their children's learning. The district leadership has all the building blocks to provide an excellent education for all students.

In February 2022, L&P Educational Services was contracted to conduct a comprehensive equity audit. The collaborative review process was commissioned to assist the district in identifying the factors that both support and limit excellence and equity. In addition, the report was intended to provide some suggested actions the district can take to enhance educational opportunities or remove barriers that may be limiting access and opportunity.

## **Methodology**

The L&P team was afforded great access to APS's staff, schools, documentation, and data. Extensive efforts were made to gather stakeholder participation, including multiple notification methods and deadline extensions.

While it is a common accountability practice to evaluate schools and districts quantitatively with student achievement data, the EA approach included qualitative data to acknowledge the stakeholders'

experiences and to understand how APS engaged, communicated, and provided a safe, welcoming, and student-centered environment.

Within the equity framework, we used data triangulation methods to analyze various data sources, determine our findings, and make recommendations by using research-supported best practices in seeking corroborating and at times conflicting evidence from both qualitative and quantitative data.

While the study took place a year after returning back to school from the COVID-19 pandemic, L&P Educational Services was able to conduct focus groups and interviews both in-person and by Zoom. We do not believe this approach adversely impacted participation or the integrity of our process, nor was this mentioned as an issue by any participants.

### **Data Review**

With the support of the district, L&P Equity Specialists analyzed achievement data and examined district policies, practices, and resource allocations. Data and documentation included, but were not limited to:

- ❖ Detailed analysis of district data relative to student academic performance, enrollment based on tracking, discipline, achievement, attendance, social-emotional needs, dropout and graduation rates, involvement in extracurricular activities, special education status, and English language learner classification
- ❖ Achievement data by race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, disability status, and English language learning proficiency
- ❖ Policy review of practices as outlined in the School Committee Policy Manual, Employee Handbook, and school handbooks
- ❖ Assessment of financial resources distributed across the district in order to provide recommendations on best practice strategies for how to equitably fund schools
- ❖ Examination of targeted intervention supports for academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs to identify strengths, challenges, opportunities, and effectiveness
- ❖ Review of family and community engagement practices to provide recommendations on strategies for creating a safe and welcoming environment for all families, including families of color
- ❖ Review of curriculum to ensure it is fully representative of APS's diverse community, to provide recommendations on how to increase representation within the curriculum, and to suggest supports for increased student representation

- ❖ Review of efforts to recruit and retain Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) staff in order to recommend steps to improve diverse staff recruitment and provide strategies on how to support a diverse workforce
- ❖ Assess the leadership team's readiness to address institutional racism and equity
- ❖ Review professional development offerings related to equity, diversity, and creating schools free of bias, prejudice, and discrimination

### **Documents and Materials Reviewed:**

- ❖ Achieving an Anti-Racist Vision
- ❖ AHS Advanced Placement Demographics
- ❖ AHS Course Recommendation Override Procedure
- ❖ Anti-Racist Action and EdEquity Mid-Year Report - March 1, 2021
- ❖ APS FY23 Budget Report
- ❖ Ashland High School Program of Studies 2022-2023
- ❖ Ashland Tiered Focused Monitoring Report (English Language Education), 2022
- ❖ Ashland Tiered Focused Monitoring Report (Group A Universal Standards), 2021
- ❖ DAET DR Survey Presentation
- ❖ DESSA Results 2021-2022
- ❖ Developmental Relationships Survey developed by Search Institute
- ❖ Elementary, Middle, and High School Curriculum Maps (6) and Units (61)
  - Science (12 units), Math (23 units), Social Studies (3 units, 6 maps), and English Language Arts (23 units)
- ❖ Elementary and Middle School Report Cards
- ❖ English Learners Tiered Instruction & Supports Chart
- ❖ Equity-Centered School District Professional Learning Plan - August 2021
- ❖ FY20 Superintendent's Budget Executive Summary
- ❖ FY21 Superintendent's Budget Executive Summary
- ❖ FY22 Superintendent's Budget Executive Summary
- ❖ Mental Health Staff Demographics and Caseloads
- ❖ Mentor Texts in Bookroom Unit Baskets
- ❖ Response to Intervention Process (from Student Services Handbook)
- ❖ SmartPD Report - Professional Development Courses Offerings from 2018-2022
- ❖ Social and Emotional Learning Educator Website
- ❖ Social and Emotional Learning Family Website

- ❖ Social-Emotional Learning Interventions & Supports Chart 2021-2022
- ❖ Staff Data Report 2022 Ethnicity & Retention
- ❖ Summary of Professional Learning Evaluation 2020-2021

## **Stakeholder Input**

Given the purpose and scope of the review, L&P Educational Services' approach was focused on a high-level understanding of equity within the district by collecting stakeholder experience data and examining policies and practices. Throughout the study period, L&P conducted:

- ❖ 1:1 interviews with school and district leaders
- ❖ Interviews with curriculum leaders and department chairs
- ❖ Focus groups with various stakeholders which included parents, students, community partners, School Committee members, Special Education Administrators, and district and school leaders

More than 75 individuals shared their experiences through interviews or focus groups. While there was feedback from many stakeholders across the community, a limitation of perceptual data is that it relies on the willingness of participants to engage in the process. While exploring issues and opportunities related to equity, an individual's personal and professional lens and experience can inspire engagement or raise barriers to the data collection process. This affirms the need to collect and analyze viewpoints from multiple sources and look for patterns of consistency in perceptions across stakeholder groups, and not rely on a single instrument to make inferences.

## **Stakeholder Events**

Stakeholder events were held from February through May 2022. These events included interviews, focus groups, and question and answer sessions conducted by L&P Equity Specialists. Some interviews took place over several sessions.

### **Interviews:**

- ❖ James E. Adams, Superintendent of Schools
- ❖ Michael A. Caira Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment
- ❖ Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations
- ❖ Jennifer Cutler, Director of Counseling & Social-Emotional Learning
- ❖ Kelley St. Coeur, Principal Ashland High School
- ❖ David DiGirolamo, Principal Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8)

- ❖ Claudia Bennett, Principal David A. Mindess School (Grades 3-5)
- ❖ Peter Regan, Principal Henry E. Warren Elementary School (Grades K-2)
- ❖ Janet Twomey, Social Studies (Grades 9-12)
- ❖ Jennifer Temple, English Language Arts (Grades K-2)
- ❖ Jessica Kamin, English Language Arts (Grades 3-5)
- ❖ Ryan Van Wyhe, English Language Arts (Grades 6-8)
- ❖ Aleisha Egan, English Language Arts (Grades 9-12)

**Focus groups:**

- ❖ School Committee Members
- ❖ Assistant Principals and Deans
- ❖ District Level Leaders
- ❖ Community Partners
- ❖ Teachers: Elementary School
- ❖ Teachers: Middle School
- ❖ Teachers: High School
- ❖ Students: Grades 4-5
- ❖ Students: Grades 6-8
- ❖ Students: Grades 9-12
- ❖ Families: Grades K-8
- ❖ Families: Grades 9-12

**Q&A Sessions:**

- ❖ Lori Freeman, Math, Warren Elementary School (Grades K-2)
- ❖ Joanne Forrest, Science, Warren Elementary School (Grades K-2)
- ❖ Kristin Fitzsimons, Math, Mindess School (Grades 3-5)
- ❖ Lindsay Johnston, Science, Mindess School (Grades 3-5)
- ❖ Karen Bernier, Math, Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8)
- ❖ Kristen Scully, Science, Ashland Middle School (Grades 6-8)
- ❖ Michael Shennett, Math, Ashland High School (Grades 9-12)
- ❖ Colleen Sherman, Science, Ashland High School (Grades 9-12)



## Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

**Overall Rating:** Initiating

### Overview:

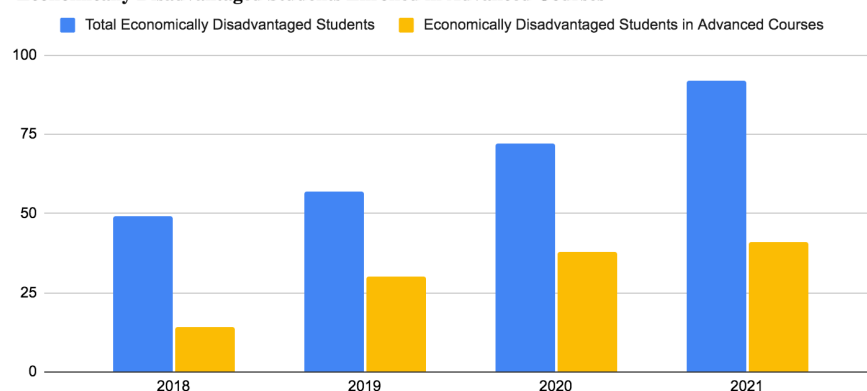
Ashland Public School leadership has the tools necessary to create an effective and equitable school district where excellence is truly for all. The challenge and opportunity lie in the ability to plan, prioritize, and align the core values of the district to their initiatives in service of optimal student learning and development for all students. The focus should always be on the equity of student access to learning and achievement and those initiatives that have the greatest impact on outcomes. District leadership should focus on the effectiveness and results of all instruction, services, and supports, ensure that all programming and resources are distributed equitably, and take an intentional and transparent approach to dismantle systemic inequities, policies, and practices that create and maintain the opportunity and access gaps in learning and negatively impact the social and emotional development of students.

### Advanced Course Enrollment Overview

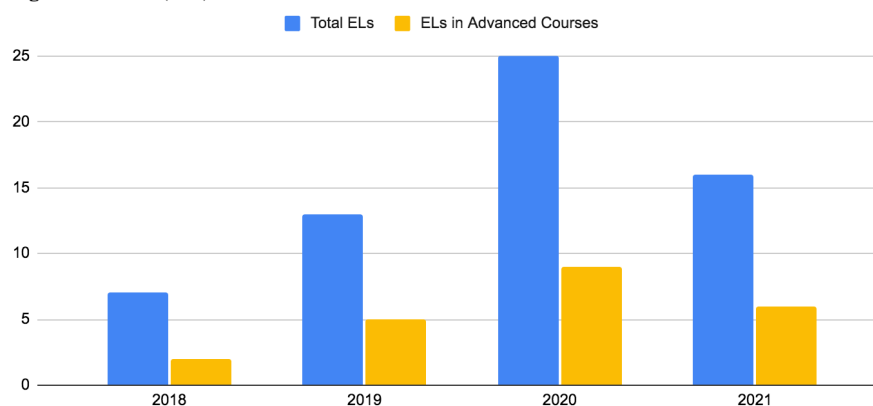
- ❖ White: Between 2018 and 2021, 65%, 64%, 70%, and 62.5% respectively have taken advanced courses. This number has remained stagnant.
- ❖ Hispanic/Latino: Between 2018 and 2021, 36%, 41%, 54%, and 32% respectively have taken advanced courses. Although progress had been made, post-pandemic, the 32% is a huge set back. It should be noted that in these four years the population of students who identify as Hispanic/Latino increased by 66 ⅔ %.
- ❖ Students with Disabilities (SWD): Between 2018 and 2021, 42%, 30%, 51%, and 36% respectively have taken advanced courses. Again, post-pandemic a huge set back occurred.
- ❖ English Language Learners (ELLs): Between 2018 and 2021, 29%, 38%, 36%, and 37.5% respectively have taken advanced courses.
- ❖ Econ Dis: Between 2018 and 2021, 29%, 53%, 53%, and 45% respectively have taken advanced courses.

**Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged Enrolled in Advanced Courses**

	<b>Total Economically Disadvantaged Students</b>	<b>Economically Disadvantaged Students in Advanced Courses</b>	<b>% of Economically Disadvantaged Students in Advanced Courses</b>
<b>2018</b>	49	14	29%
<b>2019</b>	57	30	53%
<b>2020</b>	72	38	53%
<b>2021</b>	92	41	45%

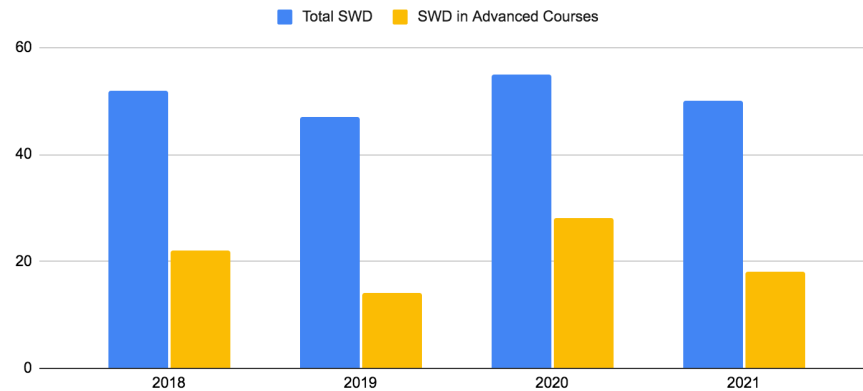
**Economically Disadvantaged Students Enrolled in Advanced Courses****Students Identified as English Learners (ELs) Enrolled in Advanced Courses**

	<b>Total ELs</b>	<b>ELs in Advanced Courses</b>	<b>% of ELs in Advanced Courses</b>
<b>2018</b>	7	2	29%
<b>2019</b>	13	5	38%
<b>2020</b>	25	9	36%
<b>2021</b>	16	6	37.50%

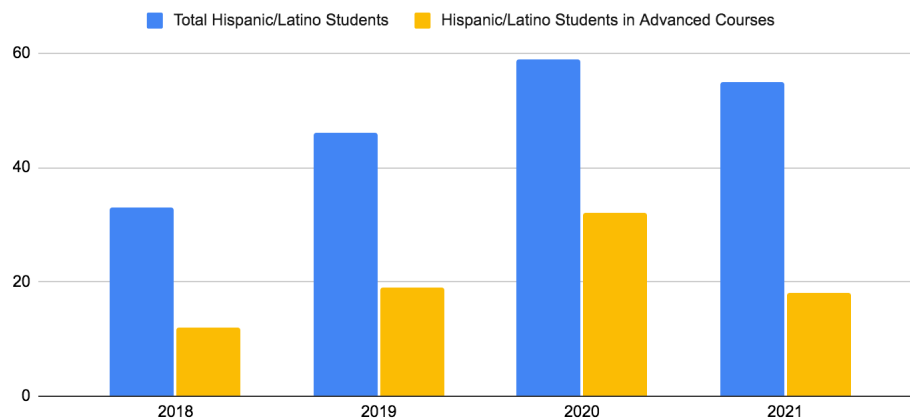
**English Learners (ELs) Enrolled in Advanced Courses**

**Students with Disabilities (SWD) Enrolled in Advanced Courses**

	<b>Total SWD</b>	<b>SWD Enrolled in Advanced Courses</b>	<b>% of SWD Enrolled in Advanced Courses</b>
<b>2018</b>	52	22	42%
<b>2019</b>	47	14	30%
<b>2020</b>	55	28	51%
<b>2021</b>	50	18	36%

**Students with Disabilities (SWD) Enrolled in Advanced Courses****Students Identified as Hispanic/Latino Enrolled in Advanced Courses**

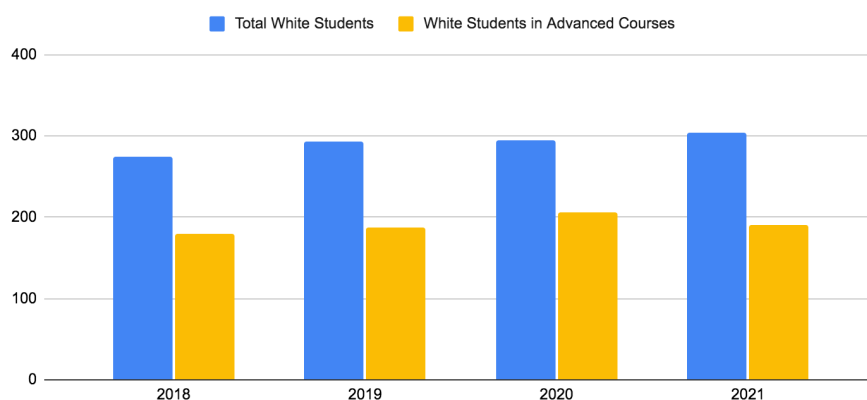
	<b>Total Hispanic/Latino Students</b>	<b>Hispanic/Latino Students in Advanced Courses</b>	<b>% of Hispanic/Latino Students in Advanced Courses</b>
<b>2018</b>	33	12	36%
<b>2019</b>	46	19	41%
<b>2020</b>	59	32	54%
<b>2021</b>	55	18	32%

**Hispanic/Latino Students Enrolled in Advanced Courses**

### Students Identified as White in Advanced Courses

	Total White Students	White Students in Advanced Courses	% of White Students in Advanced Courses
2018	275	179	65%
2019	293	188	64%
2020	294	206	70%
2021	304	190	62.50%

White Students Enrolled in Advanced Courses



### SAT Data Overview

- ❖ All: From 2017 to 2021, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) reading and writing average score for APS was 583. During this 5-year period, scores increased by 1.86%. The math score average was 610, and scores within these 5 years increased by 4.27%. At the state level, the average Massachusetts score for reading and writing was 556 and the average state score for math was 557. The national average for reading and writing was 532 and 527 for math. The average scores for Ashland students in both reading and writing, and math were notably higher than the state and national averages.
- ❖ High Needs: From 2017 to 2021, high needs students' SAT reading and writing scores averaged 539 and went up 1.87% over the 5-year period. Math scores averaged 538.2 and went up 1.09%.
- ❖ Students with Disabilities (SWD): Between 2017 to 2019, the average SAT reading and writing score was 476.6 for SWD and went down 8.19%. SWD's SAT math scores averaged 495.3 and went down 10.02%. (Note: SAT data for SWD in 2020 and 2021 is not available.)
- ❖ Econ Dis: The average reading and writing SAT score for economically disadvantaged students was 536 and went down 1.45% from 2017 to 2021. Their average math score was 548 and changed 0%. Compared to the average APS SAT scores (583 for reading and writing; 610 for math), economically disadvantaged students scored 47 points lower in reading and writing and

62 points lower in math. The average score for economically disadvantaged students is particularly lower than average scores for all students in APS.

### Average SAT Scores in Reading and Math 2007-2021

All Students			
	Reading		Math
2007	524	2007	538
2008	527	2008	557
2009	531	2009	554
2010	532	2010	556
2011	531	2011	567
2012	543	2012	578
2013	530	2013	569
2014	538	2014	566
2015	552	2015	576
2016	549	2016	576
*2017 (R/W)	591	2017	609
2018 (R/W)	581	2018	605
2019 (R/W)	573	2019	596
2020 (R/W)	570	2020	607
2021 (R/W)	602	2021	635
avg	583.4	avg	610.4
percent change	15%	percent change	18%
avg 2015-2021	574	avg 2015-2021	600.5714286
avg 2014-2021	569.5	avg 2014-2021	596.25

*\*In 2017, the College Board released a new test; Reading and Writing scores were combined into one.*

Hispanic/Latino			
	Reading		Math
2014	503	2014	520
2015		2015	
2016	472	2016	458
2017 (R/W)	528	2017	531
2018 (R/W)		2018	
2019 (R/W)	525	2019	539
2020 (R/W)	524	2020	528
2021 (R/W)		2021	

African American/Black			
	Reading		Math
2014	478	2014	507
2015		2015	
2016		2016	
2017 (R/W)		2017	
2018 (R/W)		2018	
2019 (R/W)		2019	
2020 (R/W)		2020	
2021 (R/W)		2021	

Economically Disadvantaged			
	Reading		Math
2014	474	2014	506
2015	496	2015	537
2016	541	2016	549
2017 (R/W)	550	2017	555
2018 (R/W)	538	2018	557
2019 (R/W)	513	2019	525
2020 (R/W)	539	2020	548
2021 (R/W)	542	2021	555

High Needs			
	Reading		Math
2014	473	2014	495
2015	489	2015	491
2016	508	2016	524
2017 (R/W)	534	2017	547
2018 (R/W)	503	2018	529
2019 (R/W)	593	2019	513
2020 (R/W)	521	2020	549
2021 (R/W)	544	2021	553

Students with Disabilities			
	Reading		Math
2014	448	2014	465
2015	468	2015	433
2016	498	2016	496
2017 (R/W)	513	2017	529
2018 (R/W)	446	2018	481
2019 (R/W)	471	2019	476
2020 (R/W)		2020	
2021 (R/W)		2021	

## MCAS Data Overview

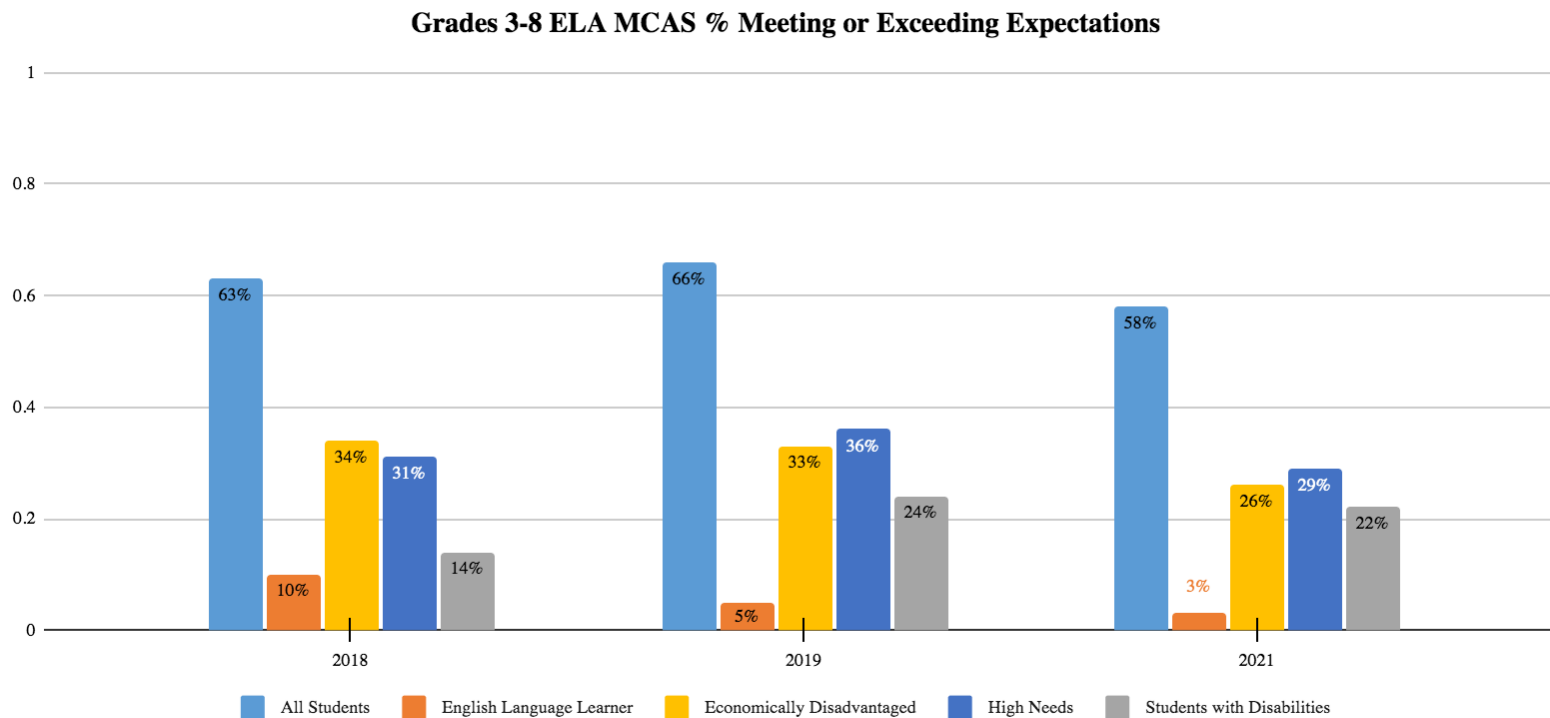
### Grades 3-8 ELA MCAS 2018, 2019, 2021

- ❖ On average in 2018, 2019, and 2021, 62.3% of students in grades 3 through 8 scored in the Meeting or Exceeding Expectations categories on the ELA MCAS. The subgroup data indicates there is room for improvement with ELs, SWD, economically disadvantaged students as well as high need students.
- ❖ The most notable difference is 56.3% between the average of all students and the average of the EL subgroup in the Meeting and Exceeding Expectations categories. On average 6% of ELs scored Meeting or Exceeding Expectations. Although the SGP\* of ELs was above the SGP average in 2018 by 3.4%, the group continued to dip below the average SGP in 2019 and 2021 by 11.9% and 11.3% respectively. It should be noted that the overall SGP in 3-8 ELA dipped by 16.2% between 2019 and 2021.
  - In 2018 ELs' SGP was 59.3. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 59.3 percent of their academic peers and less than 40.1 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 48.8, a decrease of 10.5 points compared to 2018.
  - In 2018, Economically Disadvantaged Students' SGP was 56.5. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 56.5 percent of their academic peers and less than 43.5 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 55.6, a .9 decrease compared to 2018.
  - In 2018, High Need Students' SGP was 51.1. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 51.1 percent of their academic peers and less than 48.9 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 57.3, an increase of 6.2 points compared to 2018.
  - In 2018, Students with Disabilities' SGP was 47.4. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 47.4 percent of their academic peers and less than 52.6 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 54.8, an increase of 7.4 points compared to 2018.
- ❖ Students with disabilities were also not performing to the level of their peers and showed a lower rate of growth than the average SGP. Within the 3 school year average, SWD were 42.3% behind the overall average of students scoring in the Meeting or Exceeding Expectations categories.

*\*Student Growth Percentile (SGP) is a way to measure student's growth achievement over time rather than the performance rating of Exceeding, Meeting, Partially Meeting and Not Meeting Expectations. Please note, a student can achieve at a low level but still improve relative to their academic peers, another could achieve well but not improve much from year to year. We examine SGP because it provides evidence of improvement even among those with low achievement. SGP allows districts an assessment tool to strive for beyond Exceeding Expectations.*

*Note: MCAS data is not available for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

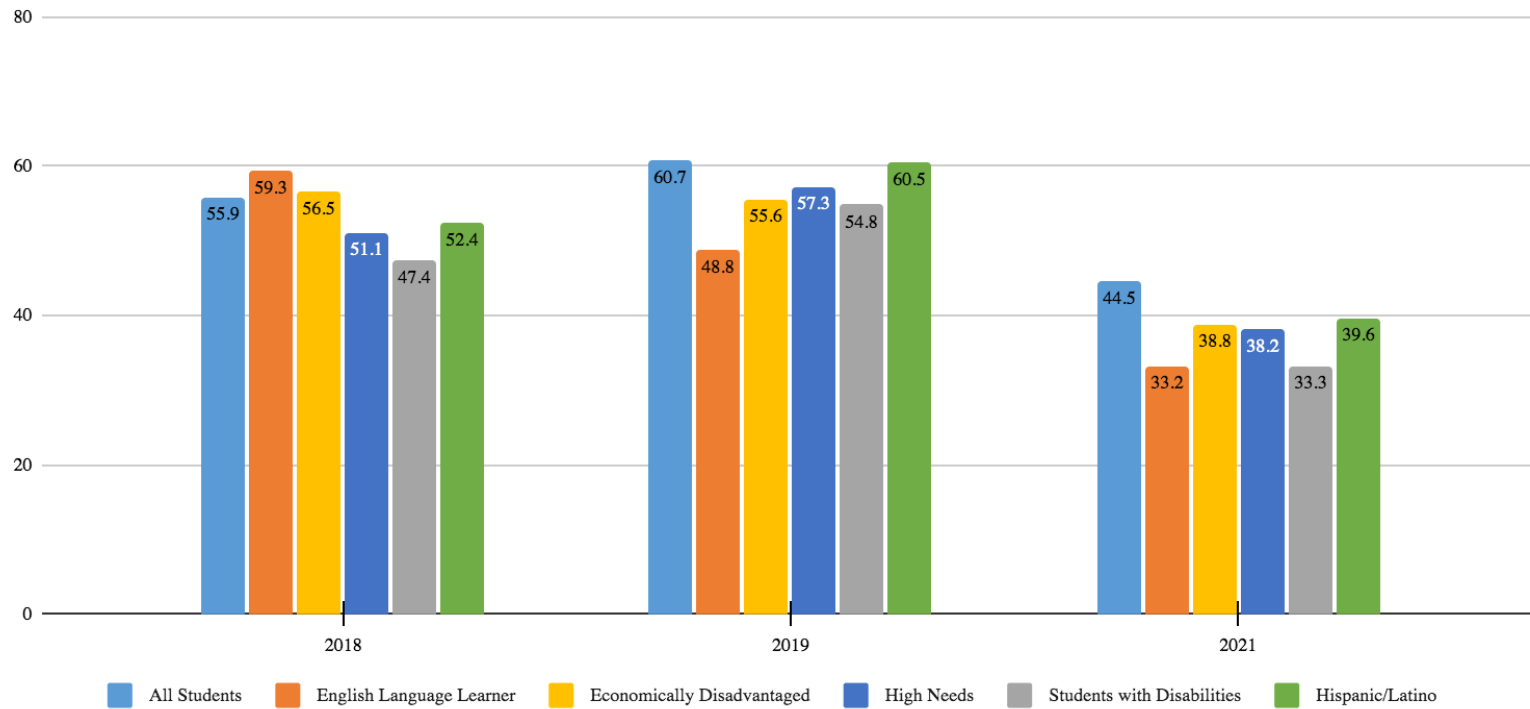
Grades 3-8 ELA MCAS: % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations					
	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities
2018	63%	10%	34%	31%	14%
2019	66%	5%	33%	36%	24%
2021	58%	3%	26%	29%	22%





**Grades 4-8 ELA MCAS Average SGP**

	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities	Hispanic/Latino
2018	55.9	59.3	56.5	51.1	47.4	52.4
2019	60.7	48.8	55.6	57.3	54.8	60.5
2021	44.5	33.2	38.8	38.2	33.3	39.6

**Grades 4-8 ELA MCAS Average SGP**

### **3-8 Math MCAS 2018, 2019, 2021**

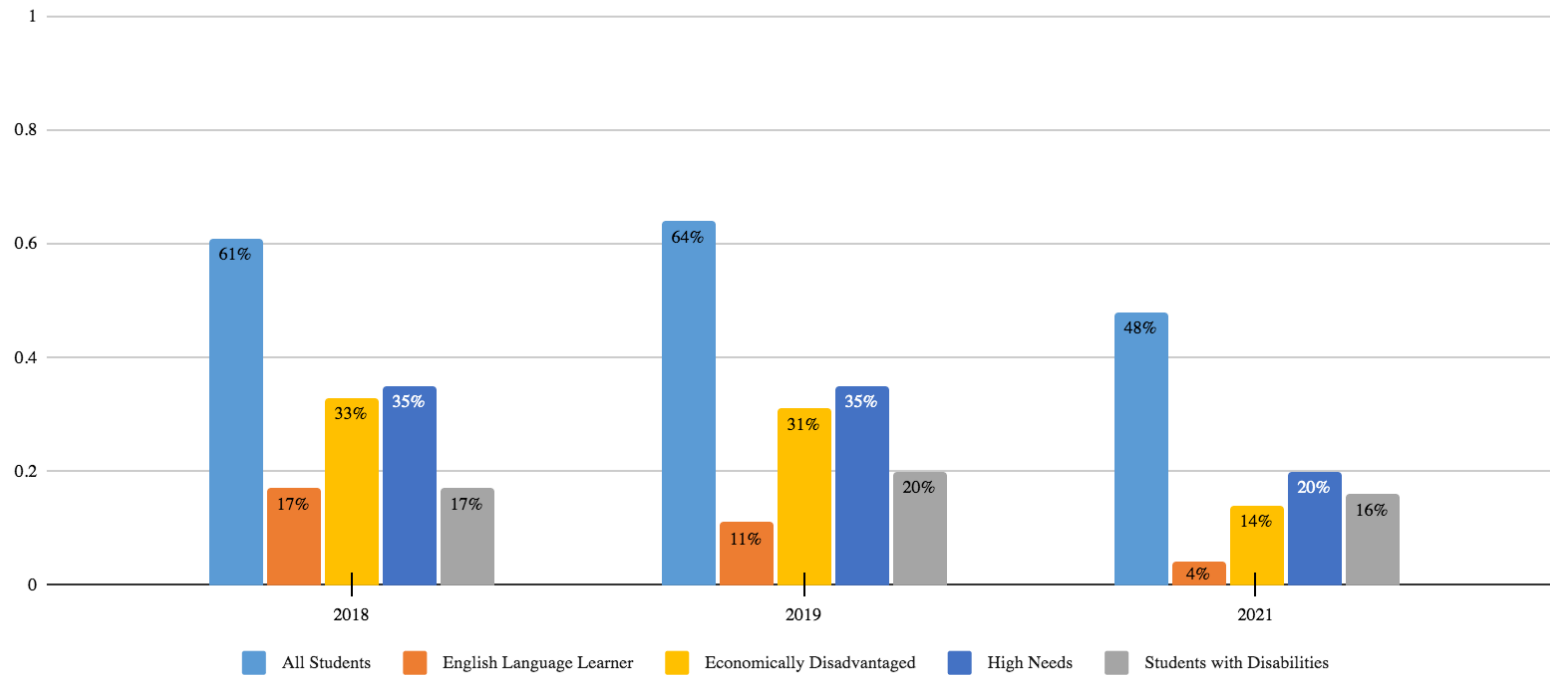
- ❖ On average in 2018, 2019, and 2021, 57.7% of students in grades 3 through 8 scored in the meeting or exceeding categories on the math MCAS.
- ❖ Similar to the ELA MCAS data, math MCAS scores increased between 2018 and 2019 but decreased from 2019 to 2021.
- ❖ Between 2018 and 2021 the number of students scoring in the top two categories on MCAS decreased by 13%.
- ❖ ELs, SWD, economically disadvantaged students as well as high need student scores also decreased. Economically disadvantaged students decreased the most (19%) between 2018 and 2021 in representation in meeting or exceeding expectations.
- ❖ High need students and ELs also decreased in the same time frame by 15% and 11% respectively.
- ❖ SGP followed the same patterns; however, in 2019 it should be noted that students who identify as Hispanic earned a higher SGP than their peers by 1.4%.
  - In 2018 ELs' SGP was 47.6. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 47.6 percent of their academic peers and less than 52.4 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 54.5, an increase of 6.9 points compared to 2018.
  - In 2018, Economically Disadvantaged Students' SGP was 50.4. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 50.4 percent of their academic peers and less than 49.6 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 57.2, an increase of 6.8 compared to 2018.
  - In 2018, High Need Students' SGP was 53.4. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 53.4 percent of their academic peers and less than 46.6 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 56.7, an increase of 3.3 points compared to 2018.
  - In 2018 Students with Disabilities SGP was 49.9. This means their SGP in grades 4-8 was higher than 49.9 percent of their academic peers and less than 50.1 percent. The SGP in 2019 was 51.4 an increase of 1.5 points compared to 2018.

*Note: MCAS data is not available for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

### Grades 3-8 Math MCAS: % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations

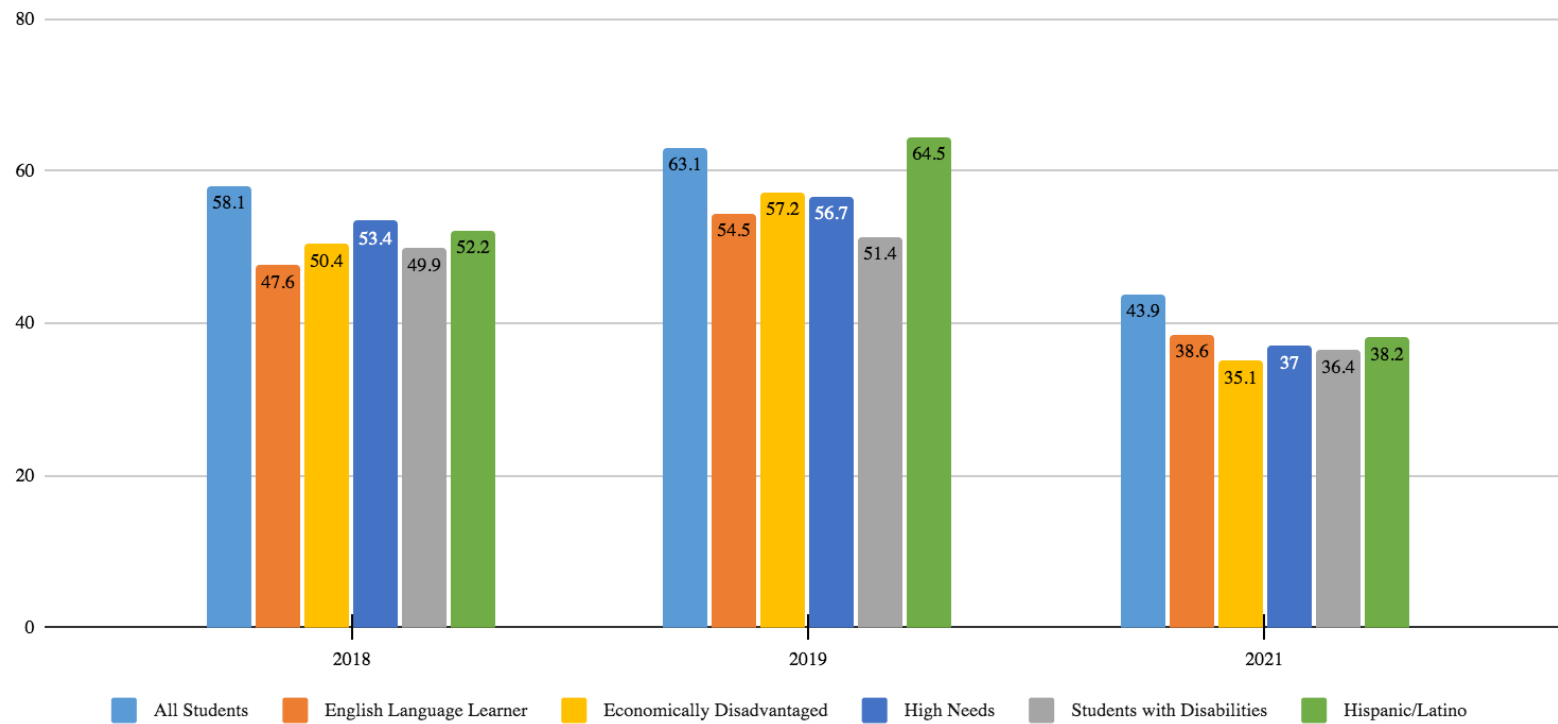
	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities
2018	61%	17%	33%	35%	17%
2019	64%	11%	31%	35%	20%
2021	48%	4%	14%	20%	16%

### Grades 3-8 Math MCAS % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations



**Grades 4-8 Math MCAS Average SGP**

	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities	Hispanic/Latino
2018	58.1	47.6	50.4	53.4	49.9	52.2
2019	63.1	54.5	57.2	56.7	51.4	64.5
2021	43.9	38.6	35.1	37	36.4	38.2

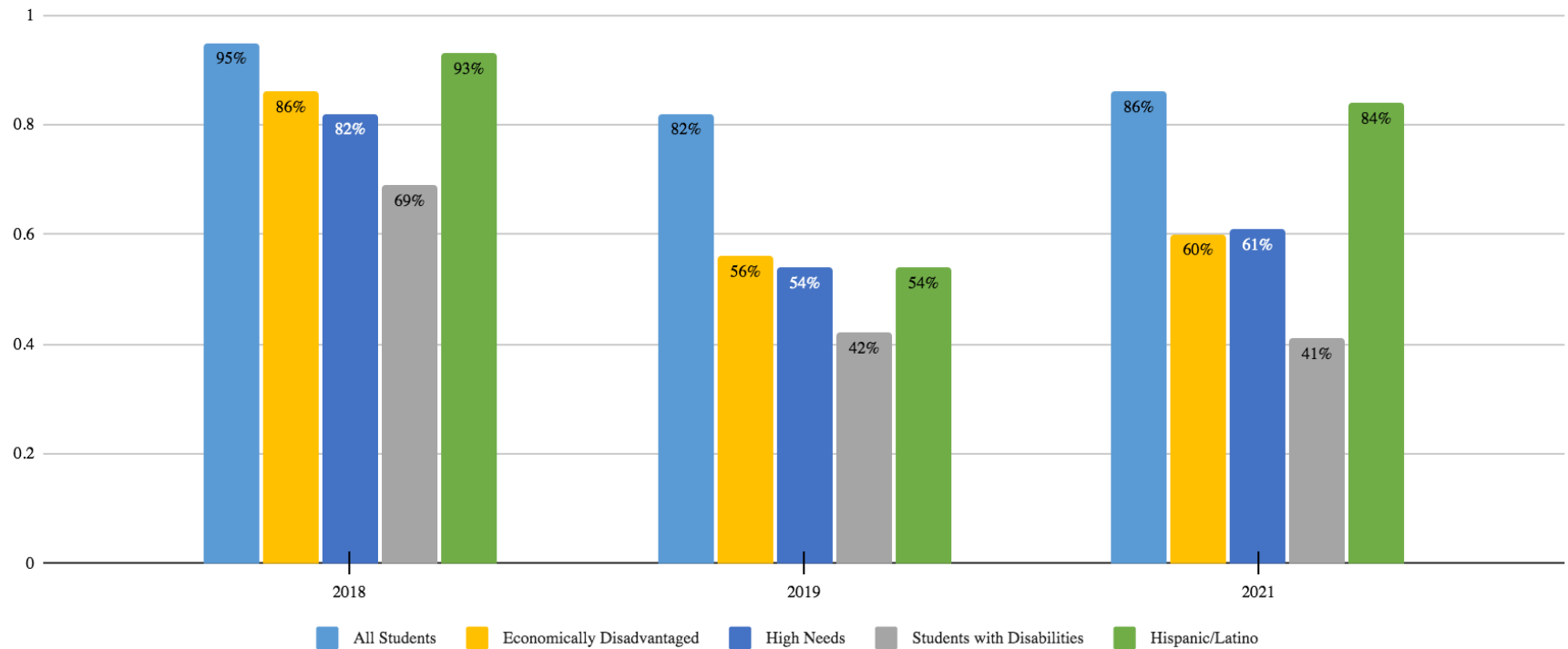
**Grades 4-8 Math MCAS Average SGP**

### **Grade 10 ELA MCAS 2018, 2019, 2021**

- ❖ On average in 2018, 2019, and 2021, 87.6% of students in grade 10 scored in the meeting or exceeding categories on the ELA MCAS. In 2019 and 2021 students took the Next Generation MCAS.
- ❖ Although there is no data for Hispanic/Latino SGP in the year 2021, subgroups high need, economically disadvantaged, and SWD all outgrew the overall grade 10 ELA SGP.
- ❖ 93% and 84% of students who identify as Hispanic/Latino, scored in the meeting or exceeding expectations categories in 2018 and 2021 respectively; where the overall average was 95% and 86% respectively.
- ❖ Students with disabilities have the largest gap in students in the meeting or exceeding expectation categories with on average a 37% difference.

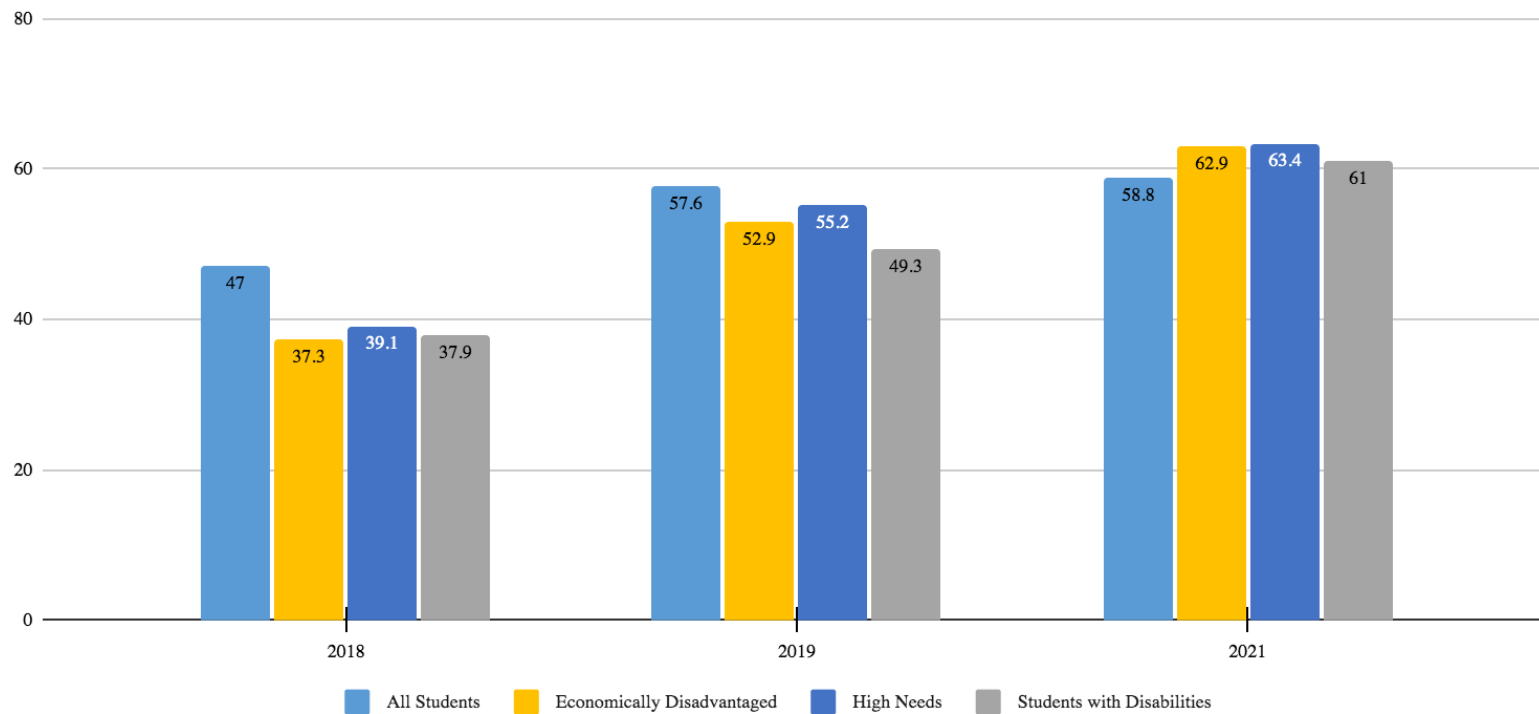
**Grade 10 ELA MCAS: % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations**

	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities	Hispanic/Latino
2018	95%	No data	86%	82%	69%	93%
2019	82%	No data	56%	54%	42%	54%
2021	86%	No data	60%	61%	41%	84%

**Grade 10 ELA MCAS % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations**

**Grade 10 ELA MCAS Average SGP**

	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities	Hispanic/Latino
2018	47	No data	37.3	39.1	37.9	45.2
2019	57.6	No data	52.9	55.2	49.3	No data
2021	58.8	No data	62.9	63.4	61	No data

**Grade 10 ELA MCAS Average SGP**

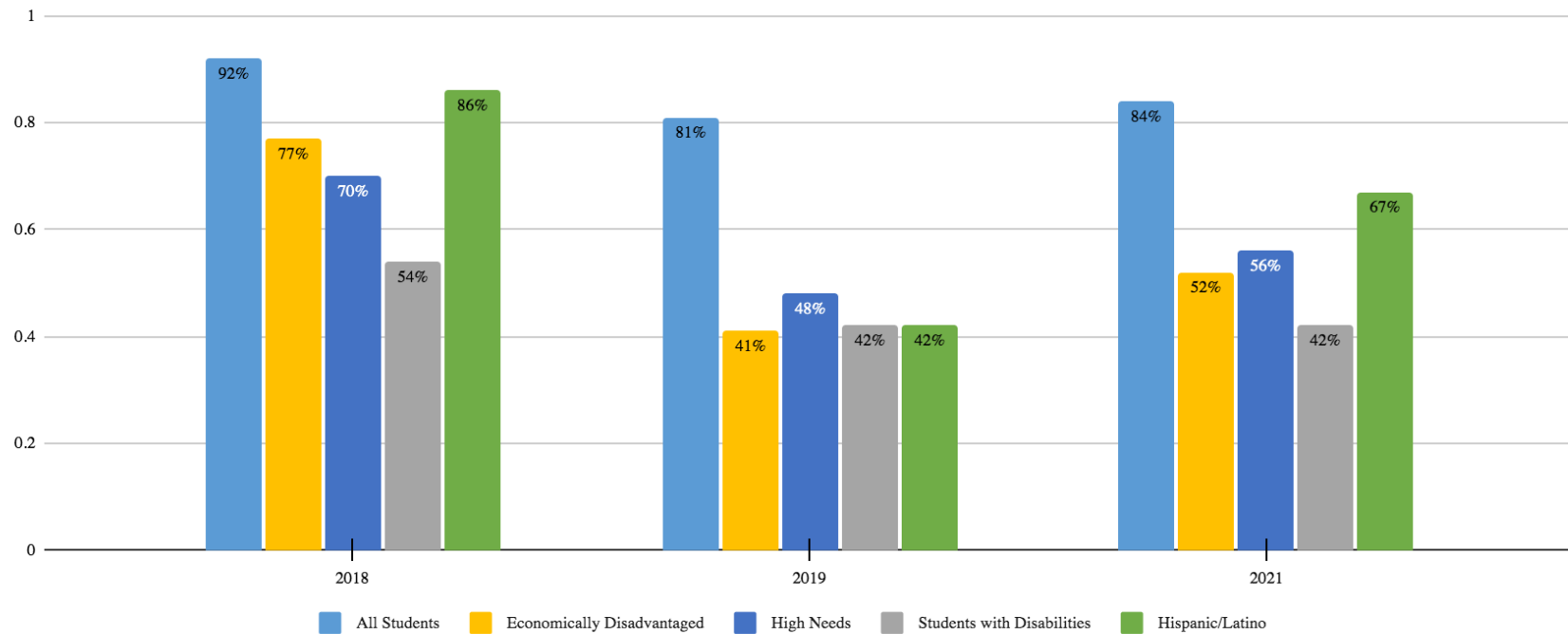
### **Grade 10 Math MCAS 2018, 2019, 2021**

- ❖ On average in 2018, 2019, and 2021, 85.7% of students in grade 10 scored in the meeting or exceeding categories on the Math MCAS. In 2019 and 2021 students took the Next Generation MCAS.
- ❖ 54% of students with disabilities scored a meeting or exceeding expectations in 2018 but decreased to 42% and remained stagnant from 2019 to 2021.
- ❖ Students who identify as Hispanic/Latino went from being within 6% of the overall meeting or exceeding expectations average to 39% lower than the average in 2019. In 2021 students who identify as Hispanic/Latino were within 17% of the overall average. DESE does not provide a SGP for the Hispanic/Latino subgroup.
- ❖ The trend of decreasing in 2019 and increasing in 2021 is true for both high need and economically disadvantaged subgroups.



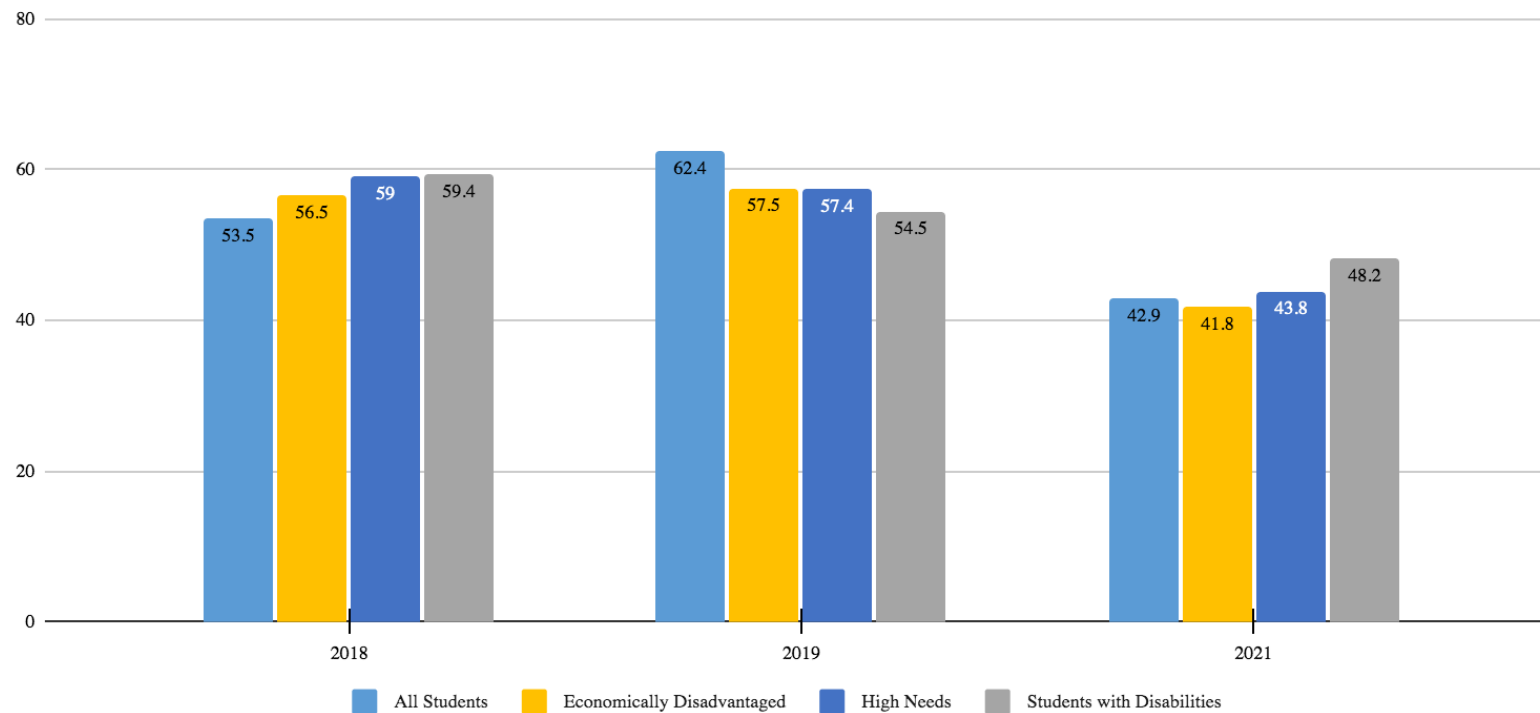
**Grade 10 Math MCAS: % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations**

	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities	Hispanic/Latino
2018	92%	No data	77%	70%	54%	86%
2019	81%	No data	41%	48%	42%	42%
2021	84%	No data	52%	56%	42%	67%

**Grade 10 Math MCAS % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations**

**Grade 10 ELA MCAS Average SGP**

	All Students	English Language Learner	Economically Disadvantaged	High Needs	Students with Disabilities	Hispanic/Latino
2018	53.5	No data	56.5	59	59.4	53.5
2019	62.4	No data	57.5	57.4	54.5	No data
2021	42.9	No data	41.8	43.8	48.2	No data

**Grade 10 Math MCAS Average SGP**

***Student Learning and Development Outcomes: Practices That Support Equity***

- ❖ The high school's senior ELA college prep 1 and college prep 2 courses were combined so that all students were in a college prep 2 course or above by their senior year.
- ❖ The middle school does not have leveled ELA courses. For each ELA inclusion classroom, there is a special education co-teacher. There is also a Study Skills classroom, for students who are struggling.
- ❖ APS has begun to honor its increasing student diversity by celebrating religious and cultural holidays observed by various student populations, creating diversity clubs at the middle and high school, and conducting a ceremony in which countries of origin for all students were recognized at the high school.
- ❖ There are eight school psychologists in the district (7 White, 1 Black female).
- ❖ There are two White female school adjustment counselors for grades 6-12.
- ❖ Thirteen school counselors in the district all identify as White; of the 13, only one is male.
- ❖ The district offered Safe and Supportive Schools professional development for staff to build understanding about how to support LGBTQ+ students/families.
- ❖ There is a Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at the high school - referred to as the Diversity Club in middle school.
- ❖ The high school does not have an advisory block, but does have X block (approx. 20 minutes) where students can sign up with any teacher.
- ❖ Promoting excellence for all students "by providing individualized, equitable, and challenging opportunities in an environment that fosters growth and skill acquisition for each student" is identified as an improvement priority in Annual Budget 22-23.
- ❖ The district established a Director of Social Emotional Learning (4 years in this role).
- ❖ There is evidence of curricula investments that not only include materials but also professional development for staff ie: Responsive Classroom, Signs of Suicide.
- ❖ The district implemented the Devereux Student Strengths assessment K-5 and Developmental Relationships Survey 6-12 to monitor SEL data.
- ❖ Code of Conduct outlined in Parent Handbook and website

- ❖ A number of teaching positions for special education instructors and ELL teachers have been funded and filled for the 2022-2023 school year.
- ❖ The district uses a progressive discipline model.
- ❖ Based on DESE 21-22 data:
  - of the 30 students disciplined 1 identified as Black, 9 Latinx, and 18 White - however, 20 were male and 17 were students with disabilities.
  - of the 30 students disciplined, the majority missed 4 to 7 days of school.
  - of the 6 students who dropped out none were Black, 1 Latinx, and 5 White.
  - of the 6 students who dropped out, 2 were economically disadvantaged, 1 was an English learner, and 1 was a student with disabilities.

**2020-2021 Student Discipline Data Report - All Offenses**

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Students Disciplined</b>	<b>% In-School Suspension</b>	<b>% Out-of-School Suspension</b>	<b>% Expulsion</b>	<b>% Alternate Setting</b>	<b>% Emergency Removal</b>	<b>% Students with a School-Based Arrest</b>	<b>% Students with a Law Enforcement Referral</b>
All Students	2,832	30	0.1	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
English Language Learner	194	2							
Economically Disadvantaged	588	17	0.3	2.7	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
High Needs	1,081	25	0.3	2.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Students with Disabilities	529	17	0.4	3.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
Female	1,371	10	0.1	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Male	1,460	20	0.1	1.2	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
African American/Black	86	1							
American Indian or Alaskan Native	12	0							
Asian	455	0							
Hispanic/Latino	423	9	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	99	2							
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	0								
White	1,757	18	0.1	1.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0

Source: <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ssdr/default.aspx?orgcode=00140000&orgtypecode=5&=00140000&>

**2020-2021 Student Discipline Days Missed Report - All Offenses**

Student Group	Students	Students Disciplined	% 1 Day	% 2 to 3 Days	% 4 to 7 Days	% 8 to 10 Days	% > 10 Days
All Students	2,832	30	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.1
English Language Learner	194	2					
Economically Disadvantaged	588	17	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.0	0.3
High Needs	1,081	25	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.2
Students with Disabilities	529	17	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.0	0.4
Female	1,371	10	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.0
Male	1,460	20	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.1
African American/Black	86	1					
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	12	0					
Asian	455	0					
Hispanic/Latino	423	9	0.2	0.9	0.9	0.0	0.0
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	99	2					
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.							
White	1,757	18	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1

Source: [https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ssdr/ssdr\\_days\\_missed\\_detail.aspx?orgcode=00140000&orgtypecode=5&=00140000&](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ssdr/ssdr_days_missed_detail.aspx?orgcode=00140000&orgtypecode=5&=00140000&)

**2020-2021 Student Dropout Rate Report**

Student Group	# Enrolled Grades 9 - 12	# Dropout All Grades	% Dropout All Grades	% Dropout Grade 09	% Dropout Grade 10	% Dropout Grade 11	% Dropout Grade 12
All Students	805	6	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.9
English Language Learner	26	1	3.8	0.0		0.0	12.5
Economically Disadvantaged	134	2	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.4
High Needs	226	2	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4
Students with Disabilities	98	1	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.7
Female	409	3	0.7	1.0	0.0	1.7	0.0
Male	395	3	0.8	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.9
African American/Black	18	0	0.0			0.0	0.0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	5						
Asian	110	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	100	1	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	24	0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	0						
White	548	5	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.3	0.7

Source: <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/dropout/default.aspx?orgcode=00140000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=15627&>

***Student Learning and Development Outcomes: Practices That Limit Equity***

- ❖ District leadership has made a more concerted effort to meet the needs of their English language learners, such as adding ELL staff at all levels and providing staff with a Portuguese language course to enhance their communication skills in response to a growing Portuguese-speaking population. However, according to staff focus groups, ELL students are often placed in classes in which they do not have the necessary support to succeed, despite some minimum standards in place such as SEI certification for teachers who have ELL students in their classes. Some staff have expressed that many ELL students are placed in classes in which staff feel success is out of reach for English learners due to the varying and sometimes substantial challenges, such as lack of social and academic language, school attendance and calendar gaps, and negative behaviors that arise from frustration. ELL students are often placed in the most basic classes by default with little opportunity to advance to more challenging courses.
- ❖ According to a director, “ELLs are presenting with trauma and challenges - none of our counselors speak another language.”
- ❖ District and school policies reference being in alignment with general state and federal policies like IDEA 2004: Section 615 (k), and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: 29 U.S.C. Section 794 (A), according to which, for example, the school may suspend or remove a child from his or her current placement for no more than ten school days. There is, in general, little discussion about students who have IEPs and/ or are SWDs or gifted, outside the realm of school discipline.
- ❖ The Ashland High School handbook provides baseline guidance concerning respecting and tending to the needs of learners of all varieties, fairness and equality in schools, and discipline/culture. This handbook specifically draws from legal precedents concerning fairness and equality as to how both students and staff are treated in schools.
- ❖ Acknowledging that students can learn and at different rates and in different ways is vital. These principles span across a number of areas and are necessary for cultivating a safe learning environment. While the goal is to keep these principles brief and broad, it's worth considering the following:
  - More explicitly acknowledging that particular student populations (e.g. students with special needs) have special challenges and that the school is committed to ensuring their success at the school.
  - More explicitly identifying how students, staff, and the district can uphold each of these principles with equity in mind.



- E.g., Changing “The school community values differences and appreciates diversity” to “The district and school leadership will cultivate cultures that foster inclusion, justice, and equity across schools so that students, regardless of background or situation, are able to thrive.”
- ❖ Staff and families see gaps in meeting the needs of diversity: the acceptance of racial slurs used by peers in school, not all staff or building leadership supporting PRIDE Day, diversity club staff volunteers left to newer staff, and narrower opportunities for students to join the middle school diversity club versus other clubs.
- ❖ Staff and student focus groups noted that additional human resources are needed to support the district's burgeoning ELL population. Staff, parent, and community focus groups all recognized a need for additional human resources to be deployed in a more systematic and purposeful way for the benefit of all students.
- ❖ There is no documented process or communication mechanism as students go from 5th grade to two different levels of 6th grade math. It was unclear to elementary staff how this process occurs, though it appears there is some degree of testing, ranking, and sorting students based on standardized test scores.
- ❖ A middle school math form letter describes criteria for placement into the next grade, including term grades, a standardized placement test, and teacher perception of achievement, understanding of concepts, and work habits. However, no discussion process or override process is mentioned. The letter is signed by the principal, yet states, “For questions, please contact your child’s math teacher.”
- ❖ The high school course placement process runs through the School Counseling department. Teachers make recommendations, counselors provide advice, and parents can call to make an appointment if they choose. The high school course placement process description states that final decisions are made by the principal. However, the information reads, “Parents may ask for an override discussion,” and “Parents have the final authority to choose.” It is unclear who makes the final decision, the principal or the parent. This information is available only in English.
- ❖ The language within the high school course descriptions suggests tracking within the ELA courses. Although all students should be challenged, proportional to their ability, the word “challenge” is only used in the honors’ descriptions. Also, the word count between college prep 1 and college prep 2 communicates a clear hierarchy, compounded by the language that college prep 2 courses are for those “planning to attend a four-year college course.”

- ❖ The middle school has an advisory block that happens for approximately 12 minutes per day. Students have a grade level advisor one out of three years but keep the same advisory for three years. This can result in fragmented communication amongst teachers.

### **High Leverage Recommendations for Equitable Student Learning and Development Outcomes**

- ❖ The district would benefit from revisiting its middle school math placement processes. Outline and communicate processes by which student placement is determined, including describing opportunities for any student to enroll in any level class. Revision of these practices and processes would allow for greater degrees of transparency and increased flexibility and choice. ★
- ❖ The district would benefit from revisiting its middle school math grouping practices. Consider de-leveling middle school math, particularly beginning in 6th grade as students transition from elementary school. This would also include teacher professional development for heterogeneous grouping, differentiated instruction, and tiered supports in mathematics. ★
- ❖ Students with IEPs outlining behavioral challenges would benefit from explicit language and policy concerning equity.
- ❖ The AHS handbook could be revised so as to explicitly encourage schools and staff to ensure that curriculum and instruction are inclusive, culturally responsive, and able to meet the needs of different learners.
- ❖ The district would benefit from employing a unified approach to creating classroom, school and district cultures in which all students felt supported, believed in and therefore included. Currently, the district deploys two different programs to create classroom culture: PBIS is at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and Responsive Classroom is only at the elementary level (K-5). Both have their merits, but Responsive Classroom provides a greater platform for inclusion and student ownership. A component of Responsive Classroom, daily meetings could be added to the high school advisory or could be scheduled during one period so as to build a strong sense of community and a continuity of expectation. In addition, AHS leaders might offer increased club offerings that are more meaningful. Can all teachers either run or support a school club to provide more opportunities to build relationships and share passions? The diversity clubs are a step in the right direction, but they, too, need to move from being simply nice-to-do gatherings to playing a more active and engaging role within the school communities. Finally, an emphasis on belongingness and relationship-building staff-to-students during freshman year would support the health, well-being, and academic success of high school students. ★

- ❖ The district would benefit from a proactive and strategic approach to meeting the needs of their English language learner population. The district has increased its support for ELL students, but some staff, students, and families consider the district's efforts to be both reactive and under-resourced for staff, students, and families, especially at the upper levels. Identifying the needs of ELL students from induction to inclusion with the appropriate staffing, scheduling, support, and placement that better meet the challenges and demands of teaching these groups would ultimately benefit the entire district. ★
- ❖ APS leaders might revise district handbooks and the School Committee Policy Manual so as to provide more equity guidance, which could provide additional support and guidance for the schools under Ashland jurisdiction. The vision and goals set forth by the district could explicitly declare APS's commitment to equity: providing the resources and support to those that need it most, creating an environment among its schools in which all students can thrive. It would also be advisable to develop a discipline policy and protocol at the district level so that this can be implemented consistently across all schools in the district. ★
- ❖ The district should consider adopting a restorative justice model to serve as behavioral and developmental support for the creation of school culture, inclusion, and safety of physical, mental, and socio-emotional needs. As a district, APS has the opportunity to embrace a restorative justice model, thereby grounding the discipline plan within a culturally responsive framework, one that is centered in restorative justice, a more proactive approach to resolving issues of conflict. Point for consideration: Implanting this entire code of conduct within a framework of restorative justice. If the goal is to truly build out the skills of self-regulation and responsibility as referenced in the handbook, consider reframing around building SEL competencies and equity. This requires training to design and implement. It requires investment, at both the district and state levels.
  - Guiding questions: How is social-emotional learning and its competencies measured, supported, and tracked at Ashland? Has there been any consideration to adopting a model like the Urban Assembly's school support services? Is a system in place to support this model?

## **Domain 2: Leadership, Management, and Accountability**

**Overall Rating:** Initiating

### **Overview:**

In recent years, central office leaders have started to enhance equity initiatives across the district, given the increase in racial and linguistic demographics among students and families. Leadership has been

proactive and understands the importance and urgency of ensuring that teachers and school-based leaders are equipped with the tools and knowledge to service their evolving student population. The district has taken on several professional development opportunities with the goal of enhancing the skills and knowledge requisite for educators to intervene effectively when biases or inequities arise in a classroom and/or a school. Leadership will need to continue to take a deep dive into the areas that directly and indirectly impact student outcomes, as well as to continue to develop initiatives that support students and families within the Ashland community.

***Leadership, Management, and Accountability: Factors that Support Equity***

- ❖ There is promise in the Ashland High School (AHS) Parent and Student Handbook. The primary points of the mission statement touch on the following: inclusiveness and responsiveness, student safety, empathy, academic growth, and holistic learning.
  - The mission statement is followed by four approaches to achieve the mission: improved achievement for all students (i.e. closing achievement gaps across race, socioeconomic status, language status, ethnicity, and special education status); supporting mental and physical well being; collaboration and partnerships; and a focus on professional development and improving best practices.
- ❖ The elementary school has RTI meetings for students who are struggling readers and writers (K-2 students are identified using Dibels, 3-5 students are identified using Fountas & Pinnell (F&P) Benchmark assessments).
- ❖ The middle school uses Gates-MacGinitie assessments at the beginning and end of the year.
- ❖ The elementary school uses F&P Benchmarking and I-Ready Diagnostic three times per year.
- ❖ The first step in this year's annual budget process was to require each building principal and director to review each line item for which they are responsible. This included analyzing how funds were spent in the previous year, anticipating expected enrollment and class size numbers, and reviewing increased needs for special education and English language learners. Such practice is promising and should be continued.
- ❖ Combined ELA college prep courses, as outlined in the first bullet point of Student Learning and Development Outcomes: Practices That Support Equity (page 34 ).
- ❖ As students transition into the next grade-level building, administrators discuss all students, and counselors discuss specific student cases.

- ❖ The district is currently in the early stages of revisiting and updating the strategic plan. A School committee member stated: *“We are starting the process to revisit the strategic plan, with equity goals in mind.”*
- ❖ School Committee members and district-level employees have attended professional learning sessions on the topic of implicit bias, sessions that called upon them to reflect on their own beliefs and to infer how these beliefs can impact the way they support students across the district. These sessions have not taken place across all schools yet, but district leaders plan for lower-grade employees to engage in this training in the 2022-23 school year. The district mindset will not see a full shift until all stakeholders engage in similar training and have this reflection opportunity.
- ❖ AHS's 2019-2022 School Improvement Plan (SIP) states that the school is committed to attracting, developing, and retaining highly qualified, passionate educators who are dedicated to the mission and vision of APS and AHS.
- ❖ The district’s human resource webpage states the district’s aim is to recruit diverse, talented candidates.
- ❖ Between 2010 and 2022, the district has hired 30 educators of color. This includes educators who identify as Asian, Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, and mixed races.

Race/Ethnicity of APS Staff	
Race/Ethnicity	# of Staff
African American/Black	5
Asian	8
Hispanic/Latino	7
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	10
White	463
Total	493
Source: Staff Data Report Ethnicity & Retention 4.7.2022	

- ❖ The district is currently partnering with the Agogos website, which is a digital platform for hiring and supporting educators of color. The Assistant Superintendent works closely with the CEO and Founder, Winston Daley, to post vacant positions in the district.
- ❖ District practice demonstrates the district’s ability to measure in place fiscal soundness and responsiveness. Over the years, fiscal budgets have been maintained and considerable increases in budget and reality have aligned (e.g. 8.27% increase in salaries budgeted). They accounted for anticipated step and lane increases for FY20. A step increase is an automatic bump in pay

for adding a year of experience in the school district. The steps are outlined in a pre-existing salary scale. A lane increase is a raise earned for education coursework.

- ❖ A number of the positions are those in the most need: nurses, special education teachers, and district-level directors and leaders. It is clear that the district knows the need; and has funded these positions for the FY23 academic year.
- ❖ Curriculum leaders across the district meet once a month to discuss common vocabulary and progression of skills.
- ❖ Clare Landrigan, an external consultant, has been working with the district on literacy professional development over the past few years.

***Leadership, Management, and Accountability: Factors that Limit Equity***

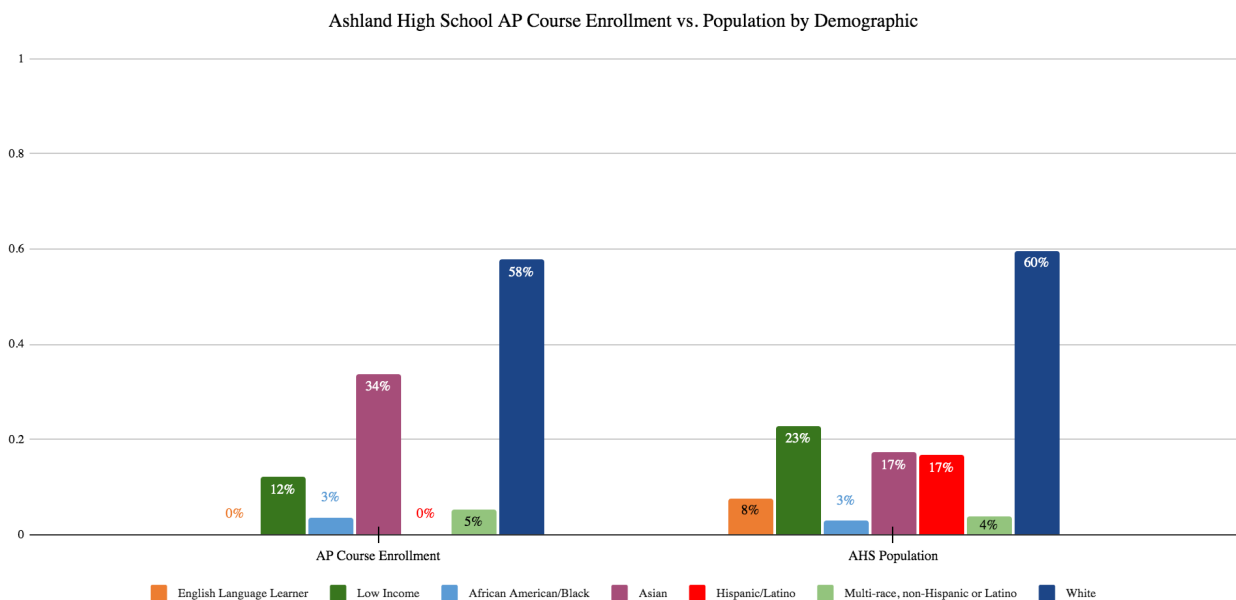
- ❖ Although district leaders have discussed a new vision for equity across the district, this vision has not yet been clearly articulated or communicated to all stakeholders. During focus groups, Special Education Coordinators and District Level staff members were not aware of the new equity vision, nor could they communicate what steps the district was taking towards enhanced equity. One district-level employee stated, “I would imagine that this equity review is the first step in moving towards greater equity in our schools.” Another shared, “This is the first time we’ve been asked questions about equity.”
- ❖ Although AHS’s 2019-2022 School Improvement Plan reflects a commitment to the recruitment, cultivation, and retention of staff dedicated to the mission and vision of APS and AHS, the indicator of success for this priority lacks overall recruitment measures, strategic actions, and metrics to facilitate hiring diverse educators, specifically, educators of color.
- ❖ The district’s human resource webpage lacks clarity around hiring educators of color. Moreover, APS does not showcase the diversity of its workforce on the human resources page, which can be used to attract diverse candidates to their district.
- ❖ The district’s Employee Handbook is perhaps the area of greatest need and potential for growth as it pertains to the mission of the district. The district could outline and confirm its vision for equity in this handbook, which could provide guidance for the schools. The vision and goals set forth by the district are a starting place where the district can explicitly state its commitment to equity, providing the resources and support to those that need it most, creating an environment among its schools in which all students can thrive. Seemingly absent within the resources named in this handbook are those that aid in the advancement of those vulnerable to discrimination who have greater need for support. Likewise, district leaders could revise the handbook in order to amend school disciplinary policy and protocol in a manner

that would further equitable decision-making and ensure that there is a consistent approach across all schools.

- ❖ The Employee Handbook states that “Teachers should avoid using instructional materials which depict stereotypically sexist or racially biased situations.” Consider how this might be interpreted across different audiences. Further consideration should be given to how this is being monitored and who is responsible for monitoring.
- ❖ Further consideration: What is in place to ensure that teachers and staff are not discriminatory or biased in situations? What is being done proactively to screen teachers who may come into the district with discriminatory views? What is currently being done to train teachers to refrain from discriminating or demonstrating bias?
- ❖ According to the Employee Handbook Non-Discrimination Clause, the grievant is expected to go to the school-level administrator with a grievance. This practice could be compromising and open them up to further discrimination or challenge. There should be district-level protections for employees experiencing discrimination. This policy needs to be teased out more with multilayered opportunities for individuals to file a grievance. Guidance or policy should articulate how all of the involved parties are receiving equity training in order to adequately and fairly administer a grievance process. This is not present within the existing policy. Links and addresses (and other logistical information for navigating the process) should be present.
- ❖ APS has not identified a specific goal for recruiting, retaining, and retiring diverse educators.
- ❖ The district has not fully communicated its equity plan according to the focus groups conducted. All - staff, students, parents, and community partners - expressed a need for a more fully formed plan, and parent groups hoped their participation in these focus groups was a step toward creating a strategic and cohesive diversity, equity, and inclusion plan.
- ❖ An [analysis of enrollment in AP courses by demographic](#) at Ashland High School revealed the following information:
  - The percentage of both White and Black students enrolled in AP courses matches the percentage of White and Black students in the overall population.
  - The percentage of Asian students enrolled in AP is double that of the percentage of Asian students in the overall population.
  - The reverse is true for low-income students: The percent enrolled in AP is about half the percent of low-income students overall.
  - While approximately 17% of students in the district identify as Hispanic, no Hispanic students are enrolled in AP courses.
  - While approximately 8% of students in the district are ELLs, no ELLs are enrolled in AP courses.

**Ashland High School AP Course Enrollment by Demographic**

	English Language Learner	Low Income	African American/Black	Asian	Hispanic/Latino	Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	White
AP Course Enrollment	0%	12%	3%	34%	0%	5%	58%
AHS Population	7.6%	22.7%	2.8%	17.2%	16.6%	3.7%	59.7%



- ❖ District policies, as well as School Committee processes and policies, are not easily accessible in Portuguese, Spanish or other languages. Neither are they easily accessible to those who may be living with visual or hearing disabilities. These should be available in Portuguese and Spanish, and any other popular language in the community, on the district website. Minutes and communications coming from the Committee and Superintendent should be made available in Portuguese and Spanish, as well as other relevant languages.
- ❖ From the perspective of the School Committee Policy Manual, there is considerable affirmation of having equitable and longstanding interactions across stakeholders, but there is little existence of the exact protocol that enables respectful interactions and cross-relational engagement.



- ❖ Opportunity for Community Engagement: The School Committee Policy Manual states that the committee will “Maintain two-way communication with citizens of the community. The public will be kept informed of the progress and problems of the school system, and citizens will be urged to bring their aspirations and feelings about their public schools to the attention of this body, which they have chosen to represent them in the management of public education.”
  - Point of consideration: What is the plan for community engagement? How does the Committee ensure that there are diverse stakeholders that are truly included in the fold of sharing and informing decision making? The district might design an outreach plan that gets policies and information about budgets out to students and families, in addition to involving them in the process of policy information.
  
- ❖ The high school uses a weighted class ranking system. Advanced placement classes carry the most weight, followed by honors, college prep 2, and college prep 1. For any given letter grade, there is a higher weight given, the higher the level of the course. All college prep courses are weighted the same. Some courses that may be significant, such as Mathematics of Investing, Game Design, App Design, Robotics, and Makerspace Leadership are all at the college prep level (not honors) and therefore give students a lower “weighted average” than traditional subject area courses.
  - This is most pronounced in the Web Design and English: Justice and Redemption (senior) courses, which are designated as college prep, rather than honors. The Web Design course explores “pioneering and innovative women and minorities who have contributed to technology and computer science.” The English: Justice and Redemption course is “about people seeking justice in an often unjust world.” Because of the weighted system, students are essentially penalized for taking these classes versus not taking them.
  
- ❖ Many adult focus groups welcomed the district taking initial steps to become a more equitable school district. Some teaching staff were unaware that district leaders have been engaged with consultants on equity over the last two school years, and these teachers did not see consistent evidence of the district leaders’ learning.
  
- ❖ 6th Grade Middle school math has two levels, 7th and 8th Grade has three levels: an accelerated class, a grade-level class, and a “concepts” class. As early as 6th grade, students are tracked, which has long-lasting ramifications for course selection and placement in high school.
  
- ❖ As students transition from elementary school (5th grade) to middle school (6th grade), they are given a math placement test. A formula is then used to rank-order students. The formula considers students’ in-class performance throughout the year (unit quizzes and tests, term

grades); the previous year's MCAS scores; and the scores of the placement test. The rankings are used to populate middle school classes.

- ❖ From a policy perspective, there is minimal evidence showing exactly how departments, teams, and schools are held accountable for eliminating gaps. Seemingly there are no data-driven or intensive family-engagement processes that could gauge context and information so as to truly understand gaps. Little to no evidence exists that there are systems in place to even show that gaps exist, and there is little to no evidence of course-correcting institutional processes dedicated to ameliorating gaps (per policies and budgets).
- ❖ While district-level policies discuss culturally responsive learning and environments to support academic achievement for all, little has been said as to how this will be accomplished. In the Employee Handbook's "Diversity Resolution" section for example, there is an opportunity to be explicit.
- ❖ The Finance and Operations Office has absorbed responsibilities associated with human resources. This staff does not have insight into the recruitment, retention, and retirement pipeline for educators. Additionally, the interviews, resume selections, and candidate selections are managed by school-based administrators. The Finance and Operations Office only handles "hiring authorization," which is the last step before hiring a candidate.
- ❖ The APS leadership team has not created an explicit initiative to recruit diverse candidates specifically for leadership and cabinet positions.
- ❖ Ashland does not have an affinity space to support higher ordering thinking and reflective spaces for educators of color. An affinity space is a space either physical or virtual, intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations. The purpose of an affinity space is to provide a positive, affirming environment for groups, often those who feel marginalized, to come together and engage in open and honest dialogues.
- ❖ Ashland does not have a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator/Director or a culturally responsive professional role to help support the capacity of DEI and culturally responsive conditions for staff and students.

*Looking at the district's Employee Handbook, the following points are to be considered:*

- ❖ Professional Development: The district might include professional development opportunities that are less formalized than a school or certification program (e.g. starting an affinity group or joining an affinity organization or district-funded attendance of a conference that affirms the identity and background of staff so they may feel supported within the profession). Where does the district stand on this? Would it be willing to invest in this way?

- ❖ Starting Salary & Salary Increases: Salary range and explanations are not available in the handbook. Are starting salaries for positions listed somewhere? What is being done to ensure transparency and fairness in salary offerings? What analysis has been done around salaries?
- ❖ Employee Benefits:
  - Benefits are on par with what is standard in terms of opt-in period and eligibility for employees working 20 hours or more. There is a question as to how many employees are able to receive benefits.
  - Given the fact that employees have 30 days to enroll in the district's healthcare, more specific guidance for enrollment might be helpful. Where/how do employees get these forms? Is there a process by which employees can submit all forms and paperwork online and also within their building of employment?
  - For some employees, two months of coverage could be considered a long time for insurance to go into effect. What measures are taken to ensure that employees and their families are able to be covered during this period?
  - There might be an opportunity to share exactly what these benefits entail according to the plan itself.
- ❖ Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Services: The fact that employees and their family members can take advantage of such a program to combat alcoholism or addiction is important. The Employee Handbook should reassure employees that taking advantage of this service does not compromise one's own employment. Furthermore, it may be of interest for the district to consider enrollment in this program and the steps it takes to protect the anonymity of employees and family members considering enrollment.
- ❖ There seems to be little evidence or discussion in the school committee or employee handbooks of mental health programming and support.
- ❖ Juneteenth is now an official holiday and should be added to the list. It should be prioritized as a holiday that, regardless of whether it falls on a Saturday or Sunday, is to be observed officially by the district.
- ❖ Holidays and Vacation: Consider creating a process whereby individuals are able to advocate for which holidays they would like to celebrate for religious purposes, as this does not exist in the current employee handbook. The district has a standard vacation policy, but there are a few questions to be raised from the current manual. For example, an employee might be concerned about access to personal wellness or mental health days.
- ❖ Family Leave: A short period of unpaid family leave compromises staff and family, and presents an equity issue. Given current socio-political realities experienced by people of color and women, for example, unpaid family leave presents a huge challenge for families. Furthermore,

unpaid family leave results in different experienced realities for different individuals (e.g. a woman who has given birth might feel pressured to return to work before her body fully recovers from childbirth). Point for consideration: What beyond the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the district willing to provide?

- ❖ All materials (employee and school handbooks as well as the school committee guidelines) should be available in accessible and varied translations for different language speakers and those with visual or hearing impairments. On the employee website, for example, it seems there is no way to easily download or translate material (granted, most of the handbooks do encourage students, staff, and families to contact an office for material) Researchers were unable to locate a place where these materials are translated or a service willing to translate them.
- ❖ On the online version of these manuals, it might be helpful to include as many hyperlinks to forms and websites as possible (e.g. insurance companies and options for new employees).
- ❖ Seemingly, district manuals and guidelines make little mention of material or procedures concerning student, parent, and staff outreach. They ought to be revised so as to outline a communications outreach plan, notably for the school committee, and to post it publicly and to review it annually.
- ❖ Aside from this employee handbook, it would be helpful to have items such as announcements, autocalls from the school, and text messages blasted in a variety of languages. Also, parents from a variety of language backgrounds would benefit from a translation option for the calendar of events.

### **High-Leverage Recommendations for Leadership, Management, and Accountability**

- ❖ School Committee Board Governance Point for Consideration: Setting up engagement procedures to ensure that a diverse group of individuals have access to committee membership.
- ❖ Update job descriptions to include anti-bias and gender-neutral language for all job postings. ★
- ❖ Aid in licensure. Emergency teacher licenses were created out of necessity when the Massachusetts state department faced a system backlog of Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL). Research has shown that at least 25% of emergency licenses have been granted to people of color. The increase in the number of educators of color entering the field has been astonishing since 8% of them make up the workforce in Massachusetts. Therefore, it is important for APS to provide licensure support (leading to a permanent license) for educators who currently hold an emergency license.

- ❖ Create and define a metric of success so as to assess progress in diversifying the teacher candidate pool. ★
- ❖ Create an affinity group for educators and staff members who identify as people of color.
- ❖ School administrators should consider joining DESE'S Teacher Diversification Professional Learning Community (TDPLC) to receive support for strengthening and diversifying existing teacher recruitment and retention programs. ★
  - As reported by DESE, participation in the TDPLC network will provide APS with a range of components that are critical for a strategic approach to the recruitment, selection, and retention of staff of color.
- ❖ Look into creating an equity statement to ensure including job applicants understand both Ashland's commitment to equity and how this commitment aligns with this institution's overall goals of being inclusive.
- ❖ Craft a job description in preparation for hiring a DEI director.
- ❖ Create and offer internships or internal recruitment hiring pipelines to graduating seniors.
- ❖ Create a specific goal for recruiting, retaining, and retiring diverse educators. For instance, as a starting point, APS could identify a goal to hire 37% educators of color, since 37% of students identify as people of color; including 2.8% African American, 17. 2% Asian, 16.6% Hispanic, and 0.4 Native American (2022 Ashland's DESE Profile).
- ❖ There is an opportunity for the district to connect its vision to equity and justice. The AHS vision, for example, could function as inspiration for the development of a vision statement that would serve as a model district-wide equity statement. This is an endeavor to which considerable time and effort should be devoted. Stakeholders at all levels, including students from across the district, should be continually consulted to consider how and where diversity shows up for them and how it can be promoted further. ★
  - E.g., "The Ashland Public Schools will strive to celebrate diversity and foster inclusive communities where all students can learn and thrive. With equity and justice in mind, we will strive to foster responsive policies, practices, and learning modules that ensure the success of every student. Centering student voice and experiences, Ashland Public Schools prioritizes responsive and inclusive curriculum, policies, and practices that honor the diverse backgrounds and cultures of students...."
- ❖ Revisit the categorization of AHS course offerings. Consider weighing computer science and STEAM electives on a par with honors level courses rather than college prep. The current

system penalizes students for enrolling in these elective courses that have appealing descriptions. ★

- The district should also examine the role of the weighted ranking system itself in bringing about equitable outcomes for students.

- ❖ Examine the district's enrollment data in AP courses. The district needs to adopt policies to ensure greater access to, and enrollment in AP courses, particularly for ELL students and for students who identify as Hispanic. ★
- ❖ Build on APS's mission and vision by defining, codifying (from celebration to discipline) and providing examples for a set of agreed upon values that can be followed by all stakeholders. A small set of values, 6-10 at most, can be created for all. Given the current emphasis on equity, values such as inclusion, belongingness, courage, and leadership could be created by a group of stakeholders, then shared across the district so all can be held accountable to them.
- ❖ There is room within the Ashland High School Parent and Student Handbook to mention early on how AHS will accomplish the four approaches identified to achieve its mission statement. What accountability measures are in place to ensure that these four approaches are in fact used?
- ❖ Learn about the beliefs, behaviors, and biases that thwart greater inclusion. Leadership and staff must move beyond challenging conversations to better understand how individual beliefs, behaviors, and biases hurt students (e.g., constantly mispronouncing a student's name, favoring the boys over the girls in a class, or dismissing PRIDE day – all stories shared by stakeholders) and collective acceptance of these beliefs, behaviors, and biases not only hurt some students, but ultimately hurt them all when any student is meant to think less of themselves. Surveying stakeholders about situations in which they do or don't feel like belonging based upon the actions of peers, leaders, and educators would be a productive first step. ★
- ❖ Build in a training within new teacher orientation that is explicitly focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. At the onset of a teacher's induction, they should be exposed to the values, vision, and tenets of the district as these pertain to racial equity. This training could be a great way to make a connection between the values and mission, and practical forms of implementation. ★
- ❖ Consider employment expectations. Reimagine professionalism as an aspiration for employees and ensure that policy is in alignment with the diverse cultures from which employees come. For example, the employee handbook states, "Work attire should reflect the professional responsibilities of an employee's position, exhibiting concern for safety, hygiene, neatness, cleanliness and projecting positive role models for students enrolled in the Ashland Public

Schools.” Professional attire has many different connotations, often entrenched around whiteness. The district could revise handbook attire guidelines to affirm an individual’s right to express themselves and their backgrounds, i.e. to wear religious attire and the clothing of cultures of origin. It might be worth noting for example, that the district respects and values the right of individuals to dress and adorn their presentation in the ways they see fit (e.g. right to wear dreadlocks, braids.... This does not necessarily have to be said explicitly. Nevertheless, acknowledgement that different cultures have different expressions and understandings of professionalism is key).

- ❖ Add Juneteenth as an official holiday to the list in the Employee Handbook. ★

### **Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CI&A)**

**Overall Rating:** Developing

#### **Overview:**

APS’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices are on course to provide coursework, teaching, and data collection that will support equitable learning for all students. Implementation of equitable practices, however, has been uneven across the system. Thus, district leaders have successfully aligned elementary courses of study to the Massachusetts Frameworks, along with strong literacy program supports, while the plethora of high school course offerings is lacking in equitable options. Likewise, district leaders provide teachers with rich professional development offerings, but only a few of these offerings target equity instructional priorities, such as implicit bias. Assessment is equally uneven vis-a-vis use of data. On the one hand, district leaders have provisioned elementary teachers with state-of-the-art data-driven literacy assessments; on the other hand, they have yet to develop any procedures for systemic data analysis of behavioral cases and challenges. The district should review areas of uneven implementation of equitable practices while deepening its commitment to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that fosters achievement for all students.

#### ***Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Practices That Support Equity***

- ❖ Elementary and middle school science courses follow the MA frameworks. Each grade level is integrated with physical, earth, and life sciences. All units are created using an Understanding by Design (UbD) framework.



- ❖ The elementary schools use Lucy Calkins Units of Study during their literacy blocks, which is aligned with the Common Core standards. They also supplement this curriculum with Foundations and Heggerty for foundational literacy skills.
- ❖ The high school ELA program of study offers English: Justice and Redemption, a justice-oriented literature course that students may take in their senior year.
- ❖ Funds have been spent over the last two years to enhance the level of multicultural books and books by authors of color.
- ❖ The high school offers the following advanced placement courses: Calculus, Statistics, Computer Science, Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, English Language and Composition, English Literature and Composition, World History, U.S. History, Psychology, European History, and Art History.
- ❖ The high school also offers honors computer programming in Python and an honors elective called the “Student Technology Assistance Team.”
- ❖ The high school program of study offers a variety of honors courses across disciplines.
- ❖ High school teachers are engaged in an antiracist book group and have a running list of texts to consider when diversifying their curriculum.
- ❖ There is clear alignment between district budgeting and federal, state, and industry spending as it pertains to budgeting resources. For example, the budgeting of special education programming and support specifically has overall increased over the years for out-of-district funding of students so that their needs are met. This begs the question: What are the district’s weak spots in retaining special needs students in its own district. Little funding has been dedicated to the explicit creation of policy, data review, and operations development as it pertains to serving the needs of special education students, despite the increase in spending over the years. It is impressive that Ashland’s district spending is below the state average and yet is considered a top-tier performing district. It seems there are lessons to be learned from AHS where, for example, in 2021, it was rated the 33rd best high school by Boston Magazine, which



looked at 150 high schools in the Metro Boston area. AHS has considerably more explicit and in-depth budget and policy considerations than the rest of Ashland schools (with Mindess perhaps being the exception).

- ❖ The high school offers the following electives: Mathematics of Investing, Web Design, Game Design, App Design, Robotics, and Makerspace Leadership. These courses are at the college prep level. Per the program of study, the freshmen can take college prep 1, college prep 2, or honors in Good and Evil. The sophomores can take college prep 1, college prep 2, or honors in Tragedy and Triumph. The juniors can take college prep 1, college prep 2, or honors in The American Dream or AP English Language and Composition. In their senior year, students have more choices with AP English Literature and Composition, War Literature, Coming of Age, Justice and Redemption, and Dystopian Literature. But, besides the AP course, the only course offered at an advanced level (honors) during their senior year is War Literature.
- ❖ Elementary report cards contain both “content” standards and “practice” standards in mathematics.
- ❖ Per the report cards shared, the elementary literacy report cards are standards-aligned, but it is unclear if the standards are Common Core or Massachusetts Frameworks.
- ❖ In the 3-5 ELA grades, there are some teachers who use reading groups by reading levels, as needed. But, primarily, they are based on strategy.
- ❖ The district is providing professional development to teachers in several areas.
- ❖ Based on a review of the 2020-2023 budgets, there seems to be a well-understood connection between the funding that is available to plan a budget and the needed expenditures for programs like special education.
- ❖ The 2022-2023 budget conveys a commitment to serving ELL students. In spring 2022, the district hired a Director of English Language Learners. Per regulations, any district with over 100 ELL students must have an identified director of English language learning. APS is now at nearly 250 ELL students. The recently completed tiered focus monitoring review also

highlights the need for creating this new position to oversee the education of ELLs, monitor compliance, and move forward on ELL initiatives.

- ❖ AHS: Both an ELL and a Special Education teacher position request for funding is slated to be funded for FY23. The AHS teacher request states, “With the rise in non-English speaking students, the teacher has increased the number of support and direct English instruction courses taught, and the number of push-in classes has increased too. Given these factors and the high school schedule, one teacher cannot deliver recommended services for 40 ELL students.” This position is of high priority to fund and support longevity. The district has responded to this need by securing funds to add both positions.
- ❖ Professional Development around understanding English Language Learners has been provided. It is unclear if this professional development has focused on instructional or classroom practice support.
- ❖ Warren School: .80 (academic year 21-22) to 1.0 FTE (academic year 22-23 ) ELL Teacher: Currently, there are 88 ELL students at Warren. APS has met the recommended minutes of English language instruction, as outlined by DESE with the increase of FTE.
- ❖ The high school program of study describes and defines its core values as being aligned with the district: “Our core values are the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and commitments that we must exhibit to fulfill the district’s vision. These values are understood and shared by every member of the district; our values are what we stand for. They guide our actions, focus our energies, and act as an anchor point for all our plans.”
- ❖ Elementary mathematics provides a yearly pacing calendar, as well as benchmark assessments and open-ended tasks. It is unclear to what extent classroom discourse, student agency, and eliciting student thinking is visible and prioritized.

### ***Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Practices That Limit Equity***

- ❖ Although funds have been spent over the last two years to enhance the level of multicultural books and books by authors of color, the taught curriculum in schools is still not culturally responsive to the community of students and families that are being served. Educators in

school committee focus groups and district level positions have shared, “...the current curriculum still has a heavy emphasis on the White savior complex throughout history,” and “Our curriculum has made some improvements over the last few years, but we are definitely not there yet.”

<b>Breakdown of Authors by Race in ELA and Social Students Texts, Grades 6-12</b>		
	<b>White</b>	<b>Other Race</b>
ELA & SS 9-12	80%	20%
ELA 6	70%	30%
ELA 7	70%	30%
ELA 8	100%	0%

Source: ELA and SS Text Lists Provided by Curriculum Leaders

<b>Breakdown of Authors by Gender in ELA and Social Studies Texts, Grades 6-12</b>		
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
ELA & SS 9-12	25%	75%
ELA 6	20%	80%
ELA 7	60%	40%
ELA 8	80%	20%

Source: ELA and SS Text Lists Provided by Curriculum Leaders

- ❖ The hope from the parent focus group was that the manner in which the district meets both the equity needs of ELL and POC would become as common as how the district meets the needs of Special Education students. Student and staff focus groups shared that the district is not meeting all student needs; for example, there is a lack of recognition of the LGBTQ+ community's opportunity to join the middle school diversity club. Students shared that this club did not meet as often as the high school club, so it was less available as a choice. Middle school staff shared that the diversity group garnered no volunteers at first, so mostly young teachers were “volunteer-told” to join.
- ❖ Per the program of study, the high school offers “self-defense for **women.**”

- ❖ Per the program of study, Spanish and French are the only two language course offerings at the high school.
- ❖ District documents evidence little discussion of data as a means of reviewing policy and spurring student outcomes. For example, district handbooks and policy manuals present no procedure for systemic or school-level review of behavioral cases and challenges (e.g. the number of school suspensions and who is being suspended). The district has the opportunity here to, for example, do district and school-wide review on this matter via a system such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), both data-based, decision-tracking, multi-tiered frameworks of support to encourage appropriate, and discourage inappropriate, student behaviors. Implementing such systems can allow for the following considerations: How do students engage with these systems and tracking measures? What is used to proactively promote the values expounded in this section? How do they result in change of school and district behavior patterns? How can the district use data (e.g. disproportionate suspension or discipline based on an item such as race) to interrogate and redesign district and school level policies?
- ❖ Math placement from grade 5 to middle school utilizes the previous year's MCAS score as one of its criteria. This data is developmentally outdated and does not measure a student's potential for rigorous coursework.
- ❖ The middle and high school report cards are not standards-based.
- ❖ Per Summary of Professional Learning Evaluation 2020-2021, professional development did not include English as a second language/sheltered English immersion support.
- ❖ Although the district is providing professional development to teachers in several areas, these offerings are not consistently aligned to district goals, nor are they available for all stakeholders. In several focus groups, district leaders shared that although they had attended professional learning sessions on implicit bias, these sessions were not yet offered to elementary school teachers. In another focus group, an educator stated that she had attended a "powerful" PD session on the acquisition of the Portuguese language. Two other participants in the same focus

group stated that they were completely unaware of this session, while another educator stated that she wanted to attend but the session was already full when she tried to register.

- ❖ The quality or depth of some of the current professional development sessions may be lacking based on responses from district employees. Although several district-level employees mentioned that they had attended professional learning sessions about implicit bias and equity, no employee could speak to a specific strategy or skill they learned to support students during classroom instruction. One employee shared that the training was about the “way that adults think about diversity and racism.” Another stated, “I haven’t learned strategies that I can take directly to the classroom.”
- ❖ A number of notably equity-driven initiatives remain unfunded in the district. These include:
  - Warren School: .50 to 1.0 FTE Counselor (who would be tasked with growing social-emotional learning needs of the diverse student population) position is unfunded.
  - Mindess School: As stated by a special education teacher, “The number of students requiring specialized programming in our autism/developmental program is growing. We currently have six students in the program, and we anticipate having 12 students in 2022-23. Given the intensity of need of the students, we need to divide this program into two classrooms.”
  - Two nursing positions are not funded within the district.
- ❖ The 2020-2023 budgets seem to offer minimal investment in resources that would allow for flexibility or clearly align with district and school goals. Such explicit alignment is absent, despite considerable investment in areas like special education, for example, which has seen steady resource investment over the years.

### **High Leverage Recommendations for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

- ❖ Prioritize the hiring of a Social Studies Coordinator for K2-2. This person should update and publish the social studies curriculum scope and sequence, aligned to the history frameworks, for elementary grades.

- ❖ Continue to diversify the mentor texts, literature, and themes used across grade levels, particularly the author's race and gender in the high school's texts. ★
- ❖ Develop a plan for increased communication among teachers who are working with a "common student." It is interesting to note that when prompted to speak about teacher collaborations around student concerns, iPass and counselors were referenced.
- ❖ Revise the district's report cards. Design standards-based report cards for middle and high school students. Revise the elementary report cards so that Social Studies grading references student performance related to specific learning standards, including nonfiction literacy skills, instead of generic knowledge/skills. ★
- ❖ Expand and diversify the honors course offerings to seniors. Currently, senior students are penalized by the weighted grading if they take equity-oriented courses, such as the Justice and Redemption course. ★
- ❖ Provide targeted professional development around instruction support for English Language Learners. ★
- ❖ The unfunded/in-process funding positions must be prioritized for sustained funding. The district must prioritize its positions of interest as well as those requests coming from the schools. For example, the district requests funding for the acquisition of a data specialist. This position should be highly prioritized as its holder will provide vital support to all educators in the district, especially in terms of monitoring the achievement and needs of historically marginalized groups of students. Hiring a data specialist will facilitate review of processes related to special education and social-emotional learning, as well as ELL.
- ❖ The district should consider infusing social-emotional learning (SEL) into its instructional and programmatic visions. This can be done with a more intentional focus on SEL and culture building within the mission and vision of both the district and its individual schools.

- ❖ The district should strongly consider a partnership with or support from an outside organization/consultant in order to leverage their expertise in tracking student and staff SEL competency and instruction development.
- ❖ The district should consider embracing a homework policy that meets the needs of students in such a way that all can learn and be successful, as well as provides guidance to staff and parents as to how best to support struggling learners.
  - Some questions to guide the consideration of a homework policy: What is the purpose of homework? What are some ways to build in work time for students in transition or in vulnerable settings? How are students with special needs supported? What measures is the school taking to ensure all parents are able to participate in the ways the homework policy suggests?
- ❖ The district should design a budget that better supports racial equity. It should explicitly budget for items such as district and school level racial equity training, culturally relevant instructional staff professional development, and itemized/intentional funding for planning and materials to advance equity in the district. Beyond this audit, the district should invest in continual review of policies and practices at the district level as it pertains to equity.
- ❖ The district should investigate patterns of parental opting for in-district, versus out-of-district special education student placement. Deep interrogation of patterns, services available and not available, for example, could yield the insight necessary to building sustainable and necessary interventions. ★

## **Domain 4: Family and Community Engagement**

**Overall Rating:** Developing

### **Overview:**

APS has established multiple means of establishing equitable and reciprocal relationships with families and community organizations, which can build support for and inclusive revision of school programs if fully utilized. The district has spawned several organizations to facilitate parent/district collaboration, though there is evidence that these organizations might not have sufficient efficacy in

bringing about some institutional changes. In addition, several community partners have forged alliances with APS, but so far, at least, their impact on equitable district practices has seemingly been minimal. Finally, the district has created communication resources that provide the greater community with important supports for students in need. Still, some parental and community resource requests to better serve struggling students remain unfunded in district budgets. APS should redouble its current efforts to include families and community partners in productive dialogue in order to craft programs and practices that better meet the needs of all students.

***Family and Community Engagement: Factors that Support Equity***

- ❖ The district has begun engaging with a few community groups as well as forging stronger connections with the public library.
- ❖ APS leaders also formally collaborate with two social justice alliances in Ashland: Ashland Is United (AIU) and Ashland Residents for Equity and Action (AREA). AREA publishes equity-oriented booklists recommended by school librarians. Both AIU and AREA members participated in Ashland High School's Reality Fair, and both organizations support APS's efforts to hire a more diverse staff.
- ❖ An example of effective outreach: The Ashland Parent Information guide indicates that parents are encouraged to participate in partnership with Ashland schools via membership in several school-supporting organizations. These include the Ashland Bilingual Parent group (ABPAC), Ashland K-12 Parent-Teacher Organization, the Ashland Parent Advisory Council, the Ashland Middle School site council, the Mindess, Pittaway, and Warren site councils, and the Ashland Educational Foundation INC. See [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RckI-eyf8G9zsWCM0VmePMUxu\\_IW85SZSjvvAEkgRtA/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RckI-eyf8G9zsWCM0VmePMUxu_IW85SZSjvvAEkgRtA/edit)
- ❖ The community focus group mentioned a closer affiliation with the Ashland Public Library, a partnership that resulted in adding more culturally relevant books in different languages to the catalog. Focus group members observed that the library had created a more welcoming atmosphere for all students, and librarians brought library programs into schools more often. Ashland United and AREA have met with individual schools, so conversations have started.



- ❖ Staff and student focus groups noted a need for additional human resources to support the district's burgeoning ELL population. Staff, parent, and community focus groups all recognized a need not only for additional human resources, but also that these human resources be deployed in a more systematic and purposeful manner. The district plans to add such additional resources in SY22-23.
- ❖ For the past four years, the district has had a Director of Counseling and Social Emotional Learning who maintains a website focused on SEL for the APS community. On this site the Director disseminates newsletters about each school's SEL services, guides for parents, SEL video lessons for families, links to crisis management, mental health and counseling websites, SEL webinars, Random Acts of Kindness activities, mood regulation strategies, and SEL websites, as well as links to Ashland's Department of Human Service, to Metrowest Navigation Line whose care coordinators speak English, Portuguese and Spanish, to multiple emergency services organizations like Samaritans, and to a plethora of local counseling practices.
- ❖ The district is beginning to develop partnerships with community organizations that provide opportunities and/or resources for students. The district is developing ways to connect families and students with the supports they need.

***Family and Community Engagement: Factors that Limit Equity***

- ❖ Although the district has begun engaging with community groups and building a stronger relationship with the public library, there are currently no codified plans for family and community engagement. Even parents who were satisfied with their child's education in Ashland recognized a lack of parental engagement. Community groups yearned for involvement and connection within the schools, and they anxiously await a time of greater partnership. Although the parent and community focus groups were more well attended than other focus groups, they only numbered in the teens. A few parents stated that in a community with 3,000 school children, only a handful of parents participating might be representative of the challenge of engaging with families. On more than one occasion, parents asked, "How can the schools do a better job of engagement?"
- ❖ Student feedback is not formally used by the district. When matters arise, it is not common practice for the district to consult with students or include student voice in decisions.

- ❖ If student voice is used to drive decision-making, it was not evident within the student focus groups. Students often took time to discuss inequities and lack of focus on diversity even though some initial changes had been made in schools. Some students took the time during focus groups to express a lack of connections with peers and some staff, and they shared some instances of inequitable treatment from leaders and/or educators.

### **High-Leverage Recommendations for Family and Community Engagement**

- ❖ The district should reconsider adding more holidays to the district calendar in favor, rather, of inviting the parent/guardian community into school to celebrate holidays and share all the different ways families both honor their cultures and work towards assimilation and acceptance. There is no one way to honor an individual, family, or group's culture while assimilating, and the district should not shy away from the challenges families and affinity groups face in doing so.
- ❖ It would benefit the district to move beyond the initial small steps of inclusion (holidays, Black History Month, offering a basic Portuguese course to teachers) and create a greater sense of community by bringing parents/guardians and community groups into schools to participate in cultural celebrations and cross-cultural school events. District and school leaders must actually recruit them as equal partners in honoring the growing diversity of the community.
- ❖ The school district should craft announcements, autocalls, and text messages in the languages of in-district parents. The district should also provide translation links on the calendar of events for the benefit of parents/guardians from various language backgrounds. ★
- ❖ All digital assets (policies and procedures) at the district level should be easily accessible to families who speak the languages reflected in Ashland schools. ★

## Supporting Literature and Promising Practices

American schools have mirrored the inequities of society since the very beginning. Whether we examine how schools were created for boys/men only, segregated by race, the exclusion of students with disabilities or the current policies enacted into law creating hostile places for the LGBTQ+ community, or disavowing our collective history of hatred for people of color, there has both been much done to improve our schools and many miles to go before we close inequity gaps.

The Ashland Public Schools has the opportunity, in many aspects of schooling, to provide meaningful inclusion for all of its students so they can learn, grow, and become productive members of the community.

The simple practice of talking about race and racism with all stakeholders – staff, students, and caregivers – is in fact, not so simple. Author, former Spelman College President, and current interim President of Mount Holyoke College, Beverly Daniel Tatum, believes how we engage and process discussions on race must be taken into consideration if changes are to be made.

In her oft-cited journal entry from Harvard Education Review, *Talking About Race, Learning About Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Developmental Theory in the Classroom*, Tatum discusses the methodologies of teaching the college course, *Psychology of Racism*, 18 times and at three different universities and what she learned. As a matter of practice, Tatum recommends that we understand the emotions that will bubble up BEFORE beginning discussions.

*“The introduction of these issues of oppression often generates powerful emotional responses in students that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair. If not addressed, these emotional responses can result in student resistance to oppression-related content areas. Such resistance can ultimately interfere with the cognitive understanding and mastery of the material. This resistance and potential interference is particularly common when specifically addressing issues of race and racism. Yet, when students are given the opportunity to explore race-related material in a classroom where both their affective and intellectual responses are acknowledged and addressed, their level of understanding is greatly enhanced.”*

Tatum’s strategies to develop a learning culture around such a sensitive subject include the following:

*Specifically, I ask students to demonstrate their respect for one another by honoring the confidentiality of the group. So that students may feel free to ask potentially awkward or embarrassing questions, or share race related experiences, I ask that students refrain from making personal attributions when discussing the*

*course content with their friends. I also discourage the use of "zaps," overt or covert put-downs often used as comic relief when someone is feeling anxious about the content of the discussion. Finally, students are asked to speak from their own experience, to say, for example, "I think . . ." or "In my experience, I have found . . ." rather than generalizing their experience to others, as in "People say . . .".*

More on specific strategies and context can be found in reading the entire journal at:

<https://equity.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Tatum-Talking-About-Race.pdf>

Staff content knowledge is important regardless of what educators are teaching and this includes a more inclusive curriculum to recognize and reach students not in the majority, including Black, Asian, Latino, and Native American students. Professor Geneva Gay, who teaches multiculturalism at the University of Washington-Seattle, outlines practical and important steps to prepare teachers for a more inclusive approach to teaching. In her 2001 writing, *Preparing for a Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Gay outlines five steps to prepare teachers and they include:

1. Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum
2. Demonstrating care
3. Building learning communities
4. Communicating with ethnically diverse students
5. Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction

More can be read at:

<https://www.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/sites/cts.cwu.edu.teaching-learning/files/documents/PreparingforCulturallyResponsiveTeaching.%20Geneva%20Gay.pdf>

When educators engage in topics that are new or aren't yet fully understood by them, it can create misgivings or even conflict in the classroom, including multicultural approaches to teaching. Author and professor, Zaretta Hammond outlines several strategies teachers should undertake to prepare for conflict when it arises in the classroom. Hammond suggests four strategies teachers can practice, discuss and learn from each other BEFORE teaching with an improved multicultural approach:

1. Devise a set of strategies for managing yourself in the moment conflict arises.
2. Before conflict arises, regularly help students "code switch."
3. Practice cross-cultural communication with active listening and paraphrasing.
4. Establish structures and protocols to help manage emotions and process conflicts.

For more on this topic, please see:

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/whats-your-plan-for-managing-difference>

Leaders must also plan and set the cultural tone for schools. Using the example of a leadership mentor, Dr. Muhammad Khalifa writes that there are several ways leaders can provide an equitable culture for all students to learn and excel. In his AASA Administrator article, *Promoting Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices*, Dr. Khalifa, an Ohio State University professor and author, presents several ways to do this, including:

1. Choose to find cultural assets in how students show up differently in school
2. Be a warm demander
3. Confront teachers lowering expectations for some groups of students
4. Promote a vision of a culturally responsive, equitable, and inclusive school
5. Use equity teams as learning groups of practice

The complete article can be found here:

<https://my.aasa.org/AASA/Resources/SAMag/2020/Feb20/Khalifa.aspx>



Below is an overview of various concepts and social constructs that help districts understand and move along the trajectory of becoming an anti-racist institution. Each overview is followed by several key pieces of information for further consideration.

**Overview:** The United States has grappled with inequities and racism for its entirety, dating back before we were a nation. This has included purposefully creating laws that didn't allow education, forcing substandard and separate schooling, disavowing the histories and cultures of entire communities, and failing to acknowledge the rich diversity present in both our country and our schools.

With changes in laws over the last 70 years starting with Brown vs. the Board of Education to the more recent Every Student Succeeds Act, the United States has struggled to best educate all of its students, whether they came to school with disabilities, limited English, Black and Brown skin, or a willingness to challenge the cultural norms of schooling. Too often, schools have purposefully or implicitly designed barriers for all students learning or simply disregarded those students not in the majority.

- ❖ Whether schools ignore the cultures and histories of Latino students in Texas, Indigenous students in Oklahoma, or Black students in Boston and fail to provide the same levels of education from school buildings to technology to teacher development, they have stifled the

achievement of identity groups not in the white majority for as long as students have been taught.

- ❖ The systematic barriers range from a lack of understanding of the rich cultural diversity students bring to school, disciplining children of color more harshly while limiting their chances to take advanced classes, or exercising white privilege in response to gains by groups not in the majority. For instance, the latest push by some school districts and states to limit or outlaw critical race theory teachings, when said theory appears only in graduate level law courses to examine systematic racism. There certainly are many aspects of American history that showcase the barbaric nature of racism from the lynching of Black citizens to forcing students of Indigenous People into schools for “Americanization” where atrocities include murders of those students. To create laws or policies not allowing for historical teachings that may “make any group uncomfortable,” is both an example of white privilege and white fragility.
- ❖ In order to understand cultures of a diverse student population, schools must become more culturally diverse in their practices and pedagogy. Zarretta Hammond’s, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, is especially apt considering Ashland’s large influx of non-Native English speakers over the last 5 years. As well as Dr. Gholdy Muhammad’s, *Cultivating Genius*, which outlines an equity framework through four goals/pursuits:
  - Identify Development
  - Skill Development
  - Intellectual Development
  - Criticality – reading texts to understand power, equity, and anti-oppression
- ❖ Centering changes in pedagogy to meet the diverse cultures of students will better prepare Ashland staff and leaders to meet those varying needs. This change will need support, planning persistence, and research to better understand how staff can improve their practice while leaders build cultures that will socially norm culturally responsive and anti-racist school practices for improved educational outcomes for all Ashland students.

**Overview:** *Equity isn’t a slogan. It should transform the way we educate kids* by Pedro Noguera:

<https://holdsworthcenter.org/blog/equity-isnt-just-a-slogan/>

How schools define and engage in the work of meeting the needs of their diverse school populations matter. Dr. Pedro Noguera, Dean of Education of the University of Southern California and author of *Excellence Through Equity*, shares a definition, metaphors for understanding equity, and how schools can examine existing barriers to equity and ultimately move toward more equitable solutions for greater student achievement for all.

Noguera writes, “This is the true meaning of equity – acknowledging students’ differences and giving them what they need to be successful. It also means staying focused on outcomes, both academic and developmental.”

- ❖ Lack of clarity in defining equity may result in uneven improvements in student achievement. It’s important to flush out the difference between equity and equality, as stakeholders can get bogged down in a perception of “what is fair” versus “what is right.” Equity can also be improved across all identity groups based on race, sexuality, economic status, English attainment, gender, etc.
- ❖ Common school practices and behaviors that inhibit equity include placing the most inexperienced teachers with the most challenging students, concentrating on GPA over mistakes made in learning, tracking, labeling, and disciplining all lend themselves to inequitable practices that diminish opportunities for learning for all kinds of students. For instance, Black students are disproportionately suspended at schools across the nation, often twice the percentage of their student populations while also being underrepresented in gifted and talented or advanced placement classes. Female students only earn 21% of bachelor’s degrees in engineering despite being 51% of the population.
- ❖ In addition to Noguera, scholars such as Tyrone Howard, *Why Race and Class Matters in Schools* and Theresa Perry, *Young Gifted and Black* are researchers worth examining further for their work in defining equity and then acting in ways that promote differing services and supports for students outside the majority.
- ❖ It’s important for the Ashland Public Schools to adequately define what equity means before making the necessary, difficult, and sometimes uncomfortable changes that can result in improved achievement through implementing equity in practice, pedagogy, and policy. In first agreeing on a definition, APS is likely to gain greater buy-in from all stakeholders in order to gather momentum for changes that will allow all learners to achieve at high levels.

**Overview:** Stereotype threat is a theory from researcher Dr. Claude Steele and others that shows when a person worries that one can be perceived through the lens of a negative stereotype, it can undermine academic performance (Steele 2010; Steele, Spencer and Aronson, 2002). Steele has written an accessible and thoughtful account of much of his research in *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*.

The perceptions, perspectives, biases, and stereotypes can affect everything teachers say and do in class. These, in turn, affect how all children do or do not learn in their classes. Steele explores how merely the perception of a threat students' feel about their potential achievement in class matters whether that's based on gender – low percentages of female students in upper-level STEM classes; race – students from Asian backgrounds excelling in math while Black students do not or non-native English speakers – students learning English can't read on grade level.

Teachers and school leaders usually don't address such threats because they don't even realize they are occurring. A deep dive into stereotype threat, which must address the perceptions of students before addressing how educators perpetuate or disrupt such threats, would be beneficial for the district.

- ❖ Defining stereotype threat as a means for lower achievement presents a unique opportunity to understand the process by which some identity groups fail to engage in learning. Stereotype threat can affect any identity group, so its study can assist in all subjects and with all students. Interestingly research shows that even when students are aware of stereotypes, it can still affect their performance and the harder students work to alleviate the threat it can actually hurt performance with stress and anxiety overwhelming students' cognitive load.
- ❖ Beyond understanding, there are some straightforward psychological interventions that can help staff better meet the needs of students who are constantly trying to learn and perform under the threat associated with their group. These include:
  - Teach that the mind is malleable and can grow over time, even when mistakes are made.
  - Provide more specific process-related feedback such as cause and effect, noting what students did well or where they need to improve over the vague, "good job," which tells students nothing about their job.
  - Increase belongingness and focus on shared experiences of success, process, and failure.
  - Allow students to self-affirm where they excel and what their passions are.



- ❖ As noted above, Claude Steele's, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* can be used as a common text. In addition, research on teaching the malleable mind, Arson, Fried and Good (2002); process-related feedback, Mueller and Dweck (1998), increased belongingness Walton and Cohen (2007, 2011), and self-affirmation Hulleman and Harackiewicz are worth investigating.
- ❖ In providing the research and interventions to mediate stereotype threat, APS would say a clear message to all stakeholders that it's interested in how to best meet the needs of all students. Since stereotype threat can affect all identity groups, improving pedagogy to meet the needs of all groups has the potential to raise achievement at all levels with all students.

**Overview:** Growth mindset is a topic Dr. Carol Dweck has been researching for more than 40 years and which she summarized in her 2006 book, *Mindsets*. While growth and fixed mindset have become buzzwords in the long lexicon of education buzzwords, there is both research and practice that substantiates Dweck's theory on learning.

While it's true that students need to understand their individual mindsets, it's not their mindsets that are most important. It's the teachers in the classrooms and the leaders who support their educators. At its essence, Dweck's definition of growth mindset is the understanding that we can all learn and grow our talents, abilities, and intelligence. While the research isn't often delivered through the equity lens, what could be more equitable than educators understanding that every student can learn and grow?

If school staff understands all students can learn, they will begin to develop and improve the framing, delivery, feedback, and assessment of their teaching when not all students are learning and growing. If educators fail to grasp that student achievement rests in their belief in all students, then they are likely to play the blame game noting what's wrong with families, society, students, curriculum, society, etc. without changing and growing their own practice to help more students learn.

- ❖ Since Dweck's mindsets are well established and can be easily understood, it may be a natural jumping-off point in district-wide equity work. Providing ample time for APS staff to understand, internalize and then operationalize the mindset theory and practice will pave the way for faculty growth before even addressing student growth. If staff are willing to believe in their students and act on that belief in practice, they will better understand that student learning starts with them – if they grow, so will their students. Leadership also has to be willing to model growth mindsets in how they address, evaluate, and grow their staff.

- ❖ Students who fail are often faced with both a stigma and dilemma. First is the stigma that an F-grade stands for failure. This poses an interesting question for educators, “How do students recover from failing?” Whether it’s an F on a test or multiple “x” marks on homework, students are often deflated by failure and see no way to succeed – it must go beyond offering extra help. They actually accept that they are failures. This presents the dilemma for students that may internally question, “This test/grade/project proves I’m a failure, so why bother trying?”
- ❖ Dweck’s work is readily accessible for all in how to improve student learning outcomes, but it should also be noted that a growth mindset can be adopted for a department, school, or district to undertake as a whole. In this Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Grandview University post, the author presents *Equity as a Mindset*, <https://www.grandviewcetl.org/equity-as-a-mindset/>. In addition, this EdSurge post wonders, *Is Growth Mindset the Missing Piece in the Equity Discussion*: <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-08-27-is-growth-mindset-the-missing-piece-in-the-equity-discussion>
- ❖ There are many ways APS can engage with their stakeholders around mindsets, from using *Mindsets* as a shared read to surveying staff and students on what happens when they do not feel successful at/in school.

### **Additional Resources for District Reference and Review**

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