Inequities in Opportunity and Achievement in Maryland

Maryland has long prided itself on its education system. A deeper look at the data, however, shows that statewide averages mask deep inequities in opportunity for certain groups of students. These gaps in opportunity lead to gaps in achievement between students of color and White students, as well as between low-income students and higher income students. What’s more, racial inequities persist among students of similar family income levels.

To be clear, these disparities are a reflection of how we organize our schools and shortchange certain students when it comes to critical educational opportunities/resources from early childhood through high school. With the pending recommendations from the Kirwan Commission, the state has the opportunity to reshape the education system to eliminate persistent income and racial inequities. The future of the state depends on it.

That begins with an honest look at the data – data that show dramatic racial gaps in student outcomes regardless of family income.

- White students are more than twice as likely to meet or exceed expectations on 4th grade reading and Algebra I than both Black and Latino students, and the achievement gap is bigger among higher income students.

- Black and Latino students are less likely to enroll in college within one year of graduation than their White peers. The gap is larger among higher income students.

These disparities in outcomes are the direct result of disparities in access to opportunities to learn. Students of color in Maryland are less likely to have access to:

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**
- Racial disparities in academic preparation begin before kindergarten.
- Latino children are particularly underserved before kindergarten, and are much less likely to be enrolled in pre-school than their White peers regardless of family income level.

**COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS**
- White students were nearly twice as likely as Black students and 2.5 times more likely than Latino students to participate in dual enrollment.
- Black students are particularly underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses. Black students are 36% of all high school students, but only 18% of students who took at least one AP exam. (Whereas, White students make up 42% of high school students but 51% of AP-exam test-takers.)
- Only 34% of AP exams taken by Black students and 54% of exams taken by Latino students received a passing grade, compared with 68% of exams taken by White students.
- Black and Latino students who “concentrated” in CTE were less likely than their peers to pass a technical assessment or attain college credit through their program.

**STRONG TEACHERS AND LEADERS**
- Students in schools with high percentages of students of color are twice as likely to have a first-year teacher as students in schools with low percentages of students of color.
- Among high poverty schools, the schools with higher percentages of students of color have higher percentages of first-year teachers. (There are similar disparities between districts with the smallest and largest percentages of students of color.)
- The educators in Maryland’s schools do not reflect the diversity of its families and students. While only 38 percent of students in Maryland are White, 74 percent of teachers and 61 percent of principals are White.
EQUITABLE FUNDING

- Most districts in Maryland do not receive the money the state says they need, and districts with the most students of color are shortchanged the most.

- Nearly half of Maryland’s Black or Latino students attend schools in one of the three most underfunded districts in the state. These districts receive about $4000 less per student than the Thornton formula says they should.

A school accountability system is one of the most powerful levers a state has for incentivizing change in practice in districts and schools.

- Maryland schools can receive high ratings without actually serving students of color, low-income students, English learners, and/or students with disabilities well.

- Maryland does not specify what schools that are identified as consistently underserving one or more students groups will need to do to improve — or what support the state and its districts will provide. Nor does the state have a mechanism in place for holding districts accountable for addressing these disparities.

These disparities have profound and lasting consequences for individual students, for our economy, and for our democracy.

THE STATE MUST EXPLICITLY ADDRESS THESE INEQUITIES IN OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT BY, FOR EXAMPLE:

- Ensuring that districts and schools serving high concentrations of students of color and low-income students have the resources they need — from early childhood education opportunities, to a strong and diverse teacher workforce, to sufficient per pupil funding and equitable access to college and career readiness pathways;

- Making timely data on racial inequities in achievement — and in access to critical resources — transparent and readily available to parents, community members, researchers, and policymakers; and

- Holding policy- and decision-makers at every level accountable for disrupting these patterns of inequity through the state’s school rating system, governance responsibilities, and other levers.

Please see our fact sheets on inequities in **achievement** and in access to **early childhood education, high quality teachers and leaders, equitable funding, and rigorous college and career pathways** for more detailed data documenting the problems, and for policy recommendations in each area.
Inequities in Access to Funding for Students of Color

TOP TAKEAWAYS IN FUNDING FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR
1: Most districts receive less than the state says they should.
2: The districts serving the most students of color tend to have the biggest funding disparities.

Money — both how much there is and how well it’s spent — matters in education. Increases in spending can lead to improved student achievement, educational attainment, and higher wages, with greater benefits for students from low-income families. Maryland’s funding formula acknowledges that some students and schools have higher needs by calling for more funding for students from low-income families, English learners, and students with disabilities. But today, these goals are left unfulfilled. In reality, the districts with higher need students are not actually getting the amount of funding the state says they should. And the districts with the most students of color are especially shortchanged. The state has the opportunity — and responsibility — to address these shortfalls.

SCHOOL FUNDING SHORTFALLS TODAY
Maryland’s school funding formula determines the amount of funding each district needs to serve its unique student population. The state provides a portion of that funding but does not ensure that each district actually receives the total amount generated by the funding formula.

Most districts receive less than the state says they should.
In FY2015, 20 of Maryland’s 24 districts received less funding than the state said they needed (under the original formula proposed through the Thornton commission); the gap between what a district should have received and what the district did receive ranged from $500 to $4,500 per pupil. The three districts with the biggest funding gaps serve about 200,000 students of color, nearly half of the state’s entire population of students of color, and were shortchanged by a total of $861 million.

Source: Adequacy of Education Funding in Maryland, Presentation to the Commission on Innovation and Excellence by Department of Legislative Services Office of Policy Analysis, January 9, 2017 and The Education Trust analysis of data from the 2015–16 Common Core of Data.
Districts with more students of color have bigger gaps.

Across school districts in Maryland, as the percentage of students of color increases, the gap between the district’s funding target and its actual funding gets worse.

Source: Adequacy of Education Funding in Maryland, Presentation to the Commission on Innovation and Excellence by Department of Legislative Services Office of Policy Analysis, January 9, 2017 and the Education Trust analysis of data from the 2015–16 Common Core of Data.

A RACE-FOCUSED EQUITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN MARYLAND

The state must make sure that districts — especially those serving the most students of color — get their fair share of funding by…

- Setting funding targets in all districts that maintain the state’s existing commitments to providing more resources for students with additional needs, and specifically take into consideration concentration of poverty.
- Ensuring that each district actually receives the full amount of its need-based funding target from the state and the local municipality.
- Ensuring that extra funds that go to districts for particular groups of students are spent in the schools serving those students.
- Ensuring that additional funding is spent in evidence-based ways — on resources and in ways that have been shown to improve outcomes for those students.
1: Racial disparities in academic preparation begin before kindergarten.
2: Latino students are particularly underserved before kindergarten.
3: Disparities for Latino students exist regardless of family income level.

High-quality early childhood education is associated with better learning skills — both academic and socioemotional — decreased special education placement and grade retention, and increased high school graduation rates. But in Maryland today, young children of color have inequitable access to this important educational experience. The state has an opportunity and responsibility to address these inequities.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Maryland teachers use the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to measure what new kindergarteners know and can do in four key areas: language and literacy, mathematics, social foundations, and physical well-being and motor development. Children who arrive at kindergarten with strong readiness skills in these areas have a solid foundation for a successful kindergarten year and beyond.

Racial disparities in academic preparation begin before kindergarten.

In Maryland, there is a 29-point achievement gap between Latino and White students on these critical kindergarten readiness skills. This is a bigger gap than between children from low-income families and children from higher-income families (22 points). These data illustrate the inadequate access to high-quality educational opportunities for Latino children before kindergarten. These opportunities include high-quality preschool and early intervention services for young children with special needs.

**PERCENTAGE OF KINDERGARTNERS DEMONSTRATING READINESS**

*Low-income status is indicated by free and reduced-price meal status.

1. American Academy of Pediatrics (2005) [http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/115/1/187.full.pdf](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/115/1/187.full.pdf);
Camilli et al. (2010); McCoy et al. (2017) [https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0013189X17737739](https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0013189X17737739), [https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ888457](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ888457)
ACCESS TO ECE OPPORTUNITIES

All of Maryland’s children should have the opportunity to benefit from high-quality preschool, and Maryland’s preschool enrollment should reflect its racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity.

**Latino children are particularly underserved before kindergarten.**

A higher percentage of White 3- and 4-year-olds enroll in preschool (55%) than Latino (36%) 3- and 4-year-olds.

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**PERCENTAGE OF 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN ENROLLED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

- **All Students**: 50%
- **Black**: 49%
- **Latino**: 43%
- **White**: 55%
- **Low-Income**: 39%
- **Higher-Income**: 55%

*Source: National Kids Count Data Center, Young Children Not in School 2012-2016*

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**Disparities in access to early education for Latino children persists regardless of income level.**

**PERCENTAGE OF 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN ENROLLED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BY RACE AND FAMILY INCOME**

- **Low-Income**:
  - All Children: 38%
  - Black: 27%
  - Latino: 40%
  - White: 55%
- **Higher-Income**:
  - All Children: 43%
  - Black: 53%
  - Latino: 43%
  - White: 58%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2012-2016.*
A RACE-FOCUSED EQUITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN MARYLAND

The state must address race-based inequities in access to high-quality early childhood education by...

✓ Increasing access to high-quality early childhood education for all students, but particularly for Latino children.

✓ Explicitly prioritizing historically underserved communities — including Latino communities — in:
  
  o New ECE seats;
  
  o Improving the quality of existing opportunities; and
  
  o Outreach about new or existing ECE opportunities.

✓ Explicitly addressing racial inequities that persist regardless of family income status.

✓ Creating a reliable mechanism for collecting and publishing data about access to quality early childhood opportunities by race/ethnicity.
TOP TAKEAWAYS IN HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS AND LEADERS

1: Schools and districts with the most students of color have more first-year teachers.
2: Even among high poverty schools, the schools with the most students of color have more first-year teachers.
3: The educators in Maryland’s schools do not reflect the diversity of its families and students.

Teachers are the most important in-school factor that contributes to student learning. While there’s no perfect way to measure high-quality teaching, teacher experience and teacher diversity both matter to student achievement. It is important that the state address the inequities in access and assignment to strong and diverse educators that exist for students of color in Maryland’s public schools.

TEACHER EXPERIENCE

Teacher effectiveness improves during the first few years of teaching, with a substantial improvement in effectiveness between a teacher’s first and second year. But in Maryland, students of color are more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers.

Schools with the most students of color have more first-year teachers.

Overall, 7 percent of teachers in Maryland are in their first year. Schools with high percentages of students of color are twice as likely to have first-year teachers as schools with low percentages of students of color (10 percent compared with 5 percent).

Even among high poverty schools, schools with more students of color have more first-year teachers.

High poverty schools also have high percentages of first-year teachers (11 percent). Strikingly, among high poverty schools, the schools with higher percentages of students of color have higher percentages of first-year teachers than the schools with lower percentages of students of color (14 percent compared with 9 percent).
Districts with more of students of color tend to have more teachers in their first-year.

Unsurprisingly, district data show patterns that are similar to what we see statewide between high and low poverty schools — when there are higher percentages of students of color there are also, generally, higher percentages of teachers in their first year.

**TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER DIVERSITY**

All students — including White and Asian students — benefit from the opportunity to learn from teachers of different races and ethnicities. Educator diversity is especially critical for students of color. Research shows that students of color who have had a teacher of the same race or ethnicity are more likely to attend school regularly, perform higher on end-of-year assessments, graduate high school, and consider college.

The educators in Maryland’s schools do not reflect the diversity of its families and students.

Although only 38 percent of students in Maryland are White, 74 percent of teachers and 61 percent of principals are White.

Source: Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Curriculum, Research, Assessment, and Accountability. Maryland Public School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender and Number of Schools, September 2017, and Professional Staff by Assignment, Race/Ethnicity and Gender, Maryland Public Schools, October 2017.
A RACE-FOCUSED EQUITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN MARYLAND

The state must explicitly address these racial inequities in access to excellent teaching by, for example:

- Ensuring that students of color are not disproportionately taught by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers.

- Promoting teacher and principal diversity by explicitly addressing preparation, recruitment, and retention of educators of color.

- Ensuring teacher preparation programs prepare future educators to succeed in schools serving high concentrations of students of color.

- Using career ladders, compensation, and investments in working conditions to transform teaching jobs in high need or “hard to staff” schools into expert positions that teachers grow into upon proof of exemplary service.

- Differentiating educator planning and collaboration time according to school and student need.

- Ensuring only principals with a proven track record of success are given the privilege of leading high need or “hard to staff” schools.
Inequities in *Rigorous College & Career Pathways* in Maryland

**TOP TAKEAWYS IN RIGOROUS COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS**

1: Dual enrollment programs serve fewer students of color.
2: Black and Latino students are underrepresented among AP exam-takers.
3: Maryland prepares fewer Black and Latino students to pass an AP exam.
4: CTE programs underserve Black and Latino students compared with their White peers.

Participation and success in rigorous coursework such as dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, and high-quality career and technical education (CTE) opportunities increase access to postsecondary opportunities. Today, students of color are given fewer of these opportunities than their peers in Maryland. The state has the opportunity — and responsibility — to address these inequities.

**DUAL ENROLLMENT PARTICIPATION**

Dual enrollment allows students to explore interests through classes generally not available at high schools, demonstrate college readiness, and get a head start on earning a postsecondary degree. While dual enrollment programs in Maryland have expanded over the years, only 4 percent of Maryland high school students in 2015-16 were enrolled in these programs. Students of color are even less likely to be given these opportunities than their peers.

**Dual enrollment programs serve fewer students of color.**

In 2015-16, White students were nearly twice as likely as Black students and 2.5 times more likely than Latino students to participate in dual enrollment.

![STATEWIDE DUAL ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGES, 2015-16](image)

*Source: Maryland Longitudinal Data System, Statewide Trends in Dual Enrollment in Maryland Public High Schools Data Table, NCES Common Core of Data, and 2017 Maryland Report Card, 2005 to 2017 Absent More than 20 Days for Grades 9–12.*
ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMS

The Advanced Placement program is designed to provide high school students with a head start on their college education. If students take the course and pass the exam, they can receive college credit, saving a lot of money. But in Maryland, access to these opportunities — and success in them — is far from equal.

**Black and Latino students are underrepresented among AP exam takers**

Black students were particularly underrepresented — they represented 35% of all high school students, but were only 18% of students who took at least one AP exam.

**Black and Latino students are less likely to pass an AP exam.**

While 62% of all AP exams taken by Maryland students received a score of 3 or above, only 34% of exams taken by Black students and 54% of exams taken by Latino students earned a passing score. Clearly, our schools are not preparing Black and Latino students for success on AP exams.

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**HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND AP TEST-TAKERS**

- Black: 35% enrollment, 18% test-takers
- Latino: 13% enrollment, 11% test-takers
- White: 41% enrollment, 51% test-takers

*Source: College Board, Archive Data-2016, AP Program Participation and Performance Data, Student Score Distributions 2016 and Maryland Report Card, 1993 to 2017 Enrollment for Grades 9-12.*

**PERCENTAGE OF AP EXAMS WITH SCORES 3 OR ABOVE**

- All Students: 62%
- Black: 34%
- Latino: 54%
- White: 68%

*Source: College Board, Archive Data-2016, AP Program Participation and Performance Data, Student Score Distributions 2016.*
**CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

High-quality career and technical education (CTE) can provide valuable preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce. But in Maryland, CTE programs are providing Black and Latino CTE students with fewer meaningful skills and outcomes than White CTE students.

**CTE programs underserve Black and Latino students as compared with White students.**

In 2016–17, Black and Latino students who “concentrated” in CTE were less likely than their peers to pass a technical assessment or attain college credit through their program.

Source: Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Career and College Readiness, CTE Data Dashboard.

Note: “Technical Skill” attainment refers to the successful passing of a technical assessment (industry certification) and/or attainment of college credit aligned to a specific CTE program area.
A RACE-FOCUSED EQUITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN MARYLAND

The state must address racial gaps in access to rigorous college and career pathway opportunities by…

✓ Expanding AP and dual enrollment offerings, especially in schools and districts serving high percentages of students of color.

✓ Eliminating racial disparities in participation in advanced coursework by, for example, increasing student and parent/family awareness of opportunities and removing barriers to access such as applications, fees, or teacher recommendation requirements.

✓ Identifying and implementing policy and practice changes to ensure that AP and CTE courses offered to students of color are high quality and address today’s inequities in exam passage rates.

✓ Leveraging the Skills Standards Board and CTE Subcabinet to ensure that students of color are participating and succeeding in high-quality CTE programs.

✓ Holding schools and districts accountable for increasing access to and success in these courses for historically underserved groups of students, including students of color.
Inequities in Achievement in Maryland

TOP TAKEAWAYS IN ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

1: Schools prepare fewer students of color for success than their White peers.
2: Racial disparities persist regardless of family income.
3: Racial/ethnic and income gaps exist in postsecondary enrollment rates.
4: Disparities in opportunity begin before children enter kindergarten and continue through K-12.
5: Schools serving the most students of color rely more on inexperienced teachers.

Maryland has long prided itself on its education system. A deeper look at the data, however, shows that statewide averages mask deep inequities in opportunity and achievement for certain groups of students. Across measures, gaps exist between students of color and White students, as well as between low-income students and higher income students. What’s more, racial inequities persist among students of similar family income levels.

To be clear, these disparities are in no way a reflection of differences in students’ ability to learn — rather, they are a reflection of how we organize our schools and shortchange certain students when it comes to critical educational opportunities/resources from early childhood through high school. With the pending recommendations from the Kirwan Commission, the state has the opportunity to reshape the education system to eliminate persistent income and racial inequities. The future of the state depends on it.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS AND GRADUATION

Schools prepare fewer students of color for success than their White peers.

On both state assessment results and graduation rates, schools demonstrate lower outcomes for Black, Latino, and low-income students than for their White and higher income peers.

![MET OR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS, 4TH GRADE READING](chart)

![MET OR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS, ALGEBRA I](chart)
Racial disparities persist regardless of family income.

In fact, racial disparities are sometimes largest among higher income students. For example, in Algebra I, 11% of Black students from low-income families met benchmarks, compared to 29% of White students from low-income families. Among students from higher income families, 22% of Black students met benchmarks, compared with 62% of White students. Racial disparities are two times larger among higher income than among low-income students.
**MET OR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS - ALGEBRA I**

![Bar graph showing MET OR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS - ALGEBRA I](image)

**FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES 2017**

![Bar graph showing FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES 2017](image)

Source: Maryland State Department of Education. [2017 Maryland Report Card](link)
POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

A postsecondary degree is becoming increasingly important to compete in today’s economy. A postsecondary education can lead to higher earnings, greater wealth over time, and thus pathways to the middle class.

Racial/ethnic and income gaps exist in postsecondary enrollment rates.

In the graduating class of 2016, White students were more likely than other racial groups to enroll in college within one year of graduation. This disparity is even greater among higher income students, where 85% of White students enrolled in college compared with only 49% of Latino students and 50% of Black students. Low-income students on average enroll in college at lower rates than their higher income peers, but Black low-income students are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education than low-income students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WITH POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT WITHIN ONE YEAR AFTER GRADUATION, BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2015-16

Source: Maryland State, College Status, Nationwide College Enrollment
INEQUITIES IN OPPORTUNITY IN MARYLAND

These disparities in outcomes in Maryland are directly related to disparities in opportunity to learn. Students of color are much less likely to receive access to the resources they need.

These disparities begin before children enter kindergarten.

Latino children are much less likely to have access to early childhood education than their White peers.

And the inequities continue through K-12.

The more students of color a district serves, the more underfunded the district is. As the percentage of students of color increases, the gap between the funding amount the state considers adequate and the amount a district actually receives gets worse. The two districts that serve the greatest percentages of students of color, Baltimore City and Prince George’s County, have gaps in funding that are more than $3,000 less per pupil than what the state considers adequate per pupil expenditure.
**Schools serving the most students of color rely more on inexperienced teachers.**

Schools serving the most students of color have more than twice the share of first-year teachers than the schools serving the fewest students of color.

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**Black students are less likely to have access to Advanced Placement programs.**

Black students represent 35% of high school students, but only 14% of AP test-takers in Maryland. White students, on the other hand, are 41% of high school students, but represent 54% of AP test-takers.

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*Source: The Education Trust analysis of data from the 2015–16 Civil Rights Data Collection and the 2015–16 Common Core of Data.*

*Source: College Board, Archive Data-2016, AP Program Participation and Performance Data, [Student Score Distributions 2016](#)*
A RACE-FOCUSED EQUITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN MARYLAND

The state must explicitly address these inequities in opportunity and achievement by, for example:

- Ensuring that districts and schools serving high concentrations of students of color and low income students have the resources they need — from early childhood education opportunities, to a strong and diverse teacher workforce, to sufficient per pupil funding and equitable access to college and career readiness pathways.

- Making timely data on racial inequities in achievement — and in access to critical resources — transparent and readily available to parents, community members, researchers, and policymakers.

- Holding adults at every level accountable for disrupting these patterns of inequity through the state’s school rating system, governance responsibilities, and other levers.

This document outlines inequities in opportunities in Maryland schools at only the highest level. Please see our fact sheets on inequities in access to early childhood education, high quality teachers and leaders, equitable funding, and rigorous college and career pathways for more detailed data documenting the problems, and for policy recommendations in each area.
Accountability for All Groups in Maryland

TOP TAKEAWAYS IN ACCOUNTABILITY

1: Maryland’s 1-5 star ratings do not incentivize schools to improve outcomes for all groups of students.

2: It’s not clear what schools that are identified as consistently underserving one or more student groups will need to do to improve — or what support the state and its districts will provide.

3: The state does not hold districts responsible for their role in improving schools.

A school accountability system is one of the most powerful levers a state has for incentivizing changes in practice in districts and schools. Although accountability systems themselves don’t close achievement gaps — only the hard work of educators and students can do that — a well-designed system can send a clear message that to be considered “good,” a school must be improving outcomes for all groups of students, including students of color and students from low-income families. Unfortunately, Maryland’s current system falls short of these goals. The state has the opportunity to strengthen Maryland’s accountability system to prompt action in, and direct resources and supports to, schools that consistently underserve one or more groups of students.

Maryland recently put in place a new school accountability system to comply with requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). State leaders plan to measure school performance using a variety of student outcome indicators and assign each school a rating of 1 to 5 stars. The state will also, separately, identify schools that are really low-performing for students overall or consistently underperforming for one or more groups of students for support and improvement. The state has not, however, explained what schools identified for underserving one or more groups of students will need to do as a result of identification or what resources and support they can expect to receive.

**Maryland’s 1-5 star ratings do not incentivize schools to improve outcomes for all groups of students.**

Maryland’s 1-5 star ratings are based solely on schoolwide averages, which can mask big disparities in outcomes and opportunity to learn between student groups within the same school. As a result, schools can receive high ratings without actually serving students of color, low-income students, English learners, and/or students with disabilities well.

Consider, for example, this actual middle school in Maryland:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENT OF STUDENTS MEETING OR EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS, ELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maryland’s school ratings would give this school credit for getting 63 percent of students to grade level in English/Language arts — and ignore the fact that the school gets only one third of its Black students and one quarter of its Latino students to proficiency.

Maryland will, separately from the star rating system, identify schools that consistently underserve one or more groups of students. But these schools can still get a 5-star rating, sending mixed messages to educators and parents.

Moreover, it’s not clear what schools that are identified as consistently underserving one or more students groups will need to do to improve — or what support the state and its districts will provide.

As required by law, Maryland’s ESSA plan explains how the state will identify schools that consistently underperform for one or more student groups for targeted support and improvement. But not only can these schools still receive a high rating, the plan does not explain what these schools are required to do, or how the state and districts will support them.

Although identification is important, what happens once schools are identified matters as much, if not more. The state should specify what steps these schools will need to take — including analyzing data to understand in-school disparities in opportunity to understand what is causing underperformance, identifying evidence-based interventions for improvement, and implementing those interventions with fidelity. The state should require continuous engagement with families and the community throughout this process. And the state should specify what it will do — and require districts to do — to support these schools. For example, the state could assist with the analysis of in-school inequities, develop needs assessment and improvement planning templates, share examples of evidence-based interventions for specific common challenges, and provide funding and professional development to support the work.

The state does not hold districts responsible for their role in improving school performance.

Districts make many decisions that affect day-to-day operations of their schools and can both support and derail improvement. Currently, however, Maryland’s accountability system focuses entirely on schools — the state does not have a public, transparent mechanism for holding districts responsible for their role in improving student outcomes and eliminating disparities in opportunity and achievement. A district accountability system can increase transparency and incentivize districts to direct more resources and support to their highest need schools.

A RACE-FOCUSED EQUITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN MARYLAND

The state must push districts and schools to improve learning experiences and outcomes for students of color by…

- Requiring that the school ratings be based on how well the school is serving all groups of students.
- Establishing clear requirements for what schools identified for targeted support and improvement need to do, and specifying how the state and districts will support them.
- Requiring meaningful, ongoing consultation with families and community members throughout the school improvement process.
- Establishing an accountability system that holds districts accountable for their role in improving student outcomes and eliminating disparities in opportunity and achievement.