

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN THE LEXINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



9/25/2018

OUR PROPOSED CALL TO ACTION

“Education is the most powerful
weapon which you can use to
change the world.” ~Nelson
Mandela

**In addition to other opportunities to collect input, you may use the link below to share reactions, thoughts and suggestions :*

<https://goo.gl/forms/93MWpCmWl3Z4Dfzx2>



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September 25, 2018

Dear Lexington School Community:

My official start date as the new Superintendent of Schools in Lexington was July 1, 2018, but thanks to the dedication of our school community, my focus on equity and inclusion began well before my arrival in Lexington.

The 37-page position paper you are reading, “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Our Call to Action,” is a collaborative effort among the Superintendent and the 19-member LPS Administrative Council (comprising district and building-based leaders), designed to problem-solve with the Lexington community. As a result of our collaboration, we recognize that discipline disparities exist in Lexington Public Schools. Beyond discipline, we see evidence of inequities across several areas and for multiple groups in the school system. Therefore, we are embarking on a comprehensive, inclusive, and transparent process to identify, address, and monitor our progress toward creating an equitable environment for all in the Lexington Public Schools, and we invite you to join us in the effort.

What drew me to Lexington, in large part, was the community’s unabiding belief that every young person deserves to feel a sense of belonging and full membership in the Lexington Public Schools, a value I wholeheartedly share. During the interview process in January 2018, Lexington School Committee members began to share with me community concerns about disproportionate discipline for students of color and students with special needs, signaling their strong desire to find a leader committed to addressing issues of equity and creating inclusive opportunities for all. I watched countless televised School Committee and community meetings and read articles giving me insight into the perspectives of the many passionate advocates in the Lexington community who believe that more can and should be done to ensure that we treat every member of our school community fairly and justly. A few months after I accepted the position, I met with the Lexington Administrative Council, and I was moved by their similar heartfelt and deep commitment to all students.

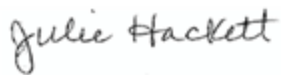
The ideas captured in “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion: Our Call to Action” reflect the willingness of the Lexington school community to engage in thoughtful, open, and honest dialogue. It takes reflective leadership to confront issues of equity and commit to making changes in practice, and I want to acknowledge the work of the dedicated members of the

LPS Administrative Council for their many contributions to this paper. My gratitude also extends to Lexington School Committee members Eileen Jay, Kate Colburn, Alessandro Alessandrini, Kathleen Lenihan, and Deepika Sawhney who are individually and collectively dedicated to creating a more unified Lexington.

Our position paper is the result of the Lexington community's collective understanding that together we can and must do more for every young person we serve. We know that additional community input will strengthen our work, we invite you to share your time and expertise with us, and we encourage you to challenge us with your thoughtful feedback. The conversations in Lexington about equity and disparities in our school system should be happening everywhere, and the ideas expressed in this position paper are only the beginning of the important work we will do together.

"Diversity, Equity, Inclusion: Our Call to Action" is a fitting tribute to the many passionate Lexington students, educators, citizens, and community groups who continue to push our thinking and inspire us daily. I thank you for helping us make Lexington schools even stronger, and I look forward to our continued partnership!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Hackett".

Julie Hackett, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Lexington Public Schools

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Association of Black Citizens of Lexington

Association of Lexington Administrators

Board of Selectmen

Chinese American Association of Lexington

Commission on Disability

Diversity Advisory Committee

Indian Americans of Lexington

Indian Family Activities Association

Japanese Support Group of Lexington

Korean-American Organization of Lexington

Lexington Community Coalition

Lexington Education Association

Lexington High School Student-Faculty Senate

Lexington High School Student Council

Lexington Human Rights Committee

Lexington Interfaith Clergy Association

Lexington Pride Coalition

Lexington Public School PTO/PTA Chairpersons

Lexington METCO Executive Parent Board

School Health Advisory Council

Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Special Education Parent Teacher Association

Town Meeting Members

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN THE LEXINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OUR CALL TO ACTION

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The Lexington Public School (LPS) district, with the support of the Lexington community, is widely known for its dedication and commitment to high-quality education. In 2016, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) published disciplinary data for the Commonwealth, and the issue of discipline disparities surfaced as a priority area of focus. Our community values high-quality educational experiences, and in the time-honored tradition of the educational excellence that has existed for many years, it continues to be our shared mission to make certain that an outstanding education is made available to every LPS student. Realization of such a mission takes constant vigilance and ongoing reflection and refinement of our educational practices and outcomes.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." As we reflect on the issues that have taken place in the last couple of years, we recognize that there is an opportunity to rebuild trust with our school community.

We acknowledge that many in our school community do not understand the schools' ongoing efforts to impact disparities in our curriculum and practices, and the efforts to effect change within the culture and climates of our schools and departments - quite simply because we have not made our efforts visible to the community. We recognize the need to inform our school community of the constant and collective improvements being made to the ways in which we create an accepting, inclusive environment for all. For example, examining curriculum for bias and cultural relevance, bringing in experts from the field to provide guidance to building administrators, school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to support Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), partnerships with community agencies, universities, and research-based organizations focused on eliminating bias are but of a few examples of the ongoing work being done in our district.

But if the data are any indication, there is more work to be done. Under the leadership of Superintendent, Dr. Julie Hackett, the LPS Administrative Council came together for our first Leadership

Retreat in August, 2018, where we began to better understand the discipline disparity issues we were facing, the underlying root causes, and the need to map out “Our Call to Action.” We recognized the need to further study, reflect, and act both in the short-term and long-term to move forward in the best interests of all students.

The position paper that you are now reading is organized into five sections (1) Introduction; (2) What do Experts Say About the Problem?; (3) LPS Data Analysis; (4) Our History with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and (5) Conclusions and Our Proposed Call to Action. Through a more comprehensive, strategic approach, we seek to achieve a deeper awareness and understanding of LPS disciplinary practices and related school and community factors. With an enhanced understanding and clarity of purpose, we will continue to make the necessary changes to ensure that all students receive a high-quality and equitable learning experience in the Lexington Public Schools.

We have endeavored to capture the collective thoughts, ideas, and the wisdom of our community that will enable us to most effectively strengthen our equity-related efforts and, ultimately, improve the quality of the educational experience that we provide to all students. It is our sincere hope that we have managed to leverage those community ideas and alternatives to discipline that are likely to be most impactful. We recognize that we may not have surfaced all ideas that are most important to the community or the most effective for all students. It is our intent to share this document with members of the Lexington community. We recognize that positive change will be achieved through the input

and support of the entire Lexington community. We look forward to considering other ideas and engaging in dialogue about whether and how we see those ideas fit into our overall strategic plan for equity in the Lexington Public Schools. We know we do not have all of the answers, and it is our sincere hope that community groups and others will offer us feedback and input to strengthen “Our Proposed Call to Action.”

Defining the Problem

A large body of evidence states that African American/black and special education students are subject to disparate discipline state- and nation-wide (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). LPS suspension data appear to mirror this pattern, with African American/Black students receiving suspensions at higher rates than their White and Asian peers.

Specifically, in 2016 - 2017, LPS African American/Black students were a little more than four times more likely than White students to have one or more suspensions. LPS students with disabilities also received suspensions at higher rates than other student subgroups. In 2016 - 2017, students with disabilities were two and a half times more likely to have one or more exclusionary disciplinary incidents. Longitudinal data appear to suggest that these patterns have been persistent for at least the last five (5) years. Disparate discipline is associated with or can lead to a number of negative outcomes for students, including school avoidance, drug involvement, loss of instructional time, lower achievement, and eventual school dropout.

In addition to discipline disparities, researchers also observe gaps in achievement and differential outcomes in other areas for students belonging to these and other subgroups. For example, national data collected by the Office of Civil Rights (2016) finds that Black and Latino students have less access to high-level courses. Data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 2015 show that although achievement gaps have narrowed since 1992, significant gaps are still present between African American/Black and White students in both mathematics and reading (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

Previous data reviews and anecdotal conversations with staff and community members throughout the spring of 2018 also suggest broader equity-related challenges in LPS. For example, similar to national statistics, African American/Black students are far less likely than their White or Asian peers to have participated in Advanced Placement exams (in 2016 - 2017, 3.9% versus 36.2% and 51.4%, respectively). Considering other aspects of diversity, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from 2017, youth who identify as bisexual or gay/lesbian were more likely than their peers who identify as heterosexual or straight to have seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months (56.1% and 35.9%, compared to 12.9%, respectively). Students identifying as bisexual, gay or lesbian were also more likely to report being bullied at school (9.8% for heterosexual, 30.9% for bisexual and 20.5% for gay or lesbian). These are UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity).

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all

only a small sample of the existing data that can be considered. Taken together, these data suggest that we must closely review LPS disciplinary practices, but we also should consider the broader implications for equity for all LPS students. The district has made notable efforts to address some of these challenges, which are described in greater detail in later sections, but the need for further action is clear.

Operational Definitions

In this work, the LPS Administrative Council uses the term “equity” when describing the challenges faced by the district, and the overarching goal for the Lexington Public Schools. In the context of this paper, *equity* is interchangeable with the term *diversity, equity, and inclusion*, and the three words are defined below. The primary source for definitions are noted, and some definitions are paraphrased.

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender, but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values (Source:

people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the

procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

(Source: Kapila, Hines, and Searby: [Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter](#), October 6, 2016).

Inclusion is the act of authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals

and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision- and policy-making in a way that shares power. An inclusive environment is one where any individual or group is welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate (Source: Racial Equity Tools Glossary; Kapila, Hines, and Searby: [Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter](#), October 6, 2016).

PART II: RESEARCH – WHAT DO EXPERTS SAY ABOUT THE PROBLEM?

This section is not intended to be an exhausted review of available research, but rather a high level review of major findings from the field. It will be important to continue to educate ourselves and work with the community to consider and communicate new findings and promising practices as our work continues .

Concerning Discipline Disparities

Four decades of research suggests that disparities exist in how students of various backgrounds are disciplined and in the effect that the said discipline - and in particular exclusionary discipline - has on a student's academic success and social integration into the school's culture. According to Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010):

The Children's Defense Fund (1975) first brought the issue of racial disproportionality to national attention, showing that Black students were two to three times overrepresented in school suspensions compared with their enrollment rates in localities across the nation. National and State data show consistent patterns of Black disproportionality in school discipline over the past 30 years, specifically in suspension, expulsion and office discipline referrals.

A sampling of other studies cite similar results, including:

- "...in 2003 Black students were significantly more likely to be suspended than White or Asian students ($p < .001$). Specifically, almost

1 in 5 Black students (19.6%) were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students (8.8%) and Asian and Pacific Islanders (6.4%)" (Kewel, Ramani et al., 2007 in Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010) p. 59).

- "A nationally representative survey of 74,000 10th graders similarly found that about 50% of Black students reported that they had ever been suspended or expelled compared with about 20% of White students...This study further showed that unlike the pattern for other racial ethnic groups, suspensions and expulsions of Black students increased from 1991 to 2005" (Wallace et al., 2008 in Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010) p. 59).

Students with disabilities are also more likely to be suspended than their peers (Morgan, et. al. 2014). The United States Government Accountability Office (2018) found the same pattern of disproportionately higher rates of discipline for students with disabilities compared to their peers without disabilities. Using data from the Office of Civil Rights from 2013-14, researchers found students with disabilities were overrepresented by approximately 20 percentage points in low poverty schools (defined as those with less than 25% free and reduced lunch).

Root Causes of Discipline Disparities

While the aforementioned statistics are clear on the lack of equitable discipline, research suggests that the underlying causes are extremely complicated, are impacted by the characteristics of the individual school settings, and warrant careful study to find ways to ensure appropriate and equitable use of

discipline. Much of the research is focused on differences by race/ethnicity, with little study on the underlying causes of disparities for students with disabilities. Regarding racial disparities, experts caution:

The discourse on racial and ethnic disproportionality seems to be constrained by simplistic dichotomies that artificially pit individual student characteristics (e.g., student aggression, disengagement from school) against systemic factors (e.g., school administrators' implicit bias, community violence) as the reason why some groups are overrepresented in suspension or expulsion (Skiba et al., 2008). The multiple and interacting variables that appear to contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in discipline demand a more comprehensive and nuanced approach (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

To date, a number of factors believed to contribute to discipline disparities have been explored in the growing body of research, including demographic, teacher, and school-related factors. Some of these have been de-emphasized as useful explanatory variables that are part of a growing body of research. For example, statistical analyses that considers multiple variables have found repeatedly that racial differences in discipline rates remain significant, even after student- and/or school-level socioeconomic levels are accounted for (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; or Skiba et al., 2002 as cited in Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Racial differences in discipline rates also remain when factors such as family and neighborhood characteristics,

student- reported parental education, family structure (e.g., single-parent household), and urbanicity of neighborhood exist. The implication is that although there is often an association, these variables do not “explain away” disparities.

Another premise explored in research is that students from certain racial and ethnic groups must misbehave or contribute to a lack of school safety more than other students. Frequently, the implication is that certain groups of students are engaging in more severe behaviors in greater frequency; however, in their review of studies that use both measures of student self-report and actual school disciplinary records, Gregory and colleagues (2010) failed to find supporting evidence to render this hypothesis true.

With more recent and refined research, a number of school factors have emerged as important to understanding discipline disparities. In their examination of potential predictors resulting in exclusionary discipline practices, researchers (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Skiba, et. al. 2014) have found school-level variables, including principal perspectives on discipline, appear to be among the strongest predictors. “When it comes to the contribution of race to out-of-school suspension, however, these results indicate that systemic school-level variables may be more important in determining the overrepresentation of Black students in discipline than are any behavioral or student characteristics” (Skiba, et. al. 2014)).

Researchers in this study considered disciplinary records from schools, student demographic data, and principal

responses to the *Disciplinary Practices Survey* from all public schools, including charter schools, in a midwestern state for the 2007–2008 school year. Researchers found that, even after holding behavioral and student characteristics constant, school characteristics made a significant contribution to the likelihood of more severe consequences. Specifically, they found out-of-school suspension and expulsion were more likely in schools with larger enrollment, and significantly less likely in schools with a principal with a perspective favoring preventative alternatives to severe forms of exclusionary discipline, such as suspension or expulsion, a finding consistent with previous research (Advancement Project, 2000; Mukuria, 2002; Skiba, Edl & Rausch, 2007).

In the same study, researchers also identified school-level achievement as a protective factor, with students at schools with higher average achievement less likely to be suspended and experience expulsions (Skiba, et. al. 2014). The authors state, “just as higher academic achievement is a protective factor for individuals, a school’s ability to maintain high overall achievement is a protective factor for students attending that school” (p. 21), building off of previous work finding behavior and academic outcomes to be consistently related. The authors conclude, “interventions that improve the quality of academic instruction and learning out- comes can have important outcomes in terms of improved student behavior and school climate” (p 21).

Another perspective considers the notion that differential selection at the classroom level contributes in some way to racial/ethnic disproportionality in school discipline (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera,

2010). Many behaviors that end up resulting in an office referral or suspension begin at the classroom level. Multiple studies support the notion that consistent disproportionality in office referrals exacerbate an already complex problem (see Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008). Further analysis of these data suggest that minority students are more likely to be singled out for “subjective” behaviors such as disrespect, questioning classroom rules, and “violation of implicit interactional codes.”

Lastly, discrimination can happen both intentionally and unintentionally.

Intentional discrimination results when different treatment occurs though the wording of specific school policies or by selectively enforcing policies.

Unintentional discrimination occurs with neutral policies that have an unintended but disparate impact on certain groups, particularly common with policies that impose mandatory suspension or expulsion (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2014; Staats, 2014)).

Impacts on Student Achievement

As indicated in the research, the use of zero-tolerance policies and school exclusion as a disciplinary practice may contribute to the well-documented racial gaps in academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2014; Anderson and Ritter, 2017). Beyond racial gaps, these practices may lead to overrepresentation of Black students in particular in the data, and lead to “disproportionate arrest and incarceration rates of minorities (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Unfortunately,

"The school disciplinary practices used most widely throughout the United States may be contributing to lowered academic performance among the group of students in greatest need of improvement (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), causing a persistent follow-on effect even after students finish their education.

Exclusionary discipline has varied deleterious effects on students, both academically and socially. From a highly practical standpoint, missed instruction and time lost on learning represents one of the most statistically significant indicators of student achievement in modern educational research (Brophy, Greenwood, Utley) and can lead to academic underperformance and a widening of the achievement gap. "Discipline sanctions resulting in exclusion from school may also damage the learning process in other ways as well. Suspended students may become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and course work, and subsequently, less motivated to achieve academic success" (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

If students feel less connected to their school, they also may experience a sense of disengagement with the larger school community, which may significantly increase the likelihood of negative life outcomes and exacerbate a cycle of academic failure, disengagement, and escalated rule-breaking (p. 60). Their learning environment is likely to be less-safe, they are likely to be unproductive, and these conditions and behaviors increase the likelihood of dropouts and decrease the likelihood of graduating from high school (Morgan, et. al. 2014).

Research and data on school discipline practices are clear: millions of students are being removed from their classrooms each year, mostly in middle and high schools, and overwhelmingly for minor misconduct. When suspended, these students are at a significantly higher risk of falling behind academically, dropping out of school, and coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. A disproportionately large percentage of disciplined students are youth of color, students with disabilities, and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) (Morgan, et. al. 2014).

Nevertheless, while research questions the effectiveness of suspension for students of special education and regular education, and highlights the negative long-term effects of it, it remains a widely-used practice across schools in America (Owen, Wettach & Hoffman, 2015).

Possible Remedies

Successfully predicting what factors lead to discipline disparity requires looking at the entire picture. Gregory and colleagues (2010) summarize the complexity of this task:

No single causal factor can fully explain racially disparate discipline and no single action will therefore be sufficient to ameliorate it. Multifaceted strategies may offer promise, but there is as yet no empirical research testing specific interventions for reducing the discipline gap.

Clearly, minimizing student exclusions from the school culture, classroom, and valuable instructional time is a critical

variable (Owen, Wettach & Hoffman, 2015). In order to minimize discipline disparities, alternative strategies must be implemented and applied equitably to all students disciplined. Given that research points to a variety of possible contributing factors, a variety of strategies may be needed to address disparities, including:

- increasing the awareness of teachers and administrators of the potential for bias when issuing referrals for discipline;
- utilizing a range of consequences in response to behavior problems;
- treating exclusion as a last resort rather than the first or only option;
- making a concerted effort to understand the roots of behavior problems; and
- finding ways to reconnect students to the educational mission of schools during disciplinary events.” (Noguera, 2007) .

While little is known about the efficacy or effectiveness of possible “gap-reducing” interventions, there is some evidence that “well-chosen alternatives to suspension can simultaneously diminish the negative outcomes of harmful discipline policies, boost student achievement, reduce student misconduct, and maintain safe and orderly schools” (Owen, Wettach & Hoffman, 2015, p. 4). Whether gap-reducing interventions can ‘draw on universal approaches, or if they need targeted, culturally specific approaches that respond to the students’ cultural and socio-economic contexts?’ is a question that remains (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

When choosing alternatives to discipline, care must be taken to select meaningful approaches that positively impact students. Owen, Wettach and Hoffman (2015) advise when determining what

alternatives to use, schools and districts should consider the level of support for change, the similarity of other districts when examining effectiveness of models, and whether or not resources exist to provide ongoing support of the strategy. They also point out that fidelity and consistency of implementation of any strategy is also essential to maximizing its success.

However, some studies indicate that, of all the relevant variables, “systemic school-level variables may be *more* important in determining the overrepresentation of Black students in discipline than are any behavioral or student characteristics” and that “policy or practice interventions addressing disproportionality in discipline will be more likely to be efficacious to the extent that they target alterable variables at the school level, rather than focusing on student or family demography” (Skiba, et al, 2014, p 23).

Perhaps the two most relevant school-level alternatives to discipline are school leadership and professional development. “The importance of principal leadership in creating systemic change appears to be especially critical when the focus of the change effort is race, culture, or equity” (Skiba, 2014, p 21). In order to be maximally effective, the principal and his or her staff needs to be provided opportunities to engage in sustained, targeted professional learning to support cultural proficiency and high quality instruction.

Lastly, school efforts to reduce discriminatory practices should include a system for monitoring and tracking *all* disciplinary referrals and ensure staff are properly trained to administer student

discipline in a nondiscriminatory manner (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2014).

PART III: LPS DATA ANALYSIS

The next few sections describe the current status of what we know and where we are. As previously mentioned, the impetus for recent discussion has been the recently released publicly available discipline data

collected by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as part of their School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR). The data collection tracks each time a drug, violent or criminal-related offense occurs in schools, as well as any instance of exclusionary discipline. Exclusionary discipline describes any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from their usual educational setting. Two of the most common exclusionary discipline practices at schools include in- and out-of-school suspensions. Although there are other forms of exclusionary discipline, as well as other forms of non-exclusionary discipline, this particular dataset from LPS concerns suspensions only.

headed as it applies to understanding the topic of discipline disparities within the Lexington Public Schools.

Concerning Exclusionary Discipline in LPS

Review of SSDR data for the Lexington Public Schools from 2013 to 2017 finds there is notable variation in rates among student subgroups. The significance of these gaps rests on the idea that if all students are receiving suspensions in the same way and to the same degree, we would expect the rate or proportion of students disciplined across these groups to be roughly equivalent. When we observe consistent variation, this signals that there are differential outcomes for students. However, these data do not readily reveal the underlying causes of those differences. Although we do observe variation for other groups (e.g. by gender and for economically disadvantaged students), among the most consistent and pervasive are the disparities in suspension rates for African American/ Black students and students with disabilities (Table 1).

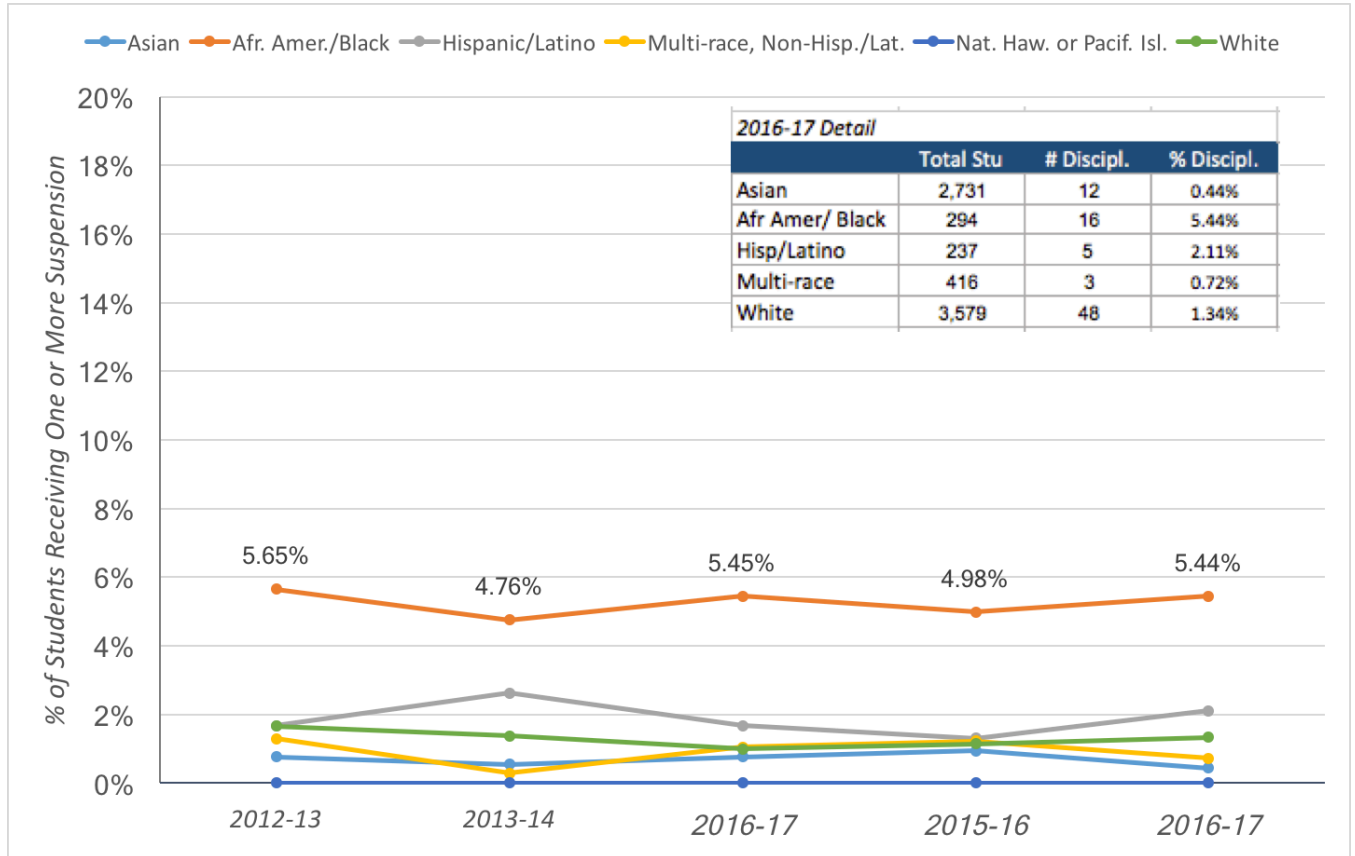
Table 1: LPS Students Receiving 1 or More Suspension by Subgroup: 2013 to 2017

	2012-13			2013-14			2014-15			2015-16			2016-17			3 Yr Avg
	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	
All Students	6,704	103	1.54	6,780	85	1.25	7,001	80	1.14	7,123	89	1.25	7,263	84	1.16	1.18
ELL	388	4	1.03	426	1	0.23	482	3	0.62	507	2	0.39	566	1	0.18	0.40
Eco. Disadv.	526	30	5.70	493	24	4.87	461	17	3.69	448	14	3.13	483	9	1.86	2.89
Spec. Ed	956	37	3.87	966	37	3.83	949	32	3.37	983	35	3.56	952	29	3.05	3.33
Female	3,282	27	0.82	3,337	23	0.69	3,422	21	0.61	3,486	25	0.72	3,567	20	0.56	0.63
Male	3,422	76	2.22	3,443	62	1.80	3,579	59	1.65	3,637	64	1.76	3,696	64	1.73	1.71
Asian	2,083	16	0.77	2,189	12	0.55	2,364	18	0.76	2,529	24	0.95	2,731	12	0.44	0.72
Afr. Am/ Black	283	16	5.65	294	14	4.76	312	17	5.45	301	15	4.98	294	16	5.44	5.29
Hisp./Latino	238	4	1.68	229	6	2.62	238	4	1.68	229	3	1.31	237	5	2.11	1.70
Multi-race	308	4	1.30	342	1	0.29	382	4	1.05	407	5	1.23	416	3	0.72	1.00
White	3,782	63	1.67	3,712	51	1.37	3,696	37	1.00	3,649	42	1.15	3,579	48	1.34	1.16

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

Table 1 shows Lexington students by subgroup receiving one or more suspensions over time, in a five (5) year period from 2013 - 2017. Overall incidents of discipline appear to be relatively low when compared to the State average or other school systems (see Graph 2). In 2016 - 2017, for example, a total of 84 students were disciplined on average, 29 of whom were students with special needs; 12 of whom were Asian; 16 of whom were African American/ Black; 5 of whom were Hispanic/Latino; and 48 of whom were White.

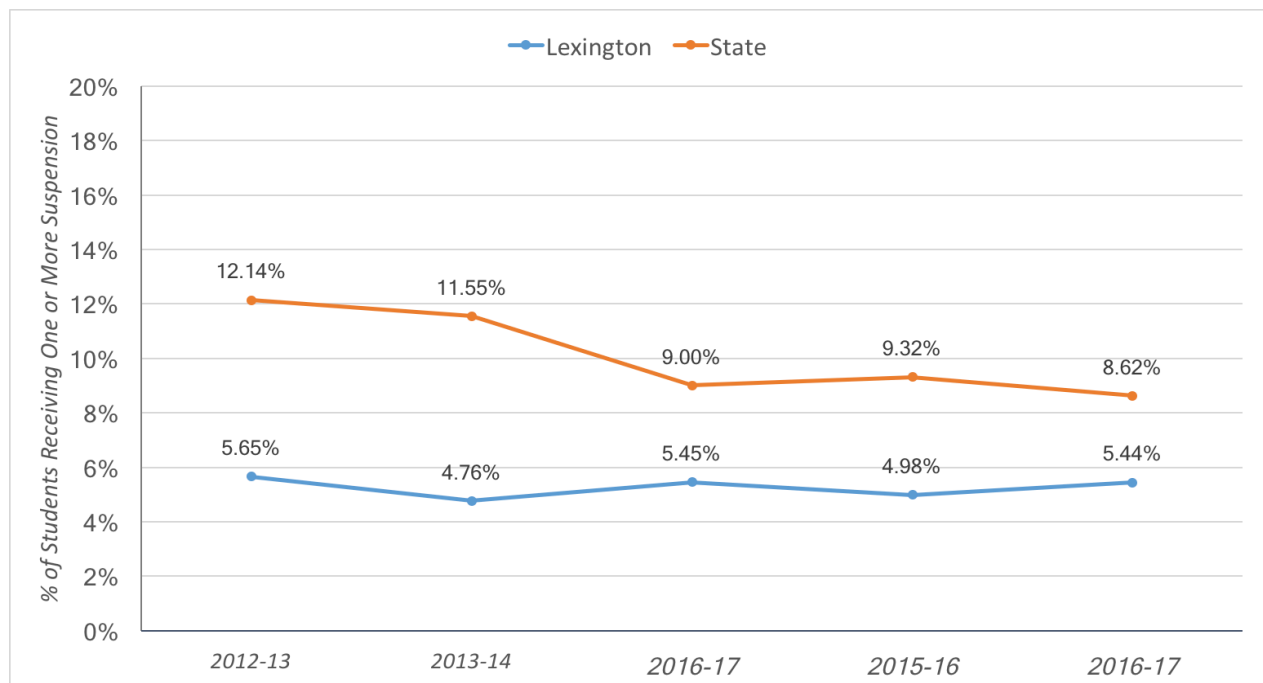
Graph 1: LPS Students Receiving 1 or More Suspension by Race: 2013-2017



Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

Graph 1 visually shows the gap between rates of receiving one of more suspensions between African American/Black students and other racial/ethnic groups over the past five years. Based on the most recent data from 2016-17, African American/Black students were a little more than 4 times more likely than White students to have one or more suspension. Compared to Asian students, who are consistently disciplined at lower rates, African American/Black students were over 12 times more likely to have one or more suspension.

Graph 2: LPS vs. State: % of African American/Black Students Receiving 1 or More Suspension: 2013-2017



Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

For additional context, we can compare ourselves to the State and other school districts. Graph 2 shows discipline data from the State (shown in blue) and LPS (in orange) for the last five (5) years for African American/Black students. These data indicate that the district suspension rate has remained relatively stable and significantly below the State's rate for this subgroup of students. In contrast to Lexington, the State rate shows some evidence of declining suspension rates for African American/Black students over the last five (5) years.

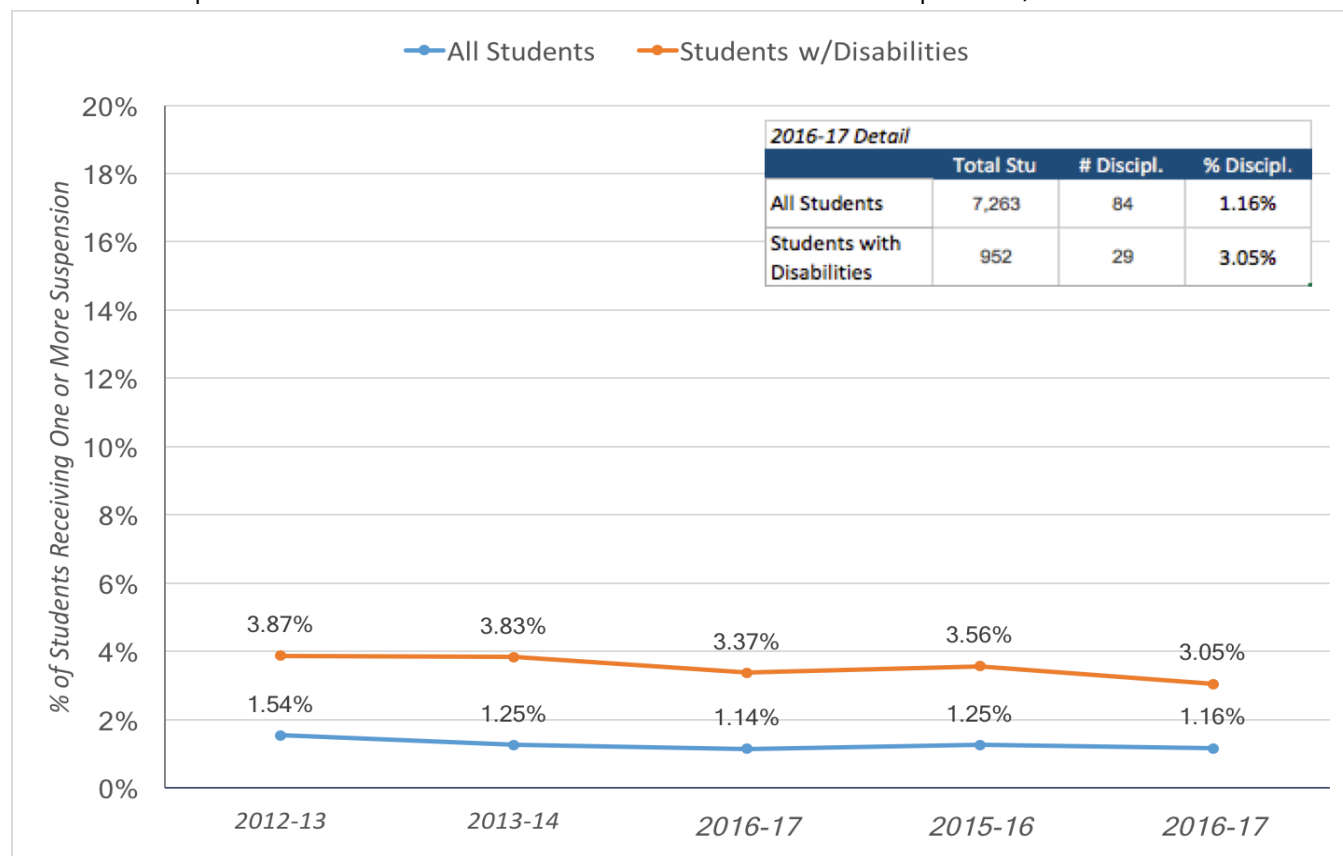
Table 2: African American/Blacks Students Receiving 1 or More Suspension by District: 2013 to 2017

	2012-13			2013-14			2014-15			2015-16			2016-17			3 Yr Avg
	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	
Lexington	283	16	5.65	294	14	4.76	312	17	5.45	301	15	4.98	294	16	5.44	5.29
Arlington	172	17	9.88	192	15	7.81	206	14	6.80	209	16	7.66	219	23	10.50	8.32
Belmont	163	10	6.13	157	13	8.28	158	8	5.06	156	9	5.77	162	10	6.17	5.67
Brookline	472	34	7.20	468	21	4.49	462	20	4.33	466	14	3.00	475	23	4.84	4.06
Newton	668	46	6.89	656	56	8.54	637	29	4.55	623	40	6.42	640	44	6.88	5.95
Wayland	138	6	4.35	140	3	2.14	136	6	4.41	132	2	1.52	142	7	4.93	3.62
Wellesley	229	12	5.24	239	18	7.53	239	8	3.35	241	8	3.32	232	6	2.59	3.08
Weston	163	11	6.75	160	12	7.50	154	3	1.95	150	1	0.67	140	0	0.00	0.87
Westwood	68	4	5.88	70	3	4.29	72	1	1.39	73	0	0.00	74	4	5.41	2.26

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

Table 2 summarizes suspension data from Lexington and other similar districts. Lexington's suspension rates are higher than some districts and lower than others for African American/Black students. Of particular note are declining rates for Weston and Wellesley, which may represent a learning opportunity for LPS.

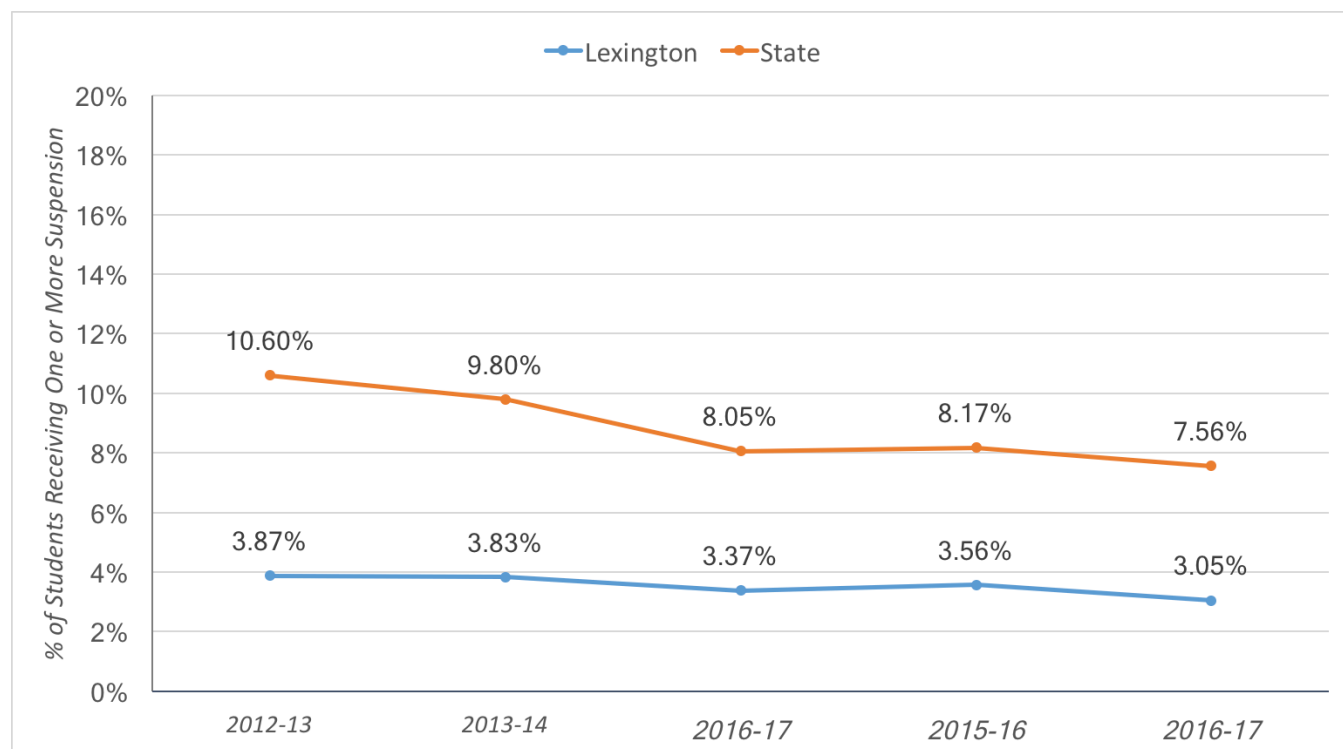
Graph 3: LPS % Students with Disabilities with 1 or More Suspension, 2013-2017



Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

Also unfortunately consistent with patterns observed in national datasets, LPS students receiving special education services are suspended at higher rates compared with the aggregate rates (Graph 3). Put another way, based on the most recent data from 2016-17, students with disabilities were just over 2 and half times more likely to have one or more exclusionary disciplinary incidents.

Graph 4: LPS vs. State: % of Students with Disabilities Receiving 1 or More Suspension: 2013-2017



Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

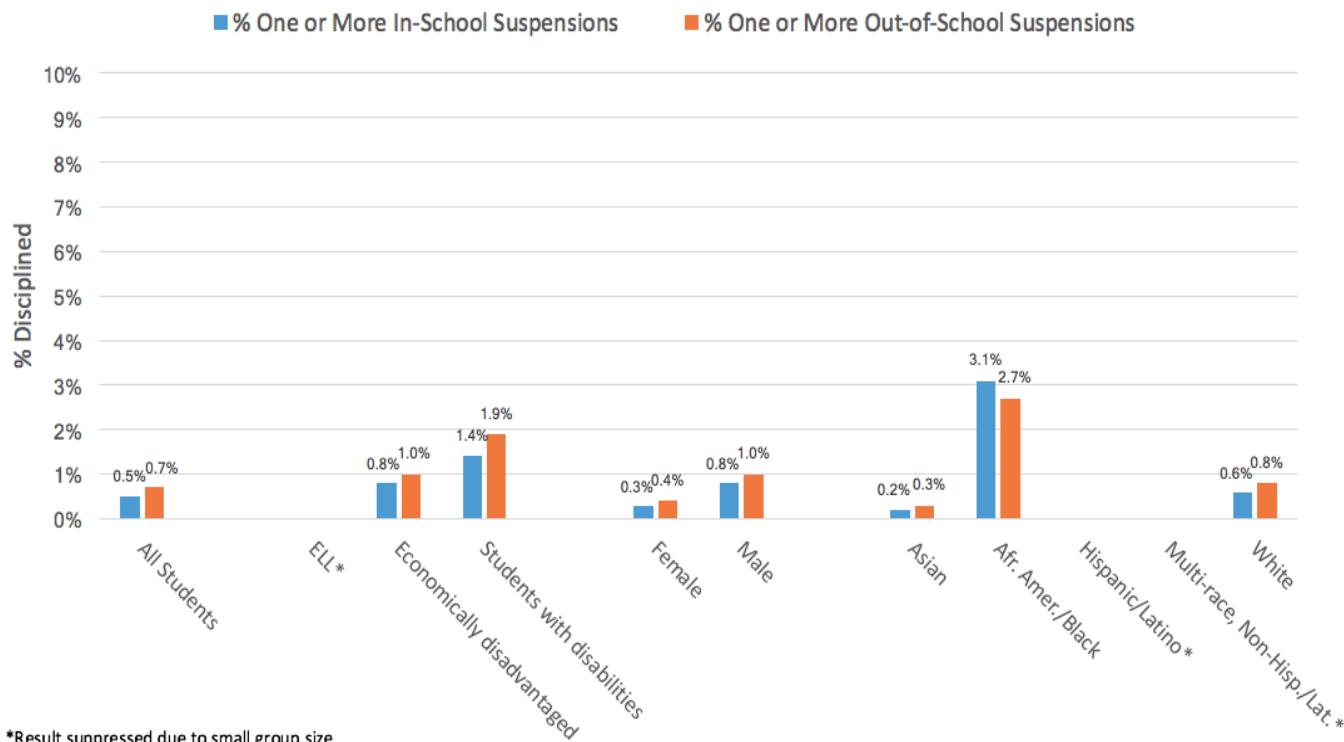
Table 3: Students with Disabilities Receiving 1 or More Suspension by District: 2013 to 2017

	2012-13			2013-14			2014-15			2015-16			2016-17			3 Yr Avg
	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	Total Stu.	# Discp	% Discp	
Lexington	956	37	3.87	966	37	3.83	949	32	3.37	983	35	3.56	952	29	3.05%	3.33
Arlington	720	61	8.47	725	45	6.21	790	42	5.32	813	29	3.57	880	46	5.23	4.70
Belmont	359	12	3.34	375	8	2.13	376	9	2.39	410	8	1.95	417	7	1.68	2.01
Brookline	1302	83	6.37	1351	58	4.29	1326	45	3.39	1297	51	3.93	1298	45	3.47	3.60
Newton	2647	155	5.86	2667	174	6.52	2634	114	4.33	2753	124	4.50	2756	123	4.46	4.43
Wayland	552	19	3.44	550	16	2.91	527	14	2.66	522	22	4.21	537	16	2.98	3.28
Wellesley	883	22	2.49	885	24	2.71	855	12	1.40	828	12	1.45	831	5	0.60	1.15
Weston	401	25	6.23	420	12	2.86	407	3	0.74	390	2	0.51	378	3	0.79	0.68
Westwood	580	6	1.03	577	14	2.43	608	4	0.66	607	0	0.00	574	3	0.52	0.39

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

When comparing Lexington to the State and other districts (Graph 4 and Table 3), the district discipline rate for students with special needs has improved slightly over time and has remained well below the State's rate for this subgroup. When we review data from other districts, we again see Lexington's suspension rates are higher than some districts and lower than others for this subgroup. As with African American/Black students, Wellesley and Weston also show declining rates for students with disabilities.

Graph 5: LPS % of Students with 1 or More In/Out-of-School Suspensions by Subgroup, 2016-2017



Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR)

Based on data from 2016-17, these patterns appear to hold regardless of suspension type (Graph 5). Rates of receiving at least one in- or out-of school suspensions during this year were highest for African American/Black students and students receiving special education services.

As we examine the exclusionary discipline by subgroup dataset, we find most discipline of this type occurs at the secondary level. There is very low use of suspension and other forms of exclusionary discipline at the elementary level. However, given the limited range of discipline considered in this data collection, it is unknown whether similar discipline disparities are present at the elementary and other levels, should a more expansive definition of discipline be considered.

Further Analysis to Build Capacity and Inform Longer Term Steps

Although these data clearly demonstrate the presence of discipline disparities, there is still much to understand to help inform our short-term and long-term action plans. Some questions that will guide our work as we progress forward include:

- What offenses have resulted in suspensions in the past? Do students who commit similar offenses receive similar disciplinary consequences, or do some students receive harsher discipline? Is this consistent Pre-K to grade 12? Is this consistent within grade spans?
- How often are suspensions being applied as a form of mandatory discipline? How often is this used as a discretionary form of discipline?
- In instances when exclusionary discipline was applied, what were the antecedents? Do we observe any meaningful patterns across subgroups of students?
- To better understand discipline among students receiving special education, what is the breakdown of discipline by disability type? Are students with certain disabilities disciplined more often?
- Do we observe similar discipline disparities when a more expansive definition of discipline is considered (i.e. discipline other than suspension)?
- What preventative or alternative measures are taken to avoid exclusionary and other forms of discipline? Are these practices consistently used with fidelity? Are these preventative measures available to all students?
- What is the role of the School Resource Officer (SRO) in terms of discipline within our schools? In what ways can the SRO assist with alternative forms of discipline?
- Are there LPS policies that may unintentionally contribute to discipline disparities for certain groups of students?
- What promising practices have been implemented in an effort to address discipline disparities and minimize the need for discipline for all students? What has been effective and how do we know? What has or should be taken to scale across the district?
- What professional development or follow-up has or can be provided to ensure effective implementation of alternative strategies to exclusionary discipline? Who has received this training so far?
- What connections exist between discipline disparities and other school factors (e.g. achievement opportunities and placement, school climate)? What do researchers say about this? What do related LPS data look like?

In some cases we have the necessary information or data to further explore these questions, but we will need additional time to complete thoughtful and

deep analysis. For example, as described in the latter sections of this document, we do know that a number of efforts have been made across the district to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments in our schools, suggesting a clear need to continue our work on disproportionate suspensions and likely expand our focus in this area. It has been a number of years since the district has conducted a system-wide review of what efforts are being made, what is most effective, and what should be taken to scale. A comprehensive review of this nature requires information to be summarized from all schools and departments.

Another opportunity may be to refine existing data collections or construct new ones. For example, there has been considerable variation in what additional discipline data is collected by each school beyond the State reporting requirements. Our middle schools have engaged in expansive and consistent disciplinary data collections. We find more variation in disciplinary reporting among elementary schools and the high school. A critical action step to be taken this year will be revisiting this data collection with the goal of expanding the range of discipline that is systematically and consistently monitored PK - 12, across all schools. Such an activity also presents the opportunity to calibrate across staff our understanding of local policies and how student offenses are best handled. Once started, we will conduct regular reviews of these data throughout the school year, with a focus on discipline disparities and the goals of answering some of the questions listed above.

Such explorations and data collection will take some time to complete, and it is

highly likely additional questions will be surfaced in the process, but this should not prevent us from taking immediate action steps in the short-term. The final section of this paper will describe actions that LPS is prepared to implement during 2018-19 and beyond.

PART IV: OUR HISTORY WITH DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The district has a long history of focusing on and providing opportunities for professional development in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion. One example includes a series of activities that occurred between 2008 and 2015. Under the leadership of the Superintendent of Schools, the district committed to examining and addressing the achievement gap in the Lexington Public Schools at the time. In part, this effort originated from a closer review of State assessment results during a period of time when the State and Federal government made accountability and assessment its focus. As the aggregate achievement data in the district showed a high level of student academic success, there was no sense of urgency to address achievement gaps among LPS students. At this time, many in the district had not closely reviewed disaggregated results for African American/Black students and other subgroups, which showed disparities in academic achievement. In addition, there was an overrepresentation of METCO students in special education (over 50% based on data from 2008). An external evaluator hired by the district later on to document these events, summarized this time with a quote from staff, "It was

difficult prior to the LaMura Report of 2008 to convince educators and parents that change was needed. Like the rest of Lexington and even METCO parents, faculty and staff took comfort in the belief that ‘we’re a great district and we do great things’” (Ferguson, et al, 2015, p. 6).

This realization by the Superintendent of Schools in 2008 prompted a detailed report (known internally as The LaMura Report), highlighting the data as well as perceptions of parents, students, and LPS teachers and administrators. As a result, there were 32 specific recommendations made and the Achievement Gap Task Force (AGTF) comprising parents, teachers, and administrators was formed. The AGTF was later renamed the Equity and Excellence Committee (EEC). The purpose of this committee was to take stock of current initiatives in the district and make recommendations for next steps. The recommendations of the EEC fell into six categories:

- Find ways to increase educator capacity through professional learning;
- Develop and support leadership at all levels;
- Provide a wide array of student intervention strategies for students not yet meeting the standards;
- Ensure that data-driven instruction and common assessments inform student learning;
- Improve school climate and culture (i.e. building trust and professional relationships as well as increasing collaboration across the district)
- Improve student, family and community engagement;

As a result of the recommendations detailed in the report, major actions taken across the district included:

- The district implemented full-day Kindergarten and began to include students enrolled in the METCO program in Kindergarten rather than first grade.
- Lexington sent a team of administrators and educators to Montgomery County to learn more about data-informed teaching and learning and ways to address achievement gaps.
- All schools established Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at each level to create common academic experiences and assessments for students across grade levels and schools. PLCs encouraged staff to collaborate and learn from one another, and helped to ensure a common set of learning expectations and experiences across the district.
- All schools developed a Response to Intervention (RtI) model. RtI includes a set of practices that involve providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student needs, monitoring progress frequently to make important decisions about a change in instruction or goals, and applying response data to important educational decisions.
- As part of RtI, schools also restructured their Child Study Teams and implemented “data teams.” These teams meet regularly to closely review performance and other student data and determine what supports and/or adjustments are necessary to better address student needs.

- Refined our curriculum and instructional practice to create a more robust set of general education interventions for all students.
- Created specific professional learning opportunities for staff around data-driven instruction.

By the spring of 2014, 96% of the district's African American/Black tenth graders scored proficient or advanced on the MCAS mathematics assessment and 100% on English Language Arts (ELA). Although the outcome was positive, it reflects an over-reliance on MCAS scores and SAT scores to demonstrate closing the achievement gap.

While many initiatives were launched and continue to the present (e.g. Windows and Mirrors curriculum at K-5, METCO Extended Learning Program, Mathpath, Calculus Project, African American/Latino Scholars), it is evident from recent data that these have not adequately addressed disparities in other aspects of the school program such as discipline, middle and high school course selection, and continued over- representation in special education. Other initiatives were discontinued or have lost momentum. For example, the EMI (Encouraging Multicultural Initiatives) course, which had been offered to all staff, was set aside over ten years ago. At the time, there was a question as to whether there was evidence to support its effectiveness.

In the intervening years, some promising practices and programs have continued to grow as a result of the grassroots efforts of our classroom educators or school and department leaders, including some intended to prevent the need for disciplinary actions.

Today, educators in the Lexington Public Schools, as well as our counterparts across the State, recognize the need for added focus on social-emotional skill sets. There is also interest in making groundwater efforts to encourage racial literacy and address systemic obstacles, including student access and school-wide building culture. For example, nearly all schools have implemented some elements of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Schools also have implemented Open Circle followed by Responsive Classroom, both intended to improve school climate, increase students' use of prosocial and critical thinking skills and reduce negative behaviors such as peer exclusion or bullying. In the same spirit, there has been interest and some formal efforts made to explore ways in which restorative justice approaches may help staff further improve the learning environment for students.

Taking a broader approach, through their Diversity, Responsibility, Unity and Mindfulness (DRUM) initiative, middle school staff are working to encourage and build students' prosocial skills. Over the course of many years, elementary staff at Bowman have been developing curricula that directly focus on issues of social justice and race (referred to as their "Dismantling Racism" curriculum). In the last year, the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC), a group that includes school leaders, personnel, community representatives, parents and students, has formed a new LGBTQ Subcommittee to focus on issues unique to these students.

Finally, there also has been more professional development for staff put into place to address disparities and equity

concerns now than that in 2008; however, not all programs are consistently and universally provided. More recently, the district in collaboration with the Lexington Education Association, has organized a series of professional development offerings for all new Lexington educators called “Better Beginnings.” The collaborative effort between the district and the LEA reaches more educators ensuring professional development on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Moving forward, district and school leaders will take stock of these efforts and move towards a more unified approach to addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

PART V: CONCLUSIONS AND OUR PROPOSED CALL TO ACTION

A nationwide discrepancy exists when comparing exclusionary discipline data for students of color and/or students in special education to those who are white and/or are non-special education. Although the overall number of suspensions for students in the Lexington Public Schools is comparatively low given the school district’s size, the data from 2012 - 2017 indicate that discipline disparities similar to those seen in national trends exist in our schools and have likely existed for many years prior to 2012.

Through the years, educators and leaders in the Lexington Public Schools have actively engaged in acquiring new knowledge to enhance their understanding of how best to cultivate and celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion in their classrooms. A majority of the ideas explored and strategies employed were spearheaded by individual teachers or building principals in a given

school and who happen to take a personal interest in one facet of the work, implementing their own grass-roots, bottom-up, organic approach to educational equity.

These individual efforts so characteristic of the creative and innovative nature of our Lexington educators should be encouraged and celebrated. Furthermore, we believe there is an opportunity to refine and “scale-up” those best practices that have the greatest likelihood of fostering equitable learning environments that increase inclusionary practices and decrease and eliminate discipline disparities.

While many individual initiatives have taken place through the years, few district-wide efforts have been undertaken to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Lexington Public Schools. In 2008, Lexington’s achievement gap initiative, coinciding with the State and Federal government’s emphasis on student subgroup performance and Governor Patrick’s signing into law Chapter 311 of the Acts of 2008, an Act Relative to School District Accountability,¹ was reportedly the first LPS effort of its kind to attempt to explore academic outcomes and inequities.

Creative approaches to professional development, such as Better Beginnings

¹ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/FY2009>

for new educators is another district-wide attempt to create racial literacy and systemic change. Unfortunately, the vast majority of educators do not participate unless they have independently elected to enhance their learning in an equity-related area of focus. We envision a professional development plan that one day reflects the full participation of the entire school community (i.e., superintendent, school committee, district and building leaders, middle management, classroom teachers, support staff, building and maintenance staff, bus drivers, and parents) to attain the sustainable, long-term cultural shifts that are needed to create a school system where every student and staff member feels valued.

Furthermore, explicitly educating students about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion has been left to the individual interests of educators, for the most part. If our desire is to create a school culture that instills in every student a sense of belonging, then Lexington Public Schools will benefit from a comprehensive and systemic approach to racial literacy and educational equity. "Our Proposed Call to Action," an action plan that reflects the thoughts and ideas of the Lexington community, represents an earnest and reasonable start to systemic and comprehensive change.

An initial review of local data suggests no one building or isolated set of practices can clearly explain the roots of the discipline disparity that exists in Lexington. Rather, as can be seen in studies of national trends, it appears that discipline disparities are likely systemic. While the tendency may be to dismiss the findings altogether given the comparatively low percentages of discipline overall, the research is clear that disparities cannot be

attributed to demographics or higher levels of inappropriate behavior occurring among students of color and/or students in special education (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

As educators, our commitment to the growth and safety of all of our students is paramount. As such, investigating any issues pertaining to equity is part of our moral and ethical obligation to ensure that all students are treated equitably. However, when disparities and inequities exist, it is our duty to investigate and make changes. Yet we recognize that discipline disparities are merely a symptom of much larger concerns; therefore, we are committed to investigating and addressing the root cause of the discipline disparities. We are committed to tackling the discipline disparity issues holistically, and we recognize that meaningful systemic change done right takes time and sustained effort.

We developed "Our Call to Action," with the understanding that a multifaceted approach to change is needed and no single solution to the problem of inequities will help to resolve them. As stated by Gregory and colleagues (2010), "no single causal factor can fully explain racially disparate discipline, and no single action will therefore be sufficient to ameliorate it." And just as no single approach can address all of the challenges our students face, no one person can single-handedly develop a plan to eradicate the underlying causes that lead to discipline disparities.

Instead, we need a comprehensive review of the problem, beginning with an Equity Audit conducted by an external agency. Described in more detail below, this Audit will both complement and serve to inform the additional action steps listed here. The

Lexington Administrative team, informed by the history and data presented in this paper, has identified a series of actions at the community, district, and school level that will set us on a course towards reaching our goals of reducing the number of disproportionate suspensions, developing common language and understandings to move our faculty, staff and community towards improved cultural proficiency, and finally implementing systems and processes throughout the district that create the conditions of equity for all. These action steps are described in narrative form below, and at the end of the section are broken out into a table for quick reference. Furthermore, it is expected that the resulting data and recommendations from the Equity Audit will help shape this list of actions, bringing some items more sharply into focus, and revising and refining others as needed in service of our long-term goals.

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1. Equity Audit

History dating back hundreds of years has taught us that disproportionality and disparities exist in all systems, including but not limited to: banking, child welfare, housing, and local government. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that disparities also exist in educational systems like the Lexington Public Schools. Understanding the inequities inherent in systems is one thing, but how best to engage in honest reflection about those inequities was a question we grappled with as an administrative team. In the process of developing this plan, we outwardly discussed confirmation bias, which is “the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting

information that is consistent with one’s existing beliefs.”² Confirmation bias is an unintended consequence for those who examine and interpret information for their own system, and as educational leaders committed to strengthening our schools for our students, it is something we wish to avoid. We recognize that it is challenging to examine one’s own flaws, and we heard those who provided public input at Lexington School Committee meetings who rightly expressed concern that it is difficult for an organization to examine its own biases without the benefit of an outside perspective.

To that end, the first strategy identified in our Equity Action Plan is to establish a baseline and test our assumptions by hiring an outside agency to conduct an Equity Audit. Examples of what an Equity Audit may help us determine are as follows:

- The contextual analysis of current exclusionary data connected to students of color and students with disabilities to compare offenses and consequences with those occurring with white and/or non-disabled students.
- Within the examination of exclusionary data is the examination of special education data and whether trends exist vis-a-vis student discipline and specific subgroups within the special education population.
- The examination of leveling practices within and between LPS schools specific to students of color and special education students.

At present, we have no particular company or consultant in mind, and we

² www.brittanica.com

are open to exploring all options and possibilities. Through our research, we identified the work of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium and appreciate the framework they have constructed to examine school- and classroom-based equity-related practices. Ideally, the LPS Equity Audit will explore the following standards and areas that such as those identified by the MAEC, including (1) the degree to which schools in the district are equitable (i.e. Academic Placement classes, tracking and grouping; student leadership and recognition; classroom environment; instructional strategies); (2) the degree to which LPS classrooms are equitable (school policies; school organization/administration; school climate/environment; staff; assessment/placement; professional learning; and standards and curriculum development); and (3) factors related to teacher behavior and persistence (i.e., instructional interventions; curriculum interventions; classroom management interventions; and interpersonal interventions).³ A sample MAEC Equity Audit can be found here:

<https://maec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MAEC-Equity-Audit-1.pdf>

We intend to cast a wide net and structure inclusive opportunities so that as many students, parents, faculty, staff, and community members as possible can inform the findings of the audit. It is worth noting that to our minds, students are often the most valuable and credible source of information, yet they are often overlooked in district audits, review processes, and problem-solving. For

these reasons, we plan to explore the views of our Lexington students on diversity, equity, and inclusion in our schools and hear their ideas for ways to eliminate disparities and improve the school culture and climate in our schools.

2. Lexington Public Schools Equity Community Input Team (E-CIT) to be chaired by the Superintendent of Schools

The issue of disproportionate suspension for students of color and for students with special needs has been a topic of intense interest for stakeholders in the Lexington school community, as it should be. At the end of the 2018 school year at the behest of the community calling for action to address inequities, a “Discipline Disparities Task Force” was convened by the former superintendent in response to community concerns. Various community groups, such as the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the Commission on Disabilities, LexPride, and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), among others, continue to advocate for systemic changes to address disparities in our schools and in our community.

While there is little debate among Lexington’s educational leaders that improving our racial literacy and creating more inclusive school settings is in the best interests of all the students and staff we serve, it is fair to say that in the absence of a district plan, administrators have found it challenging to respond to these various groups and constituencies. It also can be a challenge to balance the competing demands and duplicative

³ Source: Elements of Equity: Criteria for Equitable Schools Developed by Jill Moss Greenberg and Susan Shaffer, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., 1991, 2016

efforts with limited time. Furthermore, thoughtful, proactive planning is less likely to occur when we are responding to community concerns in the absence of an action plan of our own.

Racial inequities and disparities are centuries in the making, and creating equitable and inclusive educational systems requires a long-term, sustained effort. It is the belief of our Superintendent of Schools that if an effort is important to the school system, then the organization's leader must be a full participant. The work that she envisions for the Equity CIT will include implementation of "Our Call to Action" and the Equity Audit; recruitment and retention efforts to increase the diversity of our staff; organizing cross-cultural conversations; and ongoing communication efforts to include an Equity Newsletter and other forms of outreach, among other topics.

In November, the Superintendent of Schools will form an Equity Community Input Team (E-CIT) to engage stakeholders in the schools and the community to assist in the effective implementation of the equitable practices as outlined in this position paper and in the Equity Action Plan. Unlike a task force, a term frequently used when discussing tactical or military strategy and defined by Merriam Webster as a temporary grouping of people who deal with a specific problem identified by one leader who is interested in accomplishing a singular objective, Community Input Teams are more inclusive, designed to "bring blockers to the table," are structured to address both short-term and long-term needs, and are

geared toward creating meaningful, lasting and sustainable change.⁴

The E-CIT will include members of the community representing various organizations and school community representatives (e.g. students, staff, school committee members, parents, etc.). The overarching purpose of the E-CIT is to provide a mechanism for ensuring the implementation of our equity-related efforts. The E-CIT is likely to include smaller working groups with members who have an interest in a particular focus and who will share their perspectives with the larger E-CIT, acting as the steering committee. The three working groups currently envisioned are: (1) Inclusion; (2) LGBTQ; and (3) Racial Equity.

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3. Systematic Collection, Review of Disciplinary Data and Calibration of Discipline Processes

As we take a closer look at our disciplinary data and practices, it has become clear that developing meaningful action steps to address discipline disparities is dependent on a more comprehensive data collection and review system, and district-wide calibration of our discipline processes. While the Equity Audit may suggest certain priorities within this undertaking, we propose the following steps:

- 1) Conduct a document/policy review to create a common understanding of current practices in discipline decision-making and reporting, PK-12,

⁴ Building Relationships, Yielding Results, Harvard Education Press (2015).

and areas of focus in service of increasing consistency.

- 2) Work with the Director of Planning and Assessment to create consistent discipline tracking systems in all schools, clarifying how disciplinary decisions will be recorded, what information will be collected, and timelines and processes for analyzing discipline data. Specifically, we seek to set up systems to help the district remain accountable for the rates of exclusionary discipline practices for students of color and special education students.
- 3) Articulate mandatory discipline events (actions and behaviors that require a disciplinary response in order to maintain safe schools and classrooms) and discretionary discipline events (actions and behaviors that, depending on context, may not require a disciplinary response) and the relevant procedures and practices for each type of event as appropriate at all levels, PK-12. An example of this work would be reviewing case studies for common discipline events in schools, and determining the developmentally appropriate plan of action for students engaging in these behaviors at the elementary, middle, and high school level.
- 4) Conduct a monthly case study review of suspensions, led by the Superintendent of Schools and in conjunction with the LPS Administrative Council. In addition to maintaining a targeted focus on discipline disparities, these monthly reviews will inform the work done in steps 2 and 3, testing the systems and procedures created and providing

insight for how to revise and refine the processes to best serve our students and community.

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4. Classroom Management Professional Learning and Development Opportunities

As the Administrative Council works to clarify and codify district policies and practices around mandatory and discretionary discipline, educators will need to be trained in both the new policies, as well as the research and best practice strategies to use for student engagement and classroom and behavior management. Currently, our professional development on the subject of classroom management focuses on the younger grades. The majority of our elementary educators are trained in Responsive Classroom, an evidence-based social/emotional learning program, and we offer regular opportunities for K-5 educators to participate in advanced Responsive Classroom training. We also provide Crisis Prevention Institute de-escalation training to faculty and staff PK-12, and will continue to ensure access to these trainings. In addition to any recommendations put forth in Equity Audit, we propose the steps below as a starting point. Please note that some steps may overlap with actions outlined in the Data Collection and Review action step; the purpose for including it again here is to highlight how professional learning and development will support the implementation of the Data Collection and Review processes.

Establish district guidelines for discretionary and mandatory discipline procedures (Administrative Council),

and then train district leaders in the implementation of guidelines (via Joint Council). Cross-reference these guidelines with Aspen discipline codes and tracking practices to ensure validity in ongoing data collection and analysis.

- 1) School-site groups (admins, deans, counselors) refine a “menu” of discretionary/ mandatory discipline procedures that are developmentally appropriate and minimize impact on instruction, and share this information with faculty and staff;
- 2) Develop training to share research on effects of suspension and time on learning data, equity, and the neurological impacts of racism on students with all faculty as a way to establish a foundational understanding of the “why” this work is vital to our district and to our students;
- 3) Use the Professional Learning Subcommittee to research high-quality professional learning (specifically for older grades) in classroom management and response to behaviors (may include Restorative Justice).

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5. Cultural Proficiency Professional Learning and Development Opportunities

While opportunities for educators to engage in professional development around cultural proficiency are routinely available, these opportunities have been primarily voluntary, after-hours courses and workshops. This approach excludes faculty and staff who cannot commit to work outside of the scheduled day, as well

as those who do not choose to opt in to this work. Going forward, Lexington is committed to a comprehensive, cohesive approach to ensure that all faculty and staff are sufficiently trained and supported to engage with our students, community, curriculum, and instructional methods in ways that are culturally proficient. In order to fulfill this commitment, a multi-faceted approach is required to weave this training through both our after-school professional learning program and various professional development delivery models and times during school hours. Proposed action steps include:

- 1) Creating a subcommittee of the Professional Learning Committee to research and recommend high-quality professional learning providers in cultural proficiency, for use in the after-school Professional Learning program, as well as to recommend for school-site training.
- 2) Continue membership in EDCO IDEAS collaborative, providing cultural proficiency workshops and courses to educators.
- 3) Engage the Administrative Council in cultural proficiency training, to build the capacity of our district leaders to further the work with the educators in their care.
- 4) Designate an Equity Strand across all modes of professional learning, creating pathways for all educators and school personnel to build capacity in cultural proficiency that don't rely on after-hours training.
- 5) Continue to collaborate with the Lexington Education Association to introduce a cultural proficiency requirement to the New Educator

Induction Program. When fully implemented, this will ensure that all educators entering the school district would experience consistent training in cultural proficiency.

- 6) In collaboration with Community Input Teams (described above), identifying opportunities to include School Committee and Lexington community members in district-based cultural proficiency training, and also look for avenues through which LPS faculty and staff might participate in community-based professional learning opportunities.
- 7) Engage all School Committee members, Administrative Council members, and Lexington Education Association Executive Committee members in a one-day active bystander training in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission.

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6. PK-12 Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Review

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports comprising research-based prevention and intervention strategies are used in concert to support the academic, social, and emotional growth of all students and establish a positive school community. PBIS frameworks have been implemented in the district and are revised and refined each year to best support all students. Currently, all elementary schools and middle schools use PBIS systems school-wide.

As district demographics and school leadership change over the years, the PBIS approaches in each school have

developed differently. In order to determine our next steps in growing and refining our PBIS approach as a district, we will undertake a comprehensive review of PBIS programs in each school. A small team at each school, comprising administrators, educators, counselors, and other faculty as appropriate, will share the history of, and current practices in, PBIS implementation. That information will be compiled and analyzed at the district level, and outcomes of this work will include recommendations for continued work at the school level.

Recommendations will be made in service of increasing consistency and efficacy in implementation, and may include specific data collection and analysis, professional development, and/or policy and structural recommendations (pertaining to schedules, job roles and responsibilities, facilities, etc.).

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7. Educate All Students to be Inclusive, Racially Literate, and Culturally Proficient

While some schools and grade levels incorporate lessons and units to teach students about diversity, equity, and inclusion, these lessons are not consistently in place across the district. One outcome of our “Call to Action” will be to identify the curriculum to be used at each grade span, ensuring our students’ racial literacy and cultural proficiency, and to understand how they can contribute to creating a better world. Examples of curriculum already in use are the Windows and Mirrors curriculum and Dismantling Racism, both at the elementary level; and these programs among others will be reviewed with an eye to possible extension and expansion for wider use in the district.

In addition to the curriculum that will be used explicitly to help our students to gain racial literacy and cultural proficiency, there must be a consideration of the implicit biases in our PK-12 curriculum. Every content area undergoes periodic Curriculum Review cycles, and an equity component will be incorporated into part of the cycle in Year 1 of a Curriculum Review. The content area department heads and educators, under the direction of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Learning, will periodically conduct a comprehensive review of materials, lessons, and units from an equity/bias perspective (see Nitko document), and revise the PK-12 curriculum as needed to ensure that our curriculum, materials and pedagogy promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels. This process may include auditing reading assignments to determine the diversity of author perspectives and crafting curriculum that is more inclusive of authors from historically underrepresented backgrounds, for example, or identifying instructional practices that build on student strengths and incorporating those into existing units or lessons.

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8. Equity Lens in Building Projects

As the Lexington school population continues to grow, the district continues to engage in building projects to expand our at high levels. Going forward, we will make every effort to create physical spaces in building projects within Lexington Public Schools that will incorporate design features that champion equity for all Lexington students.

student capacity. The district is currently building a new Lexington Children's Place and a new Hastings Elementary; the district also is looking ahead to the design of a new Lexington High School and/or the expansion of our current LHS. In each of these building projects, and in future projects not yet in the works, Lexington Public Schools commits to exploring building design with an equity lens. The physical school building can support equity efforts in many ways. Adequate science laboratory space can ensure that there is space in advanced science classes for student cohorts that are demographically proportional to the district. Bathroom and locker room design and signage can be done thoughtfully to include and validate all gender identities. Flexible learning spaces can accommodate collaborative and inclusive learning environments.

The presence of a "Safe Haven" counseling and mediation hub ensures that struggling students get the support they need, and classrooms designed for technology integration make it possible for all students to access instruction with the technological supports and scaffolds they need. Project Based Learning and other pedagogical approaches can be more effective in engaging students in deep learning than traditional schooling methods, and our school spaces can be designed to encourage creative, interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning that lead all students to achieve

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DRAFT EQUITY ACTION PLAN FOR THE LEXINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS SEPTEMBER, 2018		
Strategic Priority/Description	Point Person(s)	Timeline/ Status
#1 - Equity Audit Engage an external agency to conduct a PK-12 Equity Audit of the Lexington Public Schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent of Schools • Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction • Director of Planning and Assessment 	November - December, 2018
#2 - Equity CIT Establish an Equity Community Input Team (E-CIT), comprising three distinct teams or subsets: (1) Diversity/LGBTQ CIT; Inclusion/Special Education CIT; and Racial Equity CIT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent of Schools • School Committee Reps.. • Community Group Reps. • Various Admin. • Other Stakeholders 	November, 2018 (after the community has a chance to weigh in on the DEI position paper).
#3 - Systematic Collection and Review of Disciplinary Data and Calibration of Discipline Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent of Schools • Director of Planning and Assessment • LPS Administrative Council 	2018 - 2019
#4 - Classroom Management Professional Learning and Development Opportunities Support educators to implement research-based student engagement and classroom management strategies, in alignment with review of discipline processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent (Action Steps 1-2) • Professional Learning Coordinator (Action Steps 3-4) 	2018 - 2019

<p>#5 - Cultural Proficiency Professional Learning and Development Opportunities</p> <p>Design a comprehensive approach to cultural proficiency training in the district.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Learning Coordinator 	<p>For Action Steps 1-4, beginning 2018-2019; For Action Step 5 and further actions to be determined, beginning 2019-and beyond.</p>
<p>#6 - PK-12 PBIS Review</p> <p>Conduct a review of PBIS systems and practices across the district and recommend next steps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director of Counseling 	<p>2019 - 2020</p>
<p>#7 - Curriculum and Instruction</p> <p>Build our students' capacity in cultural proficiency; ensure that curriculum, materials and instructional pedagogy promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction 	<p>2018 - ongoing</p>
<p>#8 - Equity Lens in Building Projects</p> <p>Create physical spaces in building projects within Lexington Public Schools that will incorporate design features that champion equity for all Lexington students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Superintendent of Schools Lexington High School Principal Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations 	<p>2018 - ongoing</p>

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**In addition to other opportunities to collect input, you may use the link below to share reactions, thoughts and suggestions:*

<https://goo.gl/forms/93MWpCmWI3Z4Dfzx2>