

PUBLIC WRITTEN COMMENTS ON ELIMINATING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP REPORT

December 9, 2020

I am upset that my tax dollars are being wasted trying to eliminate the achievement gap. Certain groups underperform in spite of the massive amount of money we already spend on them. I think all of you know that throwing more money at this situation will not change things.

If county officials decide to proceed to waste money on this, as I am sure they will, I demand that the county waste the same amount of money studying the achievement gap and discrimination that Asians experience in sports. Why are there so few Asian football and basketball players?

Jim Schneider

I would like to challenge the basic premise of this effort. We should not be looking to eliminating the opportunity "GAP." We should be looking to increase the opportunity for all. If we look to eliminate the opportunity "GAP," I view this as potentially lowering the opportunity for some. This would have the potential to negatively impacting our social intelligence of the future and lowering our ability to improve life for all through intelligent informed decisions.

Please consider relooking at this initiative to improve the opportunity for lower class and not reduce the opportunity for those that have access currently. That is not fair to those children and parents who have worked so hard in order to be in that situation. I have stretched my financial situation in order to ensure my children, one with special needs, are provided a good base educational system so that they can succeed and get into a good high school and ultimately college.

Choices that would hurt them is not fair to me or my family that I have struggled so much to get to the place I have in order to ensure a strong foundation for my children and their ultimate future. This will help them and society at large for being better individuals in society. We need to focus our efforts in improving lower opportunity area's and not hurt areas that have good, not great, but good opportunities currently. Thank you.

Michael Keane

I understand the need for the existing report. I did not read the entire report, but the issues being addressed are critical to our society, so thank you.

However, can you please point to a similar report for children with special needs? Do we have as much concern for this class of individuals as others?

Our youngest son has been back into public school since 9th grade with an IEP. His disability includes ADHD and ODD. We find the IEP process extremely unacceptable and feel we can never gain traction in the meetings. In fact, I personally believe the wording is very vague, so the school system does not have to take responsibility. The most recent report seems to be a disconnect from reality, and I will be responding back.

Please note: We have ensured our son had (and still has) a great deal of psychological help - very expensive and weekly, special schools, and a very expensive tutor for the last several years. - this effort is putting us into financial stress.

We also have input from a number of individuals currently in the school system and outside including an advocate. These individuals indicate this is all political and the first, second, and third answers are no.

We kind of get this special needs thing. We also have another child with special needs who is currently a senior at UMBC in Computer Science with a 3.6 GPA, However, our first son was not in public schools since 5th grade after we removed him because of being bullied/tormented.

Joseph Shelton

In terms of providing some preferences to a certain race based, I can support it. Nonetheless, to eliminate the Opportunity Gap, we CANNOT create a quota system by race for education.

I can understand that for instance, the minimum GPA level requirements for entrance into STEM program is 2.5. For blacks, maybe the school system can accept a minimum GPA 2.25. The school system CANNOT provide preference based on quota system. Thus, it will eliminate the incentive for people to work hard or harder to achieve one's goals. It will be like Malaysia, a country, which create a dependency for the Malay race where government provide everything for the Malay.

My children work very hard since they are 4 years old. I have already forced them to go on to Khans and spent 30 minutes daily.

Regards,

Allen She

Having an evidence-based core curriculum is essential to supporting academic progress. When such a program is not in place the most susceptible populations within our district suffer the most. Many high SES families accommodate for a poor curriculum via tutoring and the use of educational advocates or lawyers to obtain appropriate instruction whereas struggling students without the financial means to do this fall further behind.

AACPS utilizes a reading program (F&P) that is based on outdated theory that runs contrary to how cognitive scientists have revealed that our brains learn to read. For this reason, many state departments of education have recommended against its use. Why is AACPS continuing to use this methodology? I would encourage interested stakeholders read the below pieces and to reassess AACPS' devotion to the concept of "balanced literacy," leveled readers, and three-cueing/MSV theory. Literacy is a social justice issue. We do not have time to waste on ineffective practices and to do so would be educational malpractice.

https://www.apmreports.org/story/2019/08/22/whats-wrong-how-schools-teach-reading?mc_cid=dca3480527&mc_eid=8c5f1e8d5f

<https://projectforeverfree.org/literacy-the-most-forgotten-social-justice-issue/>

<https://www.thecity.nyc/special-report/2019/9/4/21210850/a-reading-crisis-why-some-parents-created-a-school-for-dyslexic-kids>

<https://www.corelearn.com/the-biggest-threat-to-our-democracy-illiteracy-and-the-science-deniers-who-contribute-to-it/>

<https://righttoreadproject.com/2019/09/23/fp-benchmark-assessment-system-doesnt-look-right-sound-right-or-make-sense/>

<https://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-literacy/it-good-idea-teach-three-cueing-systems-reading>

Additionally, poor core curriculum leads to many struggling learners, which overtaxes Tier 2 intervention resources. AACPS however does not have approved intervention programs in all academic areas. School staff will tell you that there are no writing interventions available, and that math interventions are limited to math fluency. AACPS does not have interventions targeted at all 5 components of reading as identified by the National Reading Panel. How are teachers to support students without intervention programs to target delayed areas?

We know that it takes a village to raise a child during these difficult times. Does AACPS have a plan to help put the dots together within the village before the child's entry into his/her journey into the education process. Or what new innovative steps will be placed by AACPS once they enter their education journey?

L. Odessa Ellis

I am hoping this letter may you give a little insight of my kids experience. Before COVID, one major hurdle my kids experience is mental health support. My kids were practically failing the grade and yet they were advanced to the next grade. It took me years to save up money so my daughter can be psychologically tested. Needless to say, not every family is fortunate enough to pay for mental health. Schools and communities should have these services available instead of a "we can't help" attitude.

Another thing is racism within a race. My kids are not Hispanic or Black enough. My son was bullied for years. Whenever I brought up a complaint, I was told they talk to the kids. My son had to physically stop the bullies picking on him. Obviously, there were consequences but mix race children are suffering as well. Anne Arundel County is a huge county then most. It's unacceptable that in 2020 lack of services is not available. We have taken away school and sports which a lot of kids depend on to de-stress. Only the rich are able to have their kids let outlets while the rest of us have no options.

Erica Pabon
Crofton

The NAACP would especially like to know how AACPS and The Office of the County Executive plan to implement the recommendations; the associated timelines, checkpoints, and benchmarks; and the plan for reporting to the public about progress toward the benchmarks.

Mary Dadone
Branch Secretary and Chair, Anne Arundel County NAACP Education Committee

This is truly a national emergency. It is far worse than the pandemic. America's schools are declining in quality in comparison to schools in other countries.

It is intolerable that fewer than one in five African American children in the eighth grade are proficient in reading, and that fewer than one in six are proficient in math.

It is intolerable that America's school districts attempt to blame African American families for the lower achievement levels of African American students when the schools failed to educate the parents and grandparents adequately.

America's public school are destroying the lives of millions of African American and other minority children systematically bit by bit, day after day.

Education is the foundation for job opportunities, income, and wealth. Not capitalism, but government, in the form of America's public schools, is guilty of this systemic racism.

The [attached information](#) is excerpted from a book on America's slave society titled Duke of York: Father of America's Slave Society, which will become fully available without charge in the next couple of days at www.DukeYork.org

The information urges greater emphasis upon America's history as a brutal slave nation. Americans should know that the slave trade in which America's slave society participated so willingly was a genocide and holocaust in which millions died horrible deaths even before their arrival in the New World.

Americans should learn that American slavery was more brutal than other forms of slavery.

They should learn that America was one of the last remaining slave nations by the time of the Civil War. Americans should learn that by enslaving four million human beings in its particularly brutal form of slavery, America not only was the largest remaining slave nation in the New World, but it enslaved more human beings than all other New World nations combined, including in Brazil, other South and Central American nations, and the Caribbean.

The attached information urges that the Board support the following:

- Greater and more accurate information regarding American slavery
- Greater access to school choice for African Americans and other minorities
- Special training and incentive pay for teachers in disadvantaged schools
- Incentive pay for excellent teachers
- Adoption of innovative “no excuses” educational curriculum programs developed by certain charter schools in New York and Boston.

Thank you for your consideration.

Edward Doten

The current effort would be most effective if the committee also looked at issues related to re-imagining school district boundaries to increase racial integration across the board; and to also create school districts where students are located closer to their school.

As an AACPS student for 12 years, I was among the first group of white students to attend the formerly all-black Mills Parole Elementary after federal law forced AACPS to integrate schools in the late 1960s. My integrated early education provided by the incredible, predominantly black teachers at Parole was a rich academic and cultural experience. After Parole, I attended Annapolis Jr. and Annapolis High. Integrated schools are a valuable way to increase interaction and understanding between different races and cultures, and to reduce incidents of racism and hate crimes. Many families, however, opt out of public schools or seek to land a spot in a predominantly white school because they lack first-hand knowledge of how rich it can be to learn in an integrated school. In general, many judge integrated schools and schools with large minority populations as “inferior.”

As a parent of children at Old Mill School High School, I love the racial balance in the student population there. However, this district is very large, and we live over 12 miles away from the school. This is a significant barrier to our ability to fully participate in and support the school. To attend a meeting at the school requires a 25-mile round trip that takes over an hour in

transportation time. Our house is closer to nine public high schools (including Bowie High in PG County). We are 4 miles from Annapolis High and 5 miles from Crofton High.

Anne Mitchell
Crownsville

The Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap in education is a result of segregation and the creation of a separate and unequal school system for Black students in Anne Arundel County. This legacy must be remedied while the system moves forward with these recommendations.

Generally, this requires improved zoning that will reduce the presence of all white or majority white schools, starting from the elementary level. In addition, the school system must specify that it will hire Black teachers and not just equity minded people or whatever the current language is.

Dr. Philip Brown documented the racist hiring practices of Anne Arundel County schools since 1900. The same racist hiring practices exist and must be rooted out.

Steven Waddy

Anne Arundel County Public Schools should stop disregarding the Memorandum of Understanding this school system entered into with the Anne Arundel NAACP. Reinstitute the Office of Equity previously in force with Dr. Akeda Pearson and all other employees. Reinstate all of those employees.

Neither the school board nor the superintendent should be unilaterally dismantling the consent decree without NAACP's knowledge, input and consent. No school official should be actively engaged in undermining or dismantling this Memorandum of Understanding without the Anne Arundel NAACP's knowledge and express written consent.

Claudia Barber

I appreciate the slogan, "Eliminating the Opportunity GAP." This move should empower the adult community to focus more on equity and equality as we move forward. Research on the topics below can support our effort as we continue the work. Application will allow our youth many opportunities to succeed at home, school and the community. They will be better prepared to make good choices, participate in the job market, become responsible informed citizens, and live a happy fulfilling life.

Topics

1. Education
2. Career Preparedness
3. Financial Awareness
4. Health

5. Spirituality / Character Education
6. Family Life

The preliminary work is complete. We have a “new slogan,” recommendations, testimonies from stakeholders, remarks from our County Executive and School Superintendent.

My thoughts:

1. We have the research and talent to eradicate academic and opportunity gaps.
2. Equity must be a strong factor in the work.
3. Hiring practices must be evaluated to select the best candidates to support the vision, mission and values of the established Recommendations.
4. A Needs Assessment should be considered to identify root causes of the opportunity gap.
5. A Strategic Plan with all components should be developed.
6. Staff development, parent and community involvement must be planned.
7. A State of The Recommendations Update should be shared with all stakeholders.
8. Progress must be recognized and celebrated.
9. Extra curricula guidelines must be clearly defined and respected.

Thank you to for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Rose Tasker
Broadneck Peninsula

Maryland is the 3rd most racially segregated state in the United States, and this segregation is reflected in the demographics of our public schools as well. AACPS was one of the last school systems in Maryland to de-jure segregate, largely due to resistance from white families. In modern times, AACPS still caves into pressure from affluent white communities regarding school zoning, and as a result, our schools are heavily de-facto segregated.

Older newspaper articles make it very lucid that certain white and affluent communities lobbied for their neighborhoods to be zoned to majority-white and affluent feeder systems as opposed to feeder systems with an ethnically diverse or majority-minority high school that is significantly closer to them. Private schools have propped up all over the county and increased in popularity since de-jure desegregation to attract wealthy white families in feeders such as Annapolis, Meade, Glen Burnie, and Old Mill, which augments the problem of segregated schools.

AACPS needs to undergo a county-wide boundary analysis study and redistricting, much like what Howard County and Montgomery County are doing. Low-income students and minorities are concentrated in a few feeder systems in AACPS, and studies have shown that integrated schools have a number of benefits for all groups of students, including increased test scores and college enrollment. This is not a partisan issue, nor should it be seen as such. Even Frederick County has engaged in efforts to even out poverty in their schools. There is no place for “separate but equal” in 2020.

Abraham Fetin

Thank you for the work you did on The Joint Initiative to Eliminate the Opportunity Gap report. Here are my comments:

Pages 2, 15, and 40 of the report refer to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). I would suggest that the committee use the terms Adverse Community Experiences and Socially-Engineered Traumas (SET) instead. These two terms are more aligned with the systemic approach taken by the committee. SETs are defined as traumatic events rooted in social forces of oppression and inequality.

Pages 15 and 40 of the report refer to Social Determinants of Education. I would suggest that the committee consider using the term Structural Determinants of Education which is in line with Socially-Engineered Traumas and Adverse Community Experiences and with the systemic approach taken by the committee.

On Page 16 (Systemic Racism) Strategy #1 does not include the community. This clause was left out “stakeholders, to include community representatives, students, AACPS representatives, and representatives from Anne Arundel County offices and agencies.” I would suggest adding that back in and adding the community symbol. I would also suggest adding the following clause after Strategy #1: “Eight specific recommendations regarding this coalition are listed in the Systemic Racism Subcommittee’s Report (Appendix C).” To me, reading strategy one by itself makes it look weak. Reading it with the additional 8 points included in the Appendix makes it look stronger.

On Page 37 (Discipline), Recommendation #6: Why wasn’t this recommendation included on Page 14 as one of this subcommittee’s recommendations? Recommendation #6 says: “Create an independent community body that monitors community based reportable offenses, school discipline and policing, and reports its findings directly to the Board of Education. There is currently no school sanctioned, independent body monitoring disproportionate discipline in AACPS. The school board should appoint such a body from the community, with a formal application process, and vote on the appointment and tenure of each member. This body should report on the discipline data, quarterly, to the school board.” I think this should be added to the main report.

Thank you.

Lynda Davis
Linthicum

On behalf of more than 20 African American parents and community representatives, the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP used the school system’s own data to illustrate long-term

and persistent disparities in access and opportunity for African American students and submitted a complaint to the Office for Civil Rights in 2004, claiming that, “Anne Arundel County Public Schools has categorically denied and limited opportunities for African American students.” Their efforts formally organized what the Joint Initiative to Eliminate the Achievement Gap stated in their report, that “For Black students, structural and systemic racism perpetuates these inequities.”

This testimony is in response and support of the report of the Joint Initiative to Eliminate the Achievement/Opportunity Gap . It is critical to build on the extensive work that was accomplished during the period between 2005 and 2013, when the school system took responsibility for their role in closing the gaps in access, opportunity, and success for African American students.

On September 7, 2005, the Superintendent, School Board and NAACP presidents, and leader of the complainant group signed an agreement to ensure the parties developed a plan to address the problems affecting African American students which will have a direct impact on other groups who are meeting the standards.

An executive level position and subsequent office was approved by the County Council and established as one of the “good faith” efforts to monitor and report to the community, the progress and challenges to ensure the goals and the indicators of success aligned with the AACPS strategic plan and stated outcomes were being met, which as was stated, “must survive the existing Board, Superintendent, and local political leadership...”

That agreement was breached by AACPS in 2014, when the Interim Superintendent, who had no history or investment in the agreement, the office or its charge, and with blatant disregard for the community, dismantled the Office of Equity and Human Relations (OEAHR). It is quite unfortunate that so much momentum was lost after the establishment of a mediated agreement between the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP on behalf of those complaints after almost one year of negotiations.

This testimony, in response and support of the report of the Joint Initiative to Eliminate the Achievement Gap. It is critical to build on the extensive work that was accomplished during the period between 2005 and 2013, when the school system took responsibility for their role in closing the gaps in access, opportunity, and success for African American students.

While the administration would have the current Board and the community believe the Office’s only accomplishment was related to community relations, the staff was integral in researching and sharing effective practices that influenced significant outcomes in addressing the goals and they designed and model programs that engaged the community and yielded results. They also facilitated the required public forums that were conducted twice a year and provided regular updates in their annual Progress and Challenges Report and on AACPS-TV programs, Community Conversations and the OCR Report.

The OEAHR established and led an internal Steering Committee that reviewed policies and practices to determine whether they contributed to the racial disparities and made

recommendations on revisions to effect more equitable outcomes. They also secured state and local funding to supplement their meager budget to create and operate myriad internal and community programs related to Academic Achievement, Safe and Supportive Schools and Community Engagement. They provided logistical support to the Advisory Committee that was established jointly by the parties to include 6 members of the community and 6 appointed by the Superintendent/Board to monitor the school system's performance toward achieving the benchmarks and milestones to ensure that the.

This was one strategy to ensure the continuation of the agreement in perpetuity. Multiple examples of their effectiveness are documented in school system publications, including in a report presented to the County Council in December 2013 which included data illustrating an increase in African American student enrollment in Advanced Placement classes by 69% over 5 years and more African American participation than ever before in SAT and ACT assessments and magnet programs.

Data from 2005 to 2013 showed performance improvements for all students, an incremental closing of the performance gaps; in math from 23% to 18% and in reading, from 19% to 12%, and the graduation gap narrowed to 7% between 2009 and 2012.

The OEAHR investigated and documented Bias Motivated Incident reports which steadily declined from 182 in 2005 to only 29 in 2013 because of a no-tolerance policy put in place by the Board under former superintendent, Dr. Eric Smith. For the first time, various approaches such as improved classroom management, restorative justice practices, and training to fairly apply policies to reduce discipline disproportionality were being employed.

The OEAHR developed a standard process for completing discipline referrals that was utilized by teachers system-wide after the Office established a Discipline Audit Team to conduct a system-wide review of student discipline records from a random sampling of the district's 120 schools to learn more about the persistent disparities that were evident in the district discipline data. This and a focus on utilizing restorative justice practices versus suspension were established to support student academic success and reduce punitive disciplinary approaches.

The OEAHR Community Closing The Gap Coalition (CCGC) was established in September 2011 and built upon significant relationships that reaped several rewards for the students of AACPS and the community. Approximately 90 agencies, businesses, churches, organizations and parents across Anne Arundel County. Among other accomplishments, various community groups organized to provide mentoring, tutoring and other support to students outside of school. They established the first faith-based initiative and sponsored a conference attended by more than 15 churches on writing grants to secure funds to provide mentoring, tutoring and other support. Partnerships and revised practices for placement in Alternative Education Programs, a community alternative to suspension program sponsored by AACPS, the Boys and Girls Club of Annapolis and the Youth Services Bureau of the Community Action Agency, and a Scholars Program with Sojourner Douglass College were established to support student access to engaging and innovative educational services.

In addition to a system-wide focus to reduce barriers and increase access to educational opportunities once enrolled in school, the Executive Director of the OEAHR was the superintendent's representative as an integral partner on two major collaborative initiatives to improve the readiness of children before they entered kindergarten. In 2006, the Local Management Board, in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, engaged in the leadership in Action Plan to develop a five-year plan to accelerate the number of children who enter kindergarten fully ready to learn. In 2016, the Early Childhood Commission or ECE was created to implement the plan and continues its work today.

The other was with the Head Start Advisory Board to strengthen the partnership between AACPS and Head Start for curriculum development, teacher training, and technology support. We understand that every year, millions of children walk into their first day of school unprepared to learn, and at no fault of their own. We know that those who start behind tend to fall further and further behind over the years. We understand that the school system cannot eliminate all of the opportunity gaps, but we also know that American public education is supposed to be the great equalizer.

As such, I/We wholeheartedly endorse the recommendations of the Joint Initiative to Eliminate the Achievement or Opportunity Gap committee and while there is work for everyone; community, government, parents, and students, the school system leadership has the responsibility to intentionally strategize concerted and targeted efforts to identify structural, cultural and systemic inequities and de-institutionalize the conditions which result in better outcomes for all students and exponentially for the students most in need.

Carlesa R. Finney, former Executive Director, and
Dr. Akeda Pearson-Stenbar, former School-Community Liaison
AACPS Office of Equity and Human Relations
Glen Burnie

The Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP fully supports the recommendations of this report and we encourage those receiving it to begin implementation immediately. The NAACP has long engaged with AACPS in the struggle against racism and for equity:

- In 1939, Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP successfully sued AACPS on behalf of Walter Mills, a black principal, for equal pay for black principals and teachers
- In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. It wasn't until 1966, when the NAACP and the Justice Department sued Anne Arundel County, that Anne Arundel County began complying with the law.
- In 2004, we filed suit with the Office of Civil Rights over the gaps between students of color and white students. This led to the 2005 Memorandum of Agreement included in the report.
- In 2011, we filed another suit concerning disciplinary disparities in AACPS. That suit is still under investigation at the Office of Civil Rights.

As our history shows, we are dealing with an historic and persistent gap in our county. We cannot fix a problem of this magnitude with anything less than a systemic change, a change that must involve not only AACPS but also the county government and the public.

Therefore, I, an African American woman who attended both Wiley Bates High School and Glen Burnie High Schools, and who is entering her fifth term as President of the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP, proudly stand on behalf of the Anne Arundel County Branch NAACP in completely endorsing this historic attempt to jointly face and overcome not only the educational gaps but also the persistent curse of systemic racism across Anne Arundel County.

Jacqueline Boone Allsup
President
Anne Arundel County Branch
NAACP