

**MEMORANDUM**

July 10, 2014

TO: Education Committee

FROM: Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Senior Legislative Analyst *EBT*  
Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: **Worksession on OLO Report 2014-7: *Performance of Montgomery County Public Schools' High Schools – A FY 2014 Update***

On July 14, the Education Committee will hold a worksession on Office of Legislative Oversight Report 2014-7, which the Council received and released on April 8, 2014. Councilmembers are asked to bring their copies of this report to the worksession. Extra copies of the full report are available in LIS. This report is also accessible on-line at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo).

Staff recommends the following worksession agenda:

- Overview of the report by OLO staff;
- Comments and presentation from MCPS representatives; and
- Committee worksession on issues identified for discussion.

The Executive Summary of OLO's report is attached on © 1. Written comments received from the Superintendent on the final draft of the report are attached on © 5.

The following representatives of Montgomery County Public Schools are scheduled to attend the ED Committee worksession:

- Phil Kauffman, Board of Education President
- Joshua Starr, Superintendent
- Kimberly Statham, Deputy Superintendent
- Mildred Charley-Green, Principal, Northwood High School

Additionally, the following Board of Education Members and MCPS staff will also be in the audience and available to address questions:

- Patricia O'Neill, Board of Education Vice President
- Shirley Brandman, Board of Education Member
- Mike Durso, Board of Education Member
- Judy Docca, Board of Education Member
- Chris Garran, Associate Superintendent, High Schools
- Darryl Williams, Associate Superintendent, Middle Schools
- LaVerne Kimball, Associate Superintendent, Elementary Schools

- Timothy Warner, Chief Community Engagement Officer
- Nicola Diamond, Executive Director, Office of the Chief Operating Officer
- Doug Prouty, President, Montgomery County Education Association
- Erick Lang, Associate Superintendent, Curriculum and Instructional Programs
- Maria Navarro, Chief Academic Officer

#### **A. Project Background, Purpose, and Methodology**

The Northeast Consortium comprised of Blake, Paint Branch, and Springbrook High Schools began in 1998 and the Downcounty Consortium comprised of Montgomery Blair, Einstein, Kennedy, Northwood, and Wheaton High Schools began in 2005. If space is available, students residing within each consortium have the option of attending another high school beyond their home school.

MCPS created its high school consortiums to address overcrowding, support integration, improve student achievement, and narrow the achievement gap. To achieve these goals, each consortium in 2009 employed three sets of strategies:

- *Expanded signature programs* such as International Baccalaureate, technology, and performing arts programs to promote student engagement and achievement;
- *Freshmen academies* to improve the transition and performance of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students; and
- *School choice* to enable students to access signature programs not available in their home schools.

As noted in OLO's 2009 report<sup>1</sup>, neither consortium improved racial or economic integration. Progress in accelerating student performance, however, was mixed with the Downcounty Consortium achieving greater gains than the Northeast Consortium whose progress more closely mirrored district-wide trends. A key limitation of OLO's 2009 analysis was the inability to compare the performance of students in consortia high schools to students enrolled in other MCPS high schools.

OLO's current high school report responds to the County Council's request to understand whether MCPS' high school consortiums have achieved progress in reducing minority or socio-economic isolation or have accelerated student performance since our original report. This report improves upon the original, however, by comparing changes in the demographics and performance of students enrolled in 11 consortia and other high-poverty high schools<sup>2</sup> to students enrolled in MCPS' remaining 14 high schools. OLO grouped the eight consortia high schools and three other high-poverty high schools for analysis in the 2014 report because they have similar demographics and employ similar strategies to accelerate student achievement. So, unlike OLO's 2009 report, this report compares MCPS' high-poverty high schools to its low-poverty high schools.

Overall, this report describes student enrollment trends by race, ethnicity, and income among MCPS' high-poverty and low-poverty high schools. This report also describes student performance data and trends by school type across the following seven measures:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo/resources/files/2009-4.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> These 11 campuses include the eight Northeast and Downcounty Consortiums high schools and three other high-poverty high schools that utilize "consortia-like" target strategies (signature programs and/or freshmen academies) to accelerate student achievement: Gaithersburg, Seneca Valley, and Watkins Mill high schools.

- *On-time graduation*
- *Academic eligibility for the school year*
- *Algebra 2 completion by Grade 11 with a C or above*
- *A score of 3 or above on an Advanced Placement exam*
- *A score of 1,650 or above on the SAT or 24 or above on the ACT*
- *Dropping out of high school class (i.e. four-year cohort)*
- *One or more out-of-school suspensions*

## **B. Project Findings**

Six key findings emerged from OLO's review of data comparing enrollment and performance trends among MCPS' high-poverty and low-poverty high schools.<sup>3</sup> A summary of OLO's key findings is attached on © 2-4; the full chapter of findings is attached, beginning at © 9.

The first three findings focusing on the demographics of MCPS' high schools follow.

- 1. MCPS' 11 high-poverty high schools enrolled a majority of the school system's low-income, Black, and Latino high school students** but accounted for 42% of total enrollment. Students receiving free and reduced priced meals (FARMS) accounted for 2 in 5 students in high-poverty high schools compared to 1 in 6 students in low-poverty high schools; Black and Latino students accounted for 2 in 3 students in these schools compared to less than 1 in 3 among other high schools; and White and Asian students accounted for 1 in 4 students in these schools compared to nearly 2 in 3 students among other high schools.
- 2. MCPS' high schools have become more polarized by income**, with high-poverty high schools enrolling a smaller share of MCPS' middle class students - defined as students who were ineligible for FARMS - in 2013 than in 2010 and 2008.
- 3. MCPS' high schools have also become more polarized by race and ethnicity**, with high-poverty high schools enrolling a larger share of MCPS' Black and Latino students in 2013 than in 2010, while MCPS' low-poverty high schools enrolled a larger share of MCPS' White and Asian students in 2013 than in 2010.

It's worth noting that the increasing stratification of MCPS high schools by income, race, and ethnicity has occurred within an overall context of increased enrollment among students eligible for FARMS and Latino students, and decreased enrollment of middle class (non-FARMS) and White students. These changes have occurred disproportionately among MCPS' high-poverty high schools.

Our next set of findings focused on the performance of students in high-poverty high schools compared to those enrolled in low-poverty high schools. Like the demographic findings, there were three major performance findings that emerged from our report.

- 4. Students in low-poverty high schools achieved at higher levels than students in high-poverty high schools.** Students in low-poverty high schools were twice as likely to demonstrate college and career ready levels of performance on the SAT, ACT, and AP and were only half as likely to dropout of their high school or to be suspended.

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<sup>3</sup> FARMS rates for MCPS' high-poverty high schools ranged from 35% to 59% in 2013 while FARMS rates for low-poverty high schools ranged from less than 5% to 34%.

5. **Student subgroups in low-poverty high schools also achieved at higher levels than their peers in high-poverty high schools.** For example, low-income students in low-poverty high schools were more likely to meet college and career readiness benchmarks and less likely to demonstrate at-risk outcomes than their low-income peers in high-poverty high schools.
6. **The achievement gap among MCPS high schools widened across a majority of measures considered.** More specifically, the gap: widened on four measures – AP performance,<sup>4</sup> SAT/ACT performance, academic eligibility, and out-of-school suspensions; narrowed on one measure – Algebra 2 by Grade 11 with a C or better; and remained the same for two measures – four year graduation and drop-out rates.

### C. Reactions to the Report

This report has received a fair amount of attention in the media, including a few op-ed pieces in the Washington Post that are included in this packet on © 21-26. This report has also spurred two community forums with members of the Montgomery County Civic Federation and the East County Advisory Community to discuss its findings and its local implications. A May 12th presentation to the Civic Federation from Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation describing the benefits of socio-economic integration and its potential in Montgomery County is attached on © 27-38.

This report also generated criticisms from the Superintendent and some Board of Education members about the methods and/or semantics used in this report although the report’s key findings regarding the demographics and performance of MCPS high schools remain uncontested. Specific criticisms from MCPS reflected in the Superintendent’s letter beginning on © 5 include the following:

- MCPS is not responsible for the economic or racial integration of County schools. While indeed wealth in the County is “unequally distributed geographically” as noted by the Superintendent, the Board of Education nevertheless has a Quality Integrated Education Policy (ACD) that seeks to “promote diversity so that the isolation of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups is avoided and the full benefits of integration are achieved.”<sup>5</sup> Thus it is BOE policy that MCPS has a role in promoting integrated schools.
- OLO should have compared the eight consortia high schools to the three other high-poverty high schools rather than compare the school system’s high-poverty high schools to their low-poverty peers. This criticism begs the question of whether the consortia were intended to improve the performance of one set of high-poverty high schools relative to another set, or were they a part of an overall strategy to improve outcomes among students in high-poverty high schools relative to low-poverty high schools?
- OLO erroneously attributes “White flight” as the cause for the increasing stratification of MCPS high schools. To clarify, the report *suggests* that a flight of middle-class, Asian, and White students may be drivers of the increasing stratification among MCPS high schools since high-poverty high schools have lost a greater share of these subgroups than low-poverty high schools. Discerning the reasons for the disproportionate decline of these subgroups among MCPS’ high-poverty high schools was beyond the scope of the report.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> As noted in Section D, the achievement gap also widened for AP/International Baccalaureate performance.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/acd.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> MCPS, however, in its FY2014 Educational Facilities Master Plan and Amendments to the FY 2013-2018 Capital Improvement Program states that housing turnover among communities with “little race and ethnic diversity” resulting from “a wave of immigration” accounted for the ethnic make-up of its focus (high-poverty elementary)

**D. AP/IB Performance Addendum**

Qualifying AP and International Baccalaureate exam scores among graduates are included among the college and career readiness measures tracked under MCPS’ Districtwide Milestones.<sup>7</sup> In April 2014 as OLO Report 2014-7 was nearing completion, MCPS’ Office of Shared Accountability shared AP/IB performance data with OLO for the classes of 2011 - 2013. This section summarizes this data. An addendum to the report with this updated data is presented on © 18-20.

**Current AP/IB performance.** As noted in Charts 1 and 2 below, in 2013:

- 53% of all MCPS graduates earned one or more qualifying AP or IB scores compared to 51% of all graduates earning one or more qualifying AP scores alone;
- The performance gap between high-poverty and low-poverty high schools on AP/IB performance is smaller than the gap on AP performance alone (26% vs. 28%); and
- The relative performance (i.e. performance ratios) of high-poverty high schools compared to low-poverty high schools is also higher for AP/IB performance than AP performance for all students and most student subgroups.

**Chart 1: Current Performance by School Type on AP and AP/IB Measures, 2013**

Measures	All Schools	High-Poverty High Schools (H)	Low-Poverty High Schools (L)	Performance Gap (L-H)	Performance Ratio (H/L)*
AP performance	51.4%	34.7%	62.6%	27.9%	55%
AP/IB performance	52.9%	37.3%	63.2%	25.9%	59%

\*How likely students in high-poverty schools meet benchmarks compared to peers in low-poverty schools.

**Chart 2: Performance Ratios by Subgroup\* on AP and AP/IB Measures, 2013**

Measures	All Students	FARMS	Non-FARMS	Asian	Black	Latino	White
AP performance	55%	82%	61%	64%	65%	63%	88%
AP/IB performance	59%	90%	64%	70%	75%	68%	88%

\*How likely subgroups in high-poverty schools meet benchmarks compared to peers in low-poverty schools.

**Trends in AP/IB performance.** As noted in Chart 3 on the next page, the gap in AP/IB performance between high- and low-poverty high schools widened, but not as much as the gap between high- and low-poverty high schools on AP performance alone. For example, the gap in AP performance by school type increased by nine points from 19 to 29 points from 2010 to 2013 while the AP/IB performance gap increased by four points from 22 to 26 points from 2011 to 2013.

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schools in FY13 where Black and Latino students comprised 72% of focus school enrollment while Asian and White students accounted for 69% of non-focus school enrollment (see chart and text on Page 2-6).

[http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/planning/Archive\\_MP14\\_Complete.pdf](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/planning/Archive_MP14_Complete.pdf) Many if not most of MCPS’ focus elementary schools are located in the 11 high-poverty high school clusters.

<sup>7</sup> AP scores of 3 or higher or IB scores of 4 or higher. See <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/framework/> for MCPS milestones.

**Chart 3: Trends in the MCPS High School Achievement Gap on AP and AP/IB Measures**

Measures	High Schools	Base Year	Current Year
<b>AP performance, 2010 - 2013</b>	High-Poverty (H)	37.8%	34.7%
	Low-Poverty (L)	56.6%	62.6%
	<b>Gap (L-H)</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>
	<b>Performance Ratio (H/L)</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>AP/IB performance, 2011 - 2013</b>	High-Poverty (H)	37.4%	37.3%
	Low-Poverty (L)	59.1%	63.2%
	<b>Gap (L-H)</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>25.9%</b>
	<b>Performance Ratio (H/L)</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>59%</b>

**E. Best Practices for Narrowing the Achievement Gap**

While noting the limitations of the current research on best practices for narrowing the achievement gap, OLO’s FY13 Achievement Gap Report<sup>8</sup> describes ten school- and classroom-based best practices for narrowing the gap that have been recognized by researchers. As shown in Chart 4 below, nine of these 10 best practices align with best practices for closing the achievement gap offered by Joseph Murphy in his handbook for closing the achievement gap:<sup>9</sup>

**Chart 4: Research-Based K-12 Practices for Narrowing the Achievement Gap**

Best Practices	OLO Report 2013-4	Murphy’s Review
<b>School-based Practices</b>	Desegregate/integrate schools	Mix students by race and class
	Equalize funding	
	Reduce class sizes	Reduce class size in the early grades, especially in highly impacted schools
	Enhance teacher quality	Ensure that struggling students and subgroups have excellent teachers
	Improve curriculum	Ensure that low-income and Black children complete a rigorous curriculum
	Instructional interventions	Provide additional instructional support to those in need
<b>Classroom-based Practices</b>	High expectations	Develop a culture of high academic press
	Quality teaching	Provide professional development to help teachers close achievement gaps
	Caring relationships	Develop a culture of high personalization
	Improve learning postures ( <i>prime students to become more active learners</i> )	Feature balanced instruction emphasizing basic skills, teaching for understanding, and culturally responsive pedagogy

<sup>8</sup> See OLO Report 2013-4 at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo/resources/files/oloreport2013-4.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See Murphy, J., *The Educator’s Handbook for Understanding and Closing Achievement Gaps*. Corwin, 2010.

Murphy also offers three additional strategies for closing the achievement gap:

- Develop a cohesive system for collecting, analyzing, and using data to understand, address, and close achievement gaps;
- Build linkages between home and school that focus on student learning; and
- Reduce school size in communities with high concentrations of low-income and African American students.

OLO Report 2013-4 also describes three “outside of school” best practices for narrowing the achievement gap based on its research review:

- Expand early childhood education and extended learning;
- Enhance parenting practices that correlate with academic achievement; and
- Reduce household inequality.

#### **F. Recommended Discussion Issues**

OLO offers two sets of discussion questions to help frame the ED Committee’s conversations with MCPS representatives during worksession. More details on OLO’s recommended issues for discussion are described in full beginning at © 15.

- 1. What is MCPS’ vision for using racial and/or socio-economic integration to narrow the achievement gap between low- and high-poverty high schools?** Given the initial funding of both high school consortiums with federal desegregation funds and the Board’s “Quality Integrated Education” policy, OLO recommends the County Council discuss with MCPS what strategies, if any, are underway to address the increasing racial, ethnic, and economic polarization of MCPS’ high-poverty high schools and the potential role of MCPS’ reexamination of its school choice policies toward this end.
- 2. What other strategies is MCPS using to narrow the achievement gap between low- and high-poverty high schools?** According to MCPS, the school system is utilizing multi-year budgeting to focus resources on the achievement gap. For example, the FY15 budget added 15 high school focus teachers that will mostly serve high-poverty high schools. Further, three MCPS high-poverty high schools – Kennedy, Springbrook, and Watkins Mill – are also “Innovation Schools” that according to MCPS receive specialized support and professional development aimed at narrowing the achievement gap.

To improve the County Council’s understanding and awareness of MCPS’ approach to narrowing the achievement gap among high schools, OLO recommends that the County Council discuss with MCPS representatives:

- What strategies are underway to improve student performance among MCPS’ high-poverty high schools, particularly among the measures reviewed in this report? How well do these strategies align with best practices for closing the achievement gap?

- If funding and resources were not a concern, what actions would MCPS take and/or advocate to narrow the achievement gap among high schools? From MCPS' perspective, which actions would offer the biggest impact? Which actions are most under MCPS' control?
- To what extent has MCPS realigned existing resources to support improved performance in high-poverty high schools?
- How will MCPS use data and evaluation to determine the efficacy of its efforts to narrow the achievement gap among its high- and low-poverty high schools?

ATTACHMENTS	BEGINS AT:
Executive Summary of OLO Report 2014-7	© 1
Comments from the Superintendent Joshua Starr, April 3, 2014	© 5
Chapter V: Summary of Findings and Recommended Issues for Discussion	© 9
OLO Report 2014-7 Addendum: Trends in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Performance, 2011-2013	© 18
Editorial Board: Montgomery County schools must attack the achievement gap, April 12, 2014 - The Washington Post	© 21
Karen Chenoweth: Montgomery County schools dance around needed changes, April 18, 2014 - The Washington Post	© 23
Richard D. Kahlenberg: An opening for Montgomery's schools to lead the way for opportunity for all, April 25, 2014 - The Washington Post	© 25
Richard D. Kahlenberg: Possibilities for Socioeconomic School Integration in Montgomery County, MD, presentation to the Montgomery County Civic Federation, May 12, 2014 – Rockville, MD	© 27

# Performance of MCPS' High Schools – A FY 2014 Update

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Executive Summary of Office of Legislative Oversight Report Number 2014-7

April 8, 2014

This report updates OLO's 2009 high school consortia report by describing changes in the demographics and performance of Montgomery County Public Schools' 25 comprehensive high schools. OLO's original report found that neither the Northeast nor the Downcounty Consortium enhanced racial or economic integration, but each may have narrowed the achievement gap among some measures of student performance at the start of each consortium.

This current report takes a wider view than the original to consider demographic and performance changes among 11 consortia and consortia-like high schools compared to MCPS' 14 other high schools. In effect, this report compares MCPS' high-poverty high schools to its low-poverty high schools.

Overall, OLO finds an increase in the stratification of MCPS high schools by income, race, and ethnicity. OLO also finds that the achievement gap between high- and low-poverty high schools has widened among a majority of measures considered. With high-poverty consortia and consortia-like high schools utilizing similar approaches to advance student achievement (e.g. expanded signature programs and freshman academies), OLO finds that MCPS' approach is not working as intended.

**MCPS HIGH SCHOOLS:** In this report, MCPS' 11 high-poverty high schools are referred to as "consortia and consortia-like schools" to reflect their common demographics and strategies to engage students. These high schools consist of Blake, Paint Branch, and Springbrook in the Northeast Consortium; Montgomery Blair, Northwood, Kennedy, Einstein, and Wheaton in the Downcounty Consortium; and Gaithersburg, Watkins Mill, and Seneca Valley high schools.

MCPS' other 14 high schools, referred to as non-consortia or low-poverty high schools in this report, consist of Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Churchill, Clarksburg, Damascus, Walter Johnson, Magruder, Richard Montgomery, Northwest, Poolesville, Quince Orchard, Rockville, Sherwood, Whitman, and Wootton high schools.

**RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND ECONOMIC ISOLATION:** In 2013, a majority of the MCPS' low-income, Black, and Latino students attended MCPS' 11 consortia and consortia-like high schools. Among these schools:

- Students receiving free and reduced priced meals (FARMS) accounted for 2 in 5 students compared to 1 in 6 students among MCPS' other, low-poverty non-consortia high schools;
- Blacks and Latinos accounted for 2 in 3 students compared to less than 1 in 3 students among MCPS' other high schools; and
- Whites and Asians accounted for 1 in 4 students compared to nearly 2 in 3 students among MCPS' other high schools.

Since 2010, the economic, racial, and ethnic stratification of students among MCPS high schools has increased. More specifically, the share of Black and Latino students in MCPS' consortia and consortia-like high schools grew while the share of White, Asian, and non-FARMS students in MCPS' low-poverty non-consortia high schools grew.

**ACHIEVEMENT GAP AMONG HIGH SCHOOLS:** To consider the progress of students among MCPS' high schools, OLO reviewed data across seven measures of performance described in the table below. Most of these measures align with current MCPS' career and college readiness milestones.

Performance Measures	Definitions	MCPS Milestone?
<b>Graduation</b>	Students who graduate with their four-year cohort.	Yes
<b>Academic Eligibility</b>	Students eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities for the school year.	No
<b>Algebra 2 by Grade 11</b>	Students who completed this course with a grade of C or above by Grade 11.	Yes
<b>AP Performance</b>	Graduates earning a score of three or above on at least one AP exam.	Yes
<b>SAT/ACT Performance</b>	Graduates earning a score of 1,650 or above on the SAT or a score of 24 or above on the ACT.	Yes
<b>Dropout</b>	Students who dropped out of their four-year cohort in high school.	No
<b>Suspensions</b>	Students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions in a school year.	No

Table S-1 summarizes data on the current performance of MCPS students by high school type on these measures. Overall, OLO finds that an achievement gap exists by high school type within MCPS where compared to their peers in low-poverty high schools, students in high-poverty consortia and consortia-like high schools are:

- 91% as likely to graduate on-time;
- 76% as likely to maintain their academic eligibility for the entire school year;
- 71% as likely to complete Algebra 2 by Grade 11 with a C or better;
- 55% as likely to earn at least one qualifying score of 3 or above on an AP exam;
- 44% as likely to score 1,650 or above on the SAT or 24 or above on the ACT;
- 189% as likely to drop out of their high school class; and
- 207% as likely to experience an out-of-school suspension.

**Table S-1: Current Performance by School Type**

Performance Measures	Consortia & Consortia-Like Schools (C)	Non-Consortia Schools (N)	Performance Gap (N-C)	Performance Ratio (C/N)*
<b>Graduation rate, 2013</b>	83.5%	91.7%	<b>8.2%</b>	91%
<b>Academic eligibility rate, 2012</b>	62.0%	82.1%	<b>20.1%</b>	76%
<b>Algebra 2 by Grade 11 rate, 2012</b>	50.2%	70.4%	<b>20.2%</b>	71%
<b>AP performance rate, 2013</b>	34.7%	62.6%	<b>27.9%</b>	55%
<b>SAT/ACT performance rate, 2013</b>	23.0%	52.7%	<b>29.7%</b>	44%
<b>Dropout rate, 2013</b>	8.7%	4.6%	<b>-4.2%</b>	189%
<b>Out-of-school suspensions rate, 2013</b>	5.8%	2.8%	<b>-3.0%</b>	207%

\*Interpreted as how likely consortia & consortia-like students meet the benchmark compared to non-consortia students.

**HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT GAP AMONG SUBGROUPS:** OLO also finds an achievement gap among subgroups by school type where subgroups in consortia and consortia-like high schools are less likely to meet college readiness benchmarks and more likely to demonstrate at-risk outcomes than subgroup peers in non-consortia high schools. For example, the data in Table S-2 show that:

- FARMS graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were only 58% as likely as their non-consortia peers to earn a SAT score of 1,650 or above or an ACT score of 24 or above.
- Non-FARMS, Asian, Black, and Latino graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were only 61-65% as likely as their non-consortia peers to earn one or more qualifying AP scores.
- Non-FARMS students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were more than twice as likely as their non-consortia peers to receive an out-of-school suspension.

**Table S-2: Performance Ratios by School Type and Subgroup**

Performance Measures	FARMS	Non-FARMS	Asian	Black	Latino	White
Graduation rate, 2013 <sup>^</sup>	101%	92%	98%	101%	89%	97%
Academic eligibility, 2012	86%	81%	88%	84%	79%	92%
Algebra 2 completion by Grade 11, 2012	94%	77%	88%	94%	76%	89%
AP performance, 2013	82%	61%	64%	65%	63%	88%
SAT/ACT performance, 2013	58%	55%	67%	62%	35%	88%
Dropout rate, 2013	92%	231%	100%*	86%	132%	128%
Out-of-school suspensions, 2013	109%	211%	100%*	107%	142%	100%*

<sup>^</sup> Calculated as % of subgroup students enrolled in consortia and consortia-like schools who graduated on time divided by the % of subgroup students enrolled in non-consortia schools who graduated on time.  
 \* 2013 values estimated because rates below 3% not reported

**HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT GAP TRENDS:** Across a majority of the measures considered, the achievement gap between high- and low-poverty high schools has widened over the past three to four years. For the remaining measures, the gap has either narrowed or remained the same. More specifically, the data show that the achievement gap by school type widened for –

- **AP Performance**, where graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 55% as likely as non-consortia graduates to meet this benchmark in 2013 compared to being 67% as likely in 2010.
- **SAT/ACT performance**, where graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 44% as likely as non-consortia graduates to meet this benchmark in 2013 compared to being 50% as likely in 2010.
- **Academic eligibility**, where students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 76% as likely as non-consortia peers to meet this benchmark in 2012 compared to being 78% as likely in 2009.
- **Out-of-school suspension**, where students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 207% as likely as non-consortia peers to have this outcome in 2013 compared to being 196% as likely in 2010.

The data also show that the achievement gap by school type narrowed or the stayed the same for -

- **Algebra 2 by Grade 11**, where students from consortia and consortia-like schools were 71% as likely as non-consortia students to meet this benchmark in 2012 compared to being 67% as likely in 2010.
- **Graduation Rates**, where students from consortia and consortia-like schools were 90-91% as likely as non-consortia students to meet this benchmark in both 2013 and 2010.
- **Dropout Rates**, where students from consortia and consortia-like schools were 189% as likely as non-consortia students to demonstrate this outcome in both 2013 and 2010.

#### RECOMMENDED DISCUSSION ISSUES:

OLO recommends the Council discuss with the Board of Education and MCPS leadership their goals for *improving student integration* and *narrowing the achievement gap* between low- and high-poverty high schools and the alignment between these goals and MCPS' operating budget.

As noted in the prior OLO report, MCPS' Northeast and Downcounty Consortiums began with a commitment and federal funding to promote integration to enhance student achievement among County students. These efforts aligned with the Board of Education's "Quality and Integrated Education Policy" to promote integrated schools. The goals of the high school consortiums also align with research indicating that Black and Latino students learn more in integrated schools and perform better in college attendance and employment.

Given the achievement gap between MCPS' high- and low-poverty high schools and the benefits of integration on student achievement, ***OLO recommends that the County Council discuss with MCPS its current vision for using integration as a strategy for narrowing the gap.***

With its FY15 budget request, MCPS also reports that narrowing the achievement gap remains a district-wide priority and that it is utilizing multi-year budgeting to focus resources. They note that their FY14 budget added 23 positions to high-poverty high schools to lower class sizes and their FY15 proposed budget requests funding for an additional 15 high school focus teachers in English language arts and mathematics. MCPS' also cites increased funding to support collaborations that serve children, its student support model, career lattice system, and 18.5 ESOL positions as strategic investments proposed for FY15 that focus on narrowing the achievement gap. Together, these proposals total approximately \$7 million in FY15.

To improve the County Council's oversight of MCPS appropriations aimed at narrowing the achievement gap, a review of MCPS' total \$2.3 billion budget proposed for FY15 is warranted. Toward this end, ***OLO also recommends that the County Council discuss with MCPS the allocation of its base budget funding to narrow the achievement gap with a specific focus on approaches being under-taken to improve achievement among high-poverty high schools and the efficacy of these efforts.***

For a complete copy of OLO-Report 2014-7, go to:  
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo/reports/2008.html>



# MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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MARYLAND

April 3, 2014



Dr. Chris Cihlar, Director  
Dr. Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Senior Legislative Analyst  
Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight  
Stella B. Werner Council Office Building  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Drs. Cihlar and Bonner-Tompkins:

Thank you for providing Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff members with the opportunity to review and provide comment on the draft Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report, *Performance of Montgomery County Public Schools' High Schools—A FY 2014 Update*. MCPS staff members who participated in this review appreciate the collaborative process used throughout the study and review of the report. Comments and suggestions provided by MCPS staff members during the technical review were incorporated where appropriate.

As you may know, I have included \$200,000 in my Fiscal Year 2015 budget for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review of current MCPS processes, policies, structures, resources and outcomes, among other things, that enable students to choose an option other than their home school. This review will, of course, include the Downcounty and Northeast consortiums. I believe that this forthcoming process will enable MCPS and our communities to engage in shared learning about what the current state is, and then develop a vision and plan for student choice in the future. This OLO report reaffirms what we have extensively discussed over the years and that has been highlighted in previous OLO reports—we have a longstanding and persistent achievement gap. As we have discussed with the Council on many occasions and as we explain below, addressing and eliminating the achievement gap is the most important priority of MCPS and we continue to allocate resources accordingly.

We do not take any issue with the facts as presented in the report, but we have strong reservations that the overall findings and outcomes presented in the follow-up report lack proper context and relevance to the original intent and rationale for grants to create the Northeast (NEC) and Downcounty (DCC) consortia. To provide a more complete understanding for readers of this report, we offer the following comments:

- Wealth in Montgomery County is unequally distributed geographically. The DCC and NEC communities have become important locations for families with limited means to reside and raise their children. There is little acknowledgement of this underlying demographic reality in Chapter III of the report, calling into question the finding that, "... MCPS has lost ground toward economically integrating its high school consortiums." It would be more complete to

Office of the Superintendent of Schools

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state that the larger increases in the number of students receiving Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) services at consortia high schools, compared to non-consortia high schools, is a function of the changing demographics of the communities served by the consortia high schools. It is not simply a failure of the consortia high schools to achieve economic integration. The same point applies to the study's finding that "... neither the NEC nor the DCC were able to reverse minority isolation or to maintain their White student enrollment." While schools exercise some influence on communities, clearly the consortia high schools are not in control of dramatic changes in the area that have followed immigration and increased race/ethnic diversity of the population over the last several years.

- Because consortia high schools serve a limited geographic area, it is problematic to compare demographic trends in these schools to trends in non-consortia high schools that serve very different geographic areas. As geographic differences are aligned with demographic variances in the county, consortia high schools should be assessed by their success within the context of the geographic area they serve. The comparison of consortia high schools to non-consortia high schools also could be problematic in that differences found may be due to factors other than the consortia features. An ideal study would compare the same high schools with and without the treatment of consortia implementation. Given these concerns, MCPS previously suggested that the OLO study compare the consortium schools with a set of schools with similar racial and economic demographics.
- MCPS has long embraced the tenet of avoiding minority group isolation. The federal government considers a school minority isolated if minority group students constitute more than 50 percent of the school's enrollment as defined by the Middle Schools Assistance Program.. The OLO report establishes a focus on the reduction in the percentage of non-Hispanic White students in the consortia high schools and, to a lesser degree, reductions in Asian students' percentages. Thus, the report concludes that integration goals are not succeeding and minority group isolation is occurring at consortia high schools. However, Table 5 in the OLO report—that identifies race/ethnic percentages of consortia high schools—clearly demonstrates very diverse student populations at the consortia high schools. Although the percentage of non-Hispanic White and Asian students is lower than that of African American and Hispanic students, this statistic does not translate to a lack of student diversity. Based on the data, I question the report's use of the term "segregated" and believe it is inconsistent with the data displayed in Table 5.
- Chapter I of the OLO report states that student performance goals in the federal grant for high school consortia included 1) reducing minority isolation, 2) strengthening student knowledge of academic subjects and vocational skills, 3) improving freshmen class performance by subgroup, and 4) improving student engagement by subgroup. These are the measures by which MCPS and the federal government evaluated implementation, progress, and success. It is important to avoid equating similar, yet slightly different descriptors when referencing intended or actual outcomes. The phrases "reducing minority isolation" and

“enhancing racial and economic integration” are similar, but should not be used interchangeably. Minority isolation was described earlier. Integration is the inclusion of more than one socioeconomic or racial/ethnic group in a school.

The conclusion that the changing demographics of consortia high schools reflect a “flight” of middle class, Asian, and non-Hispanic White students out of the consortia area is unsupported. Additionally, I am not clear as to whether there is an agreed upon definition of, or methodology for measuring “white flight.” The largest factor in the changing demographics of the consortium area is movement into the area of African American and Hispanic families. Non-Hispanic White enrollment has been trending down for 40 years in the school system as previous generations of these students have aged out of the school system and have been replaced by a diverse student population. In addition, the comment about high poverty and low poverty schools becoming more segregated fails to convey how most of the changes described are due to disparities in the spread of wealth and race/ethnicity across the county, as previously mentioned. Given these points, the comments made in Chapter III should be placed in the demographic context of the communities the consortia serve and the terms “flight” and “segregated,” should not be used, as they are unsupported.

In addition to providing the above comments, I think it is important to highlight MCPS’ efforts to close the achievement gap. These efforts are especially important in the schools examined in the OLO report, in which African American and Hispanic students constitute the highest percentage of enrollment.

Eliminating the achievement gap is at the core of our strategic priorities. During the course of many years, MCPS has employed a focused strategy of dismantling institutional barriers to rigorous coursework, disaggregating and analyzing data, and initiating conversations about ensuring equity. We allocate resources according to student need by investing more in schools with high needs. We continue to provide comprehensive supports for students and are building more community partnerships to meet the many and varied needs of our students and families. We also closely analyze which students are in which classes and monitor their performance, and we engage in intentional conversations about race and ethnicity. The work has yielded results, but as the demographic landscape continues to shift and the demands on students, teachers, and schools increase, significant work remains to be done.

MCPS’ awareness of the achievement gap between racial/ethnic groups among students receiving educational services such as FARMS, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Special Education programs has prompted action. We are deliberate in addressing variance in performance across and among different schools. MCPS has shifted the equity lens from the broad focus on system and school-level data to a specific focus on each and every student. By incorporating this refined focus, MCPS is able to accelerate progress. Content and delivery of curriculum, strong instruction, professional development, and an engaged staff and community are the key elements needed in order to facilitate change at the school level, in every

classroom, and for every student. Broader measures of social emotional learning—including knowledge of the arts, world languages, science, and civic engagement—are providing a more complete picture of how prepared our students are for the complex world in which they live. It tells us how well our schools and our communities are doing in providing students the knowledge and skills they need to become outstanding citizens.

The Montgomery County Board of Education's recommended Fiscal Year 2015 Operating Budget reaffirms our longstanding commitment to and specific plans for closing the achievement gap. The recommendation calls for the supplemental funds to encourage exemplary teachers to move to or stay in high needs schools; additional elementary school counselors, psychologists, and pupil personnel workers to work directly with impacted students; additional staff members in middle schools to provide focused support to ESOL students; high school focus teachers to reduce English and mathematics class sizes in the most impacted high schools; staff to improve mathematics teaching and learning; a redesign and strengthening of Alternative Programs; and funding to increase project-based learning at Wheaton High School.

The MCPS approach to closing the achievement gap continues to be our central priority. MCPS will continue to disaggregate and carefully study all data to ensure equitable access. Knowing and meeting the needs of each and every individual student is the key to improving student results; the addition of a student-centered instructional approach, enhanced by a stronger community commitment, will move MCPS closer to the ultimate goal of eliminating the achievement gap.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on this OLO report and we look forward to continuing our conversation with the County Council about ways we can work together to ensure that all children are prepared to thrive in their future.

Sincerely,



Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

JPS:jmc

Copy to:  
Mr. Leggett  
Mr. Rice  
Members of the Board of Education  
Executive Staff

## **CHAPTER V: Summary of Findings and Recommended Issues for Discussion**

The intent of this Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report is to improve the County Council's understanding of the performance of Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) high schools and high school consortiums in particular. Towards this end, this report updates OLO's 2009 consortia report<sup>20</sup> to describe demographic and performance trends among MCPS' consortia, consortia-like, and non-consortia high schools that are stratified by poverty levels.<sup>21</sup>

OLO's original consortia report found that MCPS' consortiums did not enhance racial or economic integration but may have narrowed the achievement gap among some measures of student performance at the start of each consortium. For this study, OLO reviews the performance of MCPS' consortia high schools together with the performance of three consortia-like campuses with demographics similar to the Northeast and Downcounty Consortiums – Gaithersburg, Seneca Valley, and Watkins Mill high schools. This study compares changes in demographics and performance between consortia and consortia-like schools to all of the other comprehensive high schools within MCPS referred to as non-consortia schools.<sup>22</sup> This study also reviews a narrower set of measures.

This chapter is presented in two parts to describe OLO's major project findings and recommended issues for discussion for the County Council with the Board of Education and MCPS leadership. Overall, OLO finds (1) an increasing stratification of MCPS high schools by income, race, and ethnicity; and (2) evidence of an achievement gap between high- and low-poverty high schools that has widened among a majority of measures reviewed. Thus, the components of MCPS' high school consortia model designed to offset the impact of poverty on student achievement - expanded signature programs and freshman academies in both consortia and consortia-like schools, coupled with student choice among the consortia schools – have not worked as intended.

### **A. Key Project Findings**

#### **Finding #1: Montgomery County's high schools are stratified by income, race, and ethnicity.**

OLO's review of data finds that MCPS' high schools are stratified by income, race, and ethnicity. Although the Northeast and Downcounty Consortia high schools and three consortia-like high schools enroll a minority of all MCPS high school students, they enroll a majority of the school system's Black, Latino, and low-income students receiving free and reduced price meals (FARMS). More specifically, in 2013:

- Students receiving FARMS accounted for 2 in 5 students enrolled in consortia and consortia-like high schools compared to 1 in 6 students enrolled among MCPS' other high schools;
- Black and Latino students accounted for 2 in 3 students enrolled in consortia and consortia-like high schools, but for less than 1 in 3 students enrolled among other MCPS high schools;
- White students accounted for 1 in 6 students enrolled in consortia and consortia-like high schools compared to 1 in 2 students enrolled in MCPS' other high schools.

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<sup>20</sup> See OLO Report 2009-4 (<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo/resources/files/2009-4.pdf>)

<sup>21</sup> MCPS' consortia and consortia-like high schools refer to its high-poverty high schools; the non-consortia high schools refer to MCPS' low-poverty high schools.

<sup>22</sup> The original study compared consortia schools to all MCPS high schools.

In this report, MCPS' 11 high-poverty, high schools are referred to as “consortia and consortia-like schools” because they are similar in their demographics and rely on some common strategies to enhance student achievement (e.g. expanded signature programs and freshmen academies). These high schools consist of Blake, Paint Branch, and Springbrook high schools in the Northeast Consortium; Montgomery Blair, Northwood, Kennedy, Einstein, and Wheaton high schools in the Downcounty County; and Gaithersburg, Watkins Mill, and Seneca Valley high schools.

MCPS' other 14 high schools enroll a majority of the school system's Asian, White, and non-FARMS populations. These schools are referred to as “non-consortia” and low-poverty high schools in this report and consist of the following high school campuses:

- Bethesda-Chevy Chase,
- Churchill,
- Clarksburg,
- Damascus,
- Walter Johnson,
- Magruder,
- Richard Montgomery,
- Northwest,
- Poolesville,
- Quince Orchard,
- Rockville,
- Sherwood,
- Whitman, and
- Wootton.

**Finding #2: MCPS' high schools have become more polarized by income, race, and ethnicity.**

OLO's original report found that the Northeast and Downcounty Consortiums did not achieve their economic or racial integration goals. With this report, OLO finds that MCPS continues to lose ground on its integration goals because its high schools have become more polarized by race, ethnicity, and income since 2010.

As noted in Table A on the next page, there have been shifts in enrollment where consortia and consortia-like high schools enroll a greater share of Black and Latino students in 2013 than in 2010 and a smaller share of non-FARMS students. In turn, the non-consortia schools enrolled a greater share of White, Asian, and non-FARMS students in 2013 than in 2010. These shifts in enrollment suggest a flight of middle-class, White, and Asian students from high-poverty, consortia and consortia-like high schools to low-poverty, non-consortia high schools. Thus, there has been an increasing polarization of MCPS high school enrollment by race, ethnicity, and income among high-poverty and low-poverty high schools since 2010.

**Table A: Distribution of High School Students by School Type, FARMS Status, Race, and Ethnicity 2010 & 2013**

Students	High Schools	2010	2013	Change
<b>FARMS</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	65.9%	65.8%	-0.1%
	Non-Consortia (N)	34.1%	34.2%	0.1%
	<b>Gap (N-C)</b>	<b>-31.8%</b>	<b>-31.5%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
<b>NON-FARMS</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	34.5%	32.8%	-1.7%
	Non-Consortia (N)	65.5%	67.2%	1.7%
	<b>Gap (N-C)</b>	<b>31.1%</b>	<b>34.4%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>

**Table A: Distribution of High School Students by School Type, FARMS Status, Race, and Ethnicity 2010 & 2013 - Continued**

Students	High Schools	2010	2013	Change
<b>ASIAN</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	35.3%	33.1%	-2.2%
	Non-Consortia (N)	64.7%	66.9%	2.2%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>33.8%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>
<b>BLACK</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	63.9%	64.3%	0.4%
	Non-Consortia (N)	36.1%	35.7%	-0.4%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>-27.8%</b>	<b>-28.7%</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>
<b>LATINO</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	59.5%	61.2%	1.7%
	Non-Consortia (N)	40.5%	38.8%	-1.7%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>-19.0%</b>	<b>-22.3%</b>	<b>-3.3%</b>
<b>WHITE</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	21.9%	19.7%	-2.2%
	Non-Consortia (N)	78.1%	80.3%	2.2%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>56.2%</b>	<b>60.7%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>

**Finding #3: An achievement gap exists between consortia and consortia-like (high-poverty) high schools and non-consortia (low-poverty) high schools.**

To consider whether an achievement gap by school type exists among MCPS' high schools, OLO reviewed performance data by school type on seven measures listed in Table B. Four of these measures directly align with MCPS' district-wide measures for college and career readiness: on-time graduation rate, successful completion of Algebra 2 by grade 11 with a C or better, AP performance, and SAT/ACT performance.

**Table B: High School Performance Measures Reviewed**

Performance Measures	Definitions	MCPS Milestone?
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	Students who graduate with their four-year cohort.	Yes
<b>Academic Eligibility Rate</b>	Students who were eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities for the entire school year.	No
<b>Algebra 2 by Grade 11 Rate</b>	Students who completed this course with a grade of C or higher by the end of Grade 11.	Yes
<b>AP Performance Rate</b>	Graduates earning a score of three or higher on at least one AP exam.	Yes
<b>SAT/ACT Performance Rate</b>	Graduates earning a score of 1,650 or higher on the SAT or a score of 24 or higher on the ACT.	Yes
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	Students who dropped out of their four-year cohort in high school.	No
<b>Out-of-School Suspensions Rate</b>	Students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions during a school year.	No

Table C describes the current performance of MCPS' high school students on the seven performance measures and demonstrates an achievement gap in performance by consortia status/school type. More specifically, Table C shows that:

- On every favorable measure of performance, a higher percent of students enrolled in non-consortia schools meet the benchmark than students in consortia and consortia-like high schools. For example, 70% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders from non-consortia schools completed Algebra 2 with a grade of C or better in 2012 compared to 50% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders from consortia and non-consortia schools.
- On every at-risk measure, a higher percent of students enrolled in consortia and consortia-like schools experienced these outcomes than students in non-consortia schools. For example, 9% of students in consortia and consortia-like high schools dropped out of their graduating class compared to 5% of non-consortia students.

**Table C: Current Performance by School Type**

Performance Measures	Consortia & Consortia-Like Schools (C)	Non-Consortia Schools (N)	Performance Gap (N-C)	Performance Ratio (C/N)*
Graduation rate, 2013	83.5%	91.7%	8.2%	91%
Academic eligibility rate, 2012	62.0%	82.1%	20.1%	76%
Algebra 2 by Grade 11 rate, 2012	50.2%	70.4%	20.2%	71%
AP performance rate, 2013	34.7%	62.6%	27.9%	55%
SAT/ACT performance rate, 2013	23.0%	52.7%	29.7%	44%
Dropout rate, 2013	8.7%	4.6%	-4.2%	189%
Out-of-school suspensions rate, 2013	5.8%	2.8%	-3.0%	207%

\*Interpreted as how likely consortia & consortia-like students meet the benchmark compared to non-consortia students.

Table C also shows gaps in achievement by school type by describing the relative performance of students in consortia and consortia-like schools to their non-consortia peers with performance ratios. For example, graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were only about half as likely as their non-consortia peers to earn a SAT score of 1,650 or more or an ACT score of 24 or more in 2013, but students from consortia and consortia-like schools were twice as likely as non-consortia students to drop out of school or be suspended. These stark differences in performance by school type suggest stark differences in the high school experiences of students by school type.

**Finding #4: The achievement gap by school type may negatively impact student subgroups in consortia and consortia-like schools.**

OLO also examined performance data by school type by income, race, and ethnicity to discern if student subgroups performed differently in consortia and consortia-like high schools (high-poverty schools) compared to non-consortia high schools (low-poverty high schools). As noted in Table D, subgroups in consortia and consortia-like schools were often more likely to demonstrate at-risk outcomes and less likely to achieve college and career benchmarks than their peers in non-consortia high schools. More specifically, the data in Table D show that:

- FARMS graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were only 58% as likely as their non-consortia peers to earn a SAT score of 1,650 or more or an ACT score of 24 or higher.
- Non-FARMS, Asian, Black, and Latino graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were only 61-65% as likely as their non-consortia peers to earn one or more qualifying AP scores.
- Non-FARMS students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were more than twice as likely as their non-consortia peers to receive an out-of-school suspension.

**Table D: Performance Ratios by School Type and Subgroup**

Performance Measures	FARMS	Non-FARMS	Asian	Black	Latino	White
Graduation rate, 2013 <sup>^</sup>	101%	92%	98%	101%	89%	97%
Academic eligibility, 2012	86%	81%	88%	84%	79%	92%
Algebra 2 completion by Grade 11, 2012	94%	77%	88%	94%	76%	89%
AP performance, 2013	82%	61%	64%	65%	63%	88%
SAT/ACT performance, 2013	58%	55%	67%	62%	35%	88%
Dropout rate, 2013	92%	231%	100%*	86%	132%	128%
Out-of-school suspensions, 2013	109%	211%	100%*	107%	142%	100%*
<sup>^</sup> Calculated as % of subgroup students enrolled in consortia and consortia-like schools who graduated on time divided by the % of subgroup students enrolled in non-consortia schools who graduated on time. * 2013 values estimated because rates below 3% not reported						

The differences in subgroup performance between consortia and consortia-like high schools compared to non-consortia high schools, particularly in SAT, ACT and AP performance, suggests that high-poverty high schools may diminish the performance of subgroups on performance measures that reflect college and career readiness.

Alternatively, among graduation and dropout rates, consortia and consortia-like high schools may offer a benefit or not harm some subgroups. For example, FARMS and Black students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were just as likely as their non-consortia peers to graduate on time in 2013 and were less likely than their non-consortia peers to dropout of school (by 8-14%).

**Finding #5: The achievement gap between consortia and consortia-like (high-poverty) high schools and non-consortia (low-poverty) high schools has widened.**

OLO examined trend data by school type on seven performance measures to discern whether the achievement gap between consortia and consortia-like high schools and their lower-poverty non-consortia peers has narrowed. Table E presents this data and notes that the performance gap by school type widened on four measures and remained the same or narrowed on three measures.

**Table E: Trends in the MCPS High School Achievement Gap**

Measures	High Schools	Base Year	Current Year
<i>Performance Measures Where the Gap Widened</i>			
<b>AP performance, 2010 - 2013</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	37.8%	34.7%
	Non-Consortia (N)	56.6%	62.6%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>67%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>SAT/ACT performance, 2010 – 2013</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	24.8%	23.0%
	Non-Consortia (N)	49.6%	52.7%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>29.7%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>50%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Academic eligibility, 2009 – 2012</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	61.8%	62.0%
	Non-Consortia (N)	79.6%	82.1%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>20.1%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>78%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Out-of-school suspensions, 2010 – 2013</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	5.5%	5.8%
	Non-Consortia (N)	2.8%	2.8%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>-2.7%</b>	<b>-2.8%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>196%</b>	<b>207%</b>
<i>Measures Where the Gap Stayed the Same or Narrowed</i>			
Measures	High Schools	Base Year	Current Year
<b>Algebra 2 completion by Grade 11, 2010 – 2012</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	41.8%	50.2%
	Non-Consortia (N)	62.6%	70.4%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>20.2%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>67%</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>Graduation rate, 2010 – 2013</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	81.1%	83.5%
	Non-Consortia (N)	89.7%	91.7%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>90%</b>	<b>91%</b>
<b>Dropout rate, 2010 – 2013</b>	Consortia & Consortia-Like (C)	10.2%	8.7%
	Non-Consortia (N)	5.4%	4.6%
	<i>Gap (N-C)</i>	<b>-4.8%</b>	<b>-4.1%</b>
	<i>Performance Ratio (C/N)</i>	<b>189%</b>	<b>189%</b>

More specifically, the data show that the achievement gap by school type widened for -

- **AP Performance**, where graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 55% as likely as non-consortia graduates to meet this benchmark in 2013 compared to being 67% as likely in 2010.
- **SAT/ACT performance**, where graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 44% as likely as non-consortia graduates to meet this benchmark in 2013 compared to being 50% as likely in 2010.
- **Academic eligibility**, where students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 76% as likely as non-consortia peers to meet this benchmark in 2012 compared to being 78% as likely in 2009.
- **Out-of-school suspension**, where students from consortia and consortia-like high schools were 207% as likely as non-consortia peers to have this outcome in 2013 compared to being 196% as likely in 2010.

The data also show that the achievement gap by school type narrowed or stayed the same for –

- **Algebra 2 by Grade 11**, where students from consortia and consortia-like schools were 71% as likely as non-consortia students to meet this benchmark in 2012 compared to being 67% as likely in 2010.
- **Graduation Rates**, where students from consortia and consortia-like schools were 90-91% as likely as non-consortia students to meet this benchmark in both 2013 and 2010.
- **Dropout Rates**, where students from consortia and consortia-like schools were 189% as likely as non-consortia students to demonstrate this outcome in both 2013 and 2010.

## **B. Recommended Discussion Issues**

### **Issue #1: Integrating MCPS' High-Poverty High Schools**

MCPS' Northeast and Downcounty Consortiums began with a commitment and federal funding to promote integration to enhance student achievement among County students. These efforts aligned with the Board of Education's "Quality and Integrated Education Policy" to promote integrated schools.<sup>23</sup> The goals of the consortiums also aligned with research indicating that Black and Latino students learn more in integrated schools and perform better in college attendance and employment.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of subsequent court decisions that limited the desegregation options available to states and school districts, MCPS' consortiums have focused on economic rather than racial integration since 2005.<sup>25</sup> As noted in this OLO study, however, MCPS' high schools remain stratified by income, race, and ethnicity, and have become more polarized since the original OLO consortia report in 2009.

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/acd.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/11/pdf/lostlearning.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid and see <http://www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~tjou/words/law/MoCoDiversity.pdf>

Given the achievement gap between MCPS' high- and low-poverty high schools and the benefits of racial and economic integration on student achievement, OLO recommends that the County Council discuss with MCPS' its current vision for using integration as a strategy for narrowing the gap.

Recommended questions for discussion include:

- Does either economic or racial integration remain explicit goals of the Board of Education? If so, how does MCPS monitor its progress toward these goals?
- What strategies are effective and legally feasible to promote economic and/or racial integration among MCPS high schools?
- What strategies, if any, are underway to address the increasing racial, ethnic, and economic polarization of MCPS' consortia and consortia-like high schools?
- Given the experiences of other school systems, what additional strategies could MCPS pursue to advance economic integration? What are the benefits, drawbacks, and potential costs of adopting these policy options locally?

**Issue #2: Narrowing the Achievement Gap between Low- and High-Poverty High Schools**

Current features of the Northeast and Downcounty Consortiums aimed at narrowing the achievement gap include student choice, signature programs, and additional staffing to support freshman academies. Other MCPS' high-poverty high schools also offer expanded signature programming, freshman academies, and collaborative partnership aimed at addressing the out-of-school factors that contribute to the achievement gap (e.g. Wellness Centers).

According to MCPS, narrowing the achievement gap is a district-wide priority and it is utilizing multi-year budgeting to focus resources. They note that their FY14 budget added 23 positions to high-poverty high schools to lower class sizes and their FY15 proposed budget requests funding for an additional 15 high school focus teachers in English language arts and mathematics.<sup>26</sup>

MCPS' also cites increased funding to support collaborations that serve children, its student support model, career lattice system, and 18.5 ESOL positions as strategic investments proposed in the FY15 budget that are focused on narrowing the achievement gap.<sup>27</sup> Together, these proposed additions to the FY15 budget focused on the achievement gap total approximately \$7 million.

Beyond the proposed marginal changes in the FY15 budget aimed at narrowing the achievement gap, the County Council needs to understand the allocation of MCPS' base budget funds aimed at narrowing the achievement gap to provide effective oversight of this funding. The Board of Education's overall budget request for FY15 is \$2.3 billion, so the bulk of achievement gap focused spending occurs with existing MCPS operating budget funding.

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<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2015/budgetbrief/LoweringClassSizes.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> See the following MCPS FY15 Budget Briefs:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2015/budgetbrief/InvestingInEnglishLangLearners.pdf>,

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2015/budgetbrief/InvestingInTeacherLeadership.pdf>,

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2015/budgetbrief/ImprovingStudentSupportModel.pdf>, and

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2015/budgetbrief/CollaboratingToServeOurChildren.pdf>

With regard to this study, the County Council is especially interested in understanding MCPS' investments aimed at narrowing the achievement gap among the County's high schools. Toward this end, OLO recommends the following questions for discussion with MCPS representatives:

- What strategies are underway to improve student performance among MCPS' high-poverty high schools, particularly among the measures reviewed in this report?
- To what extent has MCPS realigned existing resources to support improved performance in high-poverty high schools? What realignments are proposed for the FY15 budget?
- What progress does MCPS anticipate in the short-term and the long-term in narrowing the high school achievement gap by school poverty based on current investments?
- How will MCPS use data and evaluation to determine the efficacy of its efforts to narrow the achievement gap among its high- and low-poverty high schools?

**OLO Report 2014-7 Addendum:  
Trends in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Performance, 2011-2013**

Qualifying Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exam scores among graduates are included among the college and career readiness measures tracked under MCPS' Districtwide Milestones.<sup>1</sup> High school graduates can often times use qualifying AP exam scores (3 or higher) and IB scores (4 or higher) to earn entry to college or college credit. This addendum to the OLO Report 2014-7 describes the percent of MCPS high school graduates by school type and subgroup that earned at least one qualifying AP or IB score in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

Chart A describes the percent of graduates earning qualifying AP/IB scores between 2011 and 2013 by school type and FARMS (receipt of free or reduced priced meals) status.

**Chart A: Percent of Graduates Earning Qualifying AP or IB Scores by School Type and FARMS Status, 2011 - 2013**

Students	High Schools	2011	2012	2013	Change	
					#	%
<b>ALL</b>	All High Schools	50.3%	53.4%	52.9%	2.6%	5.2%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	37.4%	39.0%	37.3%	-0.1%	-0.3%
	Non-Consortia HS	59.1%	63.1%	63.2%	4.1%	6.9%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<i>21.7%</i>	<i>24.1%</i>	<i>25.9%</i>		
<b>FARMS</b>	All High Schools	27.3%	26.4%	27.6%	0.3%	1.1%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	27.7%	26.5%	26.6%	-1.1%	-4.0%
	Non-Consortia HS	26.5%	26.0%	29.6%	3.1%	11.7%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<i>-1.2%</i>	<i>-0.5%</i>	<i>3.0%</i>		
<b>NON-FARMS</b>	All High Schools	56.4%	61.2%	60.5%	4.1%	7.3%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	42.1%	46.0%	43.9%	1.8%	4.3%
	Non-Consortia HS	63.8%	68.7%	68.5%	4.7%	7.4%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<i>21.7%</i>	<i>22.7%</i>	<i>24.6%</i>		

An analysis of the data in Chart A offers the following findings:

- **Graduates from non-consortia schools have higher rates of earning qualifying AP/IB scores than their peers in consortia and consortia-like schools.** In 2013, 63% of graduates from non-consortia schools achieved this benchmark compared to 37% of graduates from consortia and consortia-like schools.
- **From 2011 to 2013, the achievement gap by school type widened on this measure.** The share of non-consortia graduates earning at least one qualifying AP score increased by 7% (4.1 points) compared to a -0.3% (0.1 point) decrease among graduates from consortia and consortia-like high schools from 2011 to 2013.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/framework//>.

- **A greater percentage of non-FARMS graduates achieved this benchmark compared to graduates receiving FARMS.** In 2013, 61% of non-FARMS graduates earned at least one qualifying AP/IB score compared to 28% of FARMS graduates.
- **Non-FARMS graduates from non-consortia schools had higher rates of AP/IB performance than non-FARMS peers attending consortia and consortia-like schools.** In 2013, qualifying AP/IB score attainment rates were 25 points higher for non-FARMS graduates from non-consortia schools than from consortia and consortia-like schools while AP/IB score attainment rates were only 3 points higher for FARMS graduates from non-consortia schools compared to consortia and consortia-like schools.

Chart B describes the percent of graduates earning qualifying AP/IB scores between 2011 and 2013 by school type, race and ethnicity.

**Chart B: Percent of Graduates Earning Qualifying AP or IB Scores by Race, Ethnicity, and School Type, 2011 - 2013**

Students	High Schools	2011	2012	2013	Change	
					#	%
<b>ASIAN</b>	All High Schools	67.0%	72.0%	71.5%	4.5%	6.7%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	53.1%	55.6%	55.6%	2.5%	4.7%
	Non-Consortia HS	74.1%	80.3%	79.1%	5.0%	6.7%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<b>21.0%</b>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>23.5%</b>		
<b>BLACK</b>	All High Schools	23.2%	24.5%	24.3%	1.1%	4.7%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	21.8%	22.3%	21.7%	-0.1%	-0.5%
	Non-Consortia HS	25.6%	28.2%	28.9%	3.3%	12.9%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>		
<b>LATINO</b>	All High Schools	38.1%	39.6%	37.5%	-0.6%	-1.6%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	33.2%	34.4%	31.2%	-2.0%	-6.0%
	Non-Consortia HS	44.5%	46.3%	45.9%	1.4%	3.1%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>11.9%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>		
<b>WHITE</b>	All High Schools	65.4%	69.8%	69.6%	4.2%	6.4%
	Consortia & Consortia-Like HS	57.8%	62.1%	62.6%	4.8%	8.3%
	Non-Consortia HS	67.5%	71.9%	71.4%	3.9%	5.8%
	<i>Gap (Non-Cons - Cons)</i>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>8.8%</b>		

Overall, an analysis of the data in Chart B offers the following findings:

- **A greater percentage of White and Asian graduates achieved the AP/IB benchmark compared to Black and Latino graduates.** In 2013, 72% of Asian and 70% of White graduates met this benchmark compared to 38% of Latino and 24% of Black graduates.

- **Across every race and ethnicity subgroup, a greater share of graduates met the AP/IB benchmark from non-consortia schools than from consortia and consortia-like schools.** In 2013, qualifying AP/IB score attainment rates were 7-24 points higher for every racial and ethnic subgroup of graduates from low-poverty high schools compared to high-poverty high schools.
- **The AP/IB achievement gap for most subgroups between high-poverty and low-poverty schools widened.** Between 2011 and 2013, the AP performance gap for Asian graduates by school type increased by 2.5 points, and for Black and Latino graduates it increased by 3.4 points compared to a 1.1 point decline for White graduates.

To further consider gaps in AP/IB performance rates by school type, Chart C uses performance ratios to compare the performance of graduates from high-poverty high schools to their low-poverty peers. An analysis of this data yields two key findings:

- **In 2013, graduates from consortia and consortia-like schools overall and by subgroup were less likely than non-consortia peers to earn one or more qualifying AP/IB scores.** For example, non-FARMS students in consortia and consortia-like schools were only 64% as likely as their peers in non-consortia schools to meet this benchmark.
- **Between 2011 and 2013, the relative performance of students from high-poverty high schools overall and across most subgroups declined on this measure.** For example, FARMS students in high-poverty high schools went from being 5% more likely (105% as likely) to reach the AP/IB benchmark as their non-consortia peers in 2011 to being 10% less likely (90% as likely) to reach this benchmark as their low-poverty peers in 2013.

**Chart C: AP/IB Performance Gap by School Type and Subgroup, 2011 - 2013**

Performance Ratios*	2011	2012	2013	Change
<b>ALL</b>	63.3%	61.8%	59.0%	-4.3%
<b>FARMS</b>	104.5%	101.9%	89.9%	-14.7%
<b>NON-FARMS</b>	66.0%	67.0%	64.1%	-1.9%
<b>ASIAN</b>	71.7%	69.2%	70.3%	-1.4%
<b>BLACK</b>	85.2%	79.1%	75.1%	-10.1%
<b>LATINO</b>	74.6%	74.3%	68.0%	-6.6%
<b>WHITE</b>	85.6%	86.4%	87.7%	2.0%

\* Calculated as % of subgroup students in consortia and consortia-like schools meeting benchmark divided by the % of subgroup students in non-consortia schools meeting the benchmark. Interpreted as how likely students in consortia and consortia-like high schools meet this benchmark compared to students in non-consortia high schools.

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The Post's View

# Montgomery County schools must attack the achievement gap

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**BY EDITORIAL BOARD** April 12

A NEW report shows that Montgomery County Public Schools has lost ground in recent years in narrowing the achievement gap between its high-poverty and low-poverty high schools. The depiction of a system geographically divided between highly ranked schools serving affluent, mainly white and Asian students and those where poor and mainly minority students struggle should serve as a wake-up call for renewed action.

“Since 2010, the economic, racial and ethnic stratification of students among MCPS high schools has increased . . . the achievement gap between high- and low-poverty high schools has widened . . . MCPS’ approach is not working as intended.” Those were the discouraging findings of the County Council’s Office of Legislative Oversight. Its report, comparing 11 high-poverty high schools in the county’s Northeast and Downcounty Consortium with 14 low-poverty high schools in western and other parts of Montgomery, had some positive notes: improved graduation rates and decreased suspension rates. It’s also important that even as the

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gap persisted between groups, generally there was across-the-board improvement in performance.

Nonetheless, the entrenchment of a two-tier system of have and have-not schools is troubling. Without a doubt, some demographic forces are beyond the control of school officials, and some demographic changes occurred faster than expected. And the achievement gap is neither new nor unique to Montgomery. But given the promising progress made in previous years in attacking the gap, particularly under the sustained focus of former superintendent Jerry Weast, the stagnation now is alarming.

Joshua P. Starr, who took over as superintendent from Mr. Weast in 2011, seems to have directed his efforts elsewhere — deemphasizing standardized tests, for example, and urging more “hopefulness” and innovation in education. He acknowledged to us that the system’s efforts in attacking the achievement gap have been akin to “treading water” in recent years, but he said that is not for lack of commitment or interest. Instead, he faulted a lack of resources and noted that his 2015 budget proposal calls for additional funds to benefit vulnerable students, including reducing class sizes in high-need high schools, improving services to English-language learners and hiring more counselors and student support staff.

It will be instructive to see what happens to those planned programs if school officials get less money than requested in what has come to be an annual battle with the council. We have argued that the problem with Montgomery school funding is not the amount (more than half of the county budget) but how it’s spent. One wonders, for example, if the outcome of this report would have been different if some of the money used for across-the-board pay raises had gone into more support for students most in need or for middle-school improvement. Committed leadership is as important as resources. We hope Mr. Starr will recommit the system to this cause.

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## Karin Chenoweth: Montgomery County schools dance around needed changes

By Karin Chenoweth, Published: April 18

Many years ago I gathered with other parents in Blair High School's cafeteria to hear a series of enthusiastic Montgomery County Public Schools officials describe plans for the "Downcounty Consortium," which would allow students in the southeastern part of Montgomery County to choose among five high schools — Einstein, Blair, Northwood, Kennedy and Wheaton.

The theory, school officials explained, was that if students chose their high schools they would feel more invested in their education and would be more successful. It was a scheme developed by then-Superintendent Jerry Weast to bring in federal magnet school money and shake up patterns of declining high school performance in the eastern part of the county. Later, those same officials formed the Northeast Consortium, which permitted choice among another set of high schools in the northeastern part of the county.

I remember thinking that we were watching the district dance really fast so that we wouldn't notice that it wasn't getting anywhere.

There was little talk about how the schools would improve teaching and learning; all the talk was about the choices being afforded students. But those choices were among the lowest-performing schools in the county. Proposals from Silver Spring parents to widen the options to the higher-performing schools in the western part of the county were not so much dismissed as ignored.

Not long after that evening, I overheard a conversation among the checkout baggers at Snider's grocery store in Silver Spring, many of whom were students at Einstein and Blair high schools. Their considered — and astute — analysis was that the Downcounty Consortium would increase segregation among the schools.

Now the data are in and, sadly, the baggers were right. The consortia, implemented at great cost, have increased racial and economic isolation in county schools — and have not increased academic achievement.

That assessment was made by Montgomery County's Office of Legislative Oversight in a new report that looked at a wide array of data, including graduation rates, suspension rates and academic achievement. As the report says, "MCPS' approach is not working as intended." The district has "lost ground in achieving its racial and economic integration goals," the report concluded, and the achievement gap has grown wider since 2010.

Back when the Downcounty Consortium was proposed, I was writing a column on schools and education for the local Montgomery County section of The Post and was the parent of two children in the Einstein High cluster of schools. Since then, my children have graduated, and I have written two books and co-written a third about what I call "unexpected schools" — high-achieving and rapidly improving schools that have significant populations of children of color and living in poverty.

The success that these schools have achieved could certainly be replicated by Montgomery County, which has more resources and more capacity than almost any school system in the country.

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But at the heart of successful schools and districts is an understanding that just about every student is capable of learning a lot and that it's up to the adults in the system to ensure that they do so. Successful schools do not engage in the obfuscation that Montgomery County has undertaken to keep people from understanding what is going on in them. For example, MCPS has focused public attention on data that reflect what percentage of students in the consortia are able to go to their first choice of high school, rather than on what percentage of students in those schools are academically ineligible to participate in sports, how many graduate and how many need remediation when they enroll in college.

Many teachers, principals and school district staff in Montgomery County believe in the ability of kids and are committed to doing what is necessary to make sure that all students learn a lot. In fact, one of the last columns I wrote, in 2004, was about Viers Mill Elementary in the Wheaton area, which had begun to demonstrate the power of good instruction. It has continued to do so. Most of Viers Mill's students are black or Hispanic and 70 percent meet the qualifications for free or reduced-price lunches. Viers Mill gives many of Montgomery's more privileged schools a run for their money: Last year, 68 percent of its fifth-grade students scored at the advanced level in reading on the state tests. Other Montgomery County schools are doing similarly great things for kids.

So I know Montgomery County can do better for its kids, and it has schools that point the way.

But, for too long, Montgomery County as a system has engaged in tricky and expensive schemes — including the high school consortia — to keep us from noticing how little progress has been made, particularly at the secondary level.

Superintendent Joshua P. Starr has a wonderful opportunity to welcome the bracing reality of the Office of Legislative Oversight's report as a way of beginning an important conversation and putting in place the kinds of processes that will ensure that just about all of Montgomery County's students graduate ready for the next phase of their lives, whether it is two-year college, four-year college or technical training.

Many people move to Montgomery County for the schools, and that includes parents in the eastern part of the county. They — we — deserve a school system that is designed to ensure their children succeed, not one that dances around reality.

*Karin Chenoweth is writer-in-residence at the Education Trust. The views expressed here are her own.*

Read more about this topic: [The Post's View: Montgomery County schools must attack the achievement gap](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery County is poised to spend money on schools it will regret](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery County's perverse politics](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery County's wrong education priorities](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery school spending fight](#) [The Post's View: A tale of two counties](#)

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## An opening for Montgomery's schools to lead the way on opportunity for all

By Richard D. Kahlenberg, Published: April 25

An alarming report this month by the Montgomery County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight found increasing racial and economic segregation in the county's public schools and a widening of achievement gaps along racial and economic lines. The report's good news was that low-income students in more-affluent schools perform better than comparable students in higher-poverty schools. The bad news was that more and more disadvantaged children attend schools where most of their classmates are also disadvantaged.

Reacting to the report, The Post properly suggested in a recent editorial, "Montgomery schools must reduce education disparities between high- and low-income areas." But rather than addressing segregation itself, The Post suggested that officials improve middle schools and better target resources "for students most in need."

A half-century of research, however, suggests that pouring extra funds into high-poverty schools is not the most important thing policymakers can do for poor kids. Giving them access to high-quality middle-class schools is far more effective. Money matters in education, but other things matter more.

The "resources" a school provides include not only funds but also academically engaged peers who encourage achievement among classmates, a cadre of parents who volunteer in class and know how to pull the levers of power when things go wrong and teachers who have high expectations for students. All of these ingredients for success are much more likely to be found in schools with a majority of middle-class students than in high-poverty schools.

One of the most rigorous studies on the effects of economic school segregation comes from Montgomery County itself. In 2010, RAND researcher Heather Schwartz published research with the Century Foundation that tracked low-income students at public housing units (and attending neighborhood elementary schools) throughout Montgomery County. The study found that low-income students in lower-poverty schools did far better over time than those in higher-poverty schools — even though the latter spent \$2,000 more per pupil. Two-thirds of the beneficial effect stemmed from being in a lower-poverty school, Schwartz concluded; the other third was from being in a lower-poverty neighborhood.

Montgomery County has a nationally recognized inclusionary zoning program that helps foster diversity by encouraging the construction of affordable housing, but its school integration efforts are extremely modest. Magnet schools draw students from the more affluent western part of the county to the eastern half, but they are limited in reach and often employ a "school within a school" model that restricts interaction among students.

Moreover, there is no widespread effort to allow low-income students to transfer to wealthier schools, a practice in other jurisdictions. This omission is a major drawback of Montgomery's integration efforts. More-advantaged children would benefit immensely from greater levels of school integration. My children have received terrific academic preparation in the Pyle-Whitman cluster in Bethesda, for instance, but they miss out on the benefits of learning alongside those with different life experiences rooted in race and income.

Integration in Montgomery County is far more feasible than in higher-poverty school districts. Montgomery schools are majority middle class, and students are highly diverse by race: 32 percent are white, 27 percent Latino, 21 percent

African American and 14 percent Asian. While that level of racial diversity would have been threatening to white parents in the past, today's families often have a different set of attitudes, as evidenced by long waiting lists for many schools around the country with a rainbow of students.

Middle-class parents understandably do not want to send their children to schools with overwhelming poverty, but Columbia University researchers Allison Roda and Amy Stuart Wells have found that many white, advantaged parents see racial and ethnic diversity as a plus in preparing children for a 21st-century workforce. Schools that offer bilingual Spanish and English programs are particularly popular and highlight the ways in which diversity bolsters learning, as native Spanish speakers can help English speakers learn a new language, and vice versa.

Before becoming Montgomery County's superintendent, Joshua P. Starr led the Stamford, Conn., public schools, where a school choice system was structured to promote socioeconomic integration. Starr has earmarked \$200,000 in his fiscal 2015 budget for a review of school choice policies. Why not customize the lessons of some 80 districts that pursue such integration to the conditions in Montgomery County?

Sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided, most education reform continues to try to make the best of schools that are segregated along lines of race and income. But those efforts have been generally unsuccessful. Majority middle-class schools are 22 times more likely to be high-performing than majority low-income schools. And low-income students attending more-affluent schools are two years ahead of their counterparts in high-poverty schools on the fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress in math. Montgomery County is well positioned to become a leader in promoting opportunity for all students by taking on economic school segregation directly.

*The writer is a senior fellow at the Century Foundation.*

Read more about this topic: [The Post's View: Montgomery County schools must attack the achievement gap](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery County is poised to spend money on schools it will regret](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery County's perverse politics](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery County's wrong education priorities](#) [The Post's View: Montgomery school spending fight](#) [The Post's View: A tale of two counties](#)

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**Possibilities for Socioeconomic  
School Integration in  
Montgomery County, MD**

Montgomery County Civic Federation

Richard D. Kahlenberg

May 12, 2014

Rockville, MD

**Office of Legislative Oversight  
Report**

- Provides Further Evidence on the Achievement Gap.
- Provides Evidence of Growing Economic and Racial Segregation in Montgomery County Public Schools.
- Underlines the Connection Between Segregation and Achievement. Low-income students in more affluent schools perform better.

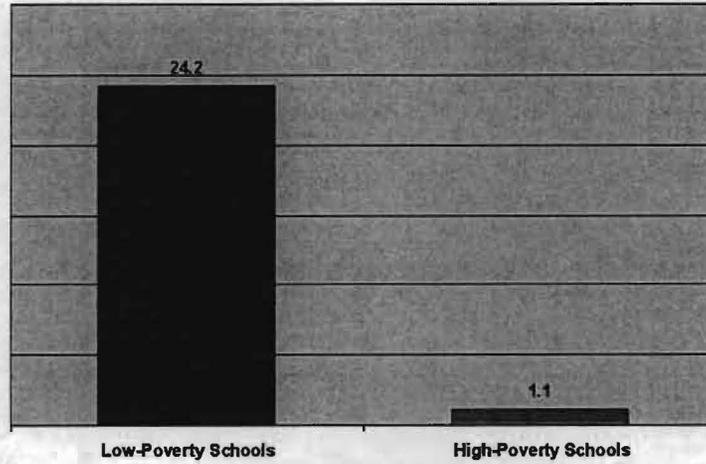
## **Three Questions**

- How Concerned Should We Be About Growing Economic Segregation in Schools?
- What Are School Districts Across the Country Doing to Reduce School Poverty Concentrations?
- How Might the Experiences in Other Districts Inform Steps that Montgomery County Public Schools Take?

### **I. How Concerned Should We Be About Economic Segregation? 50 Years of Research**

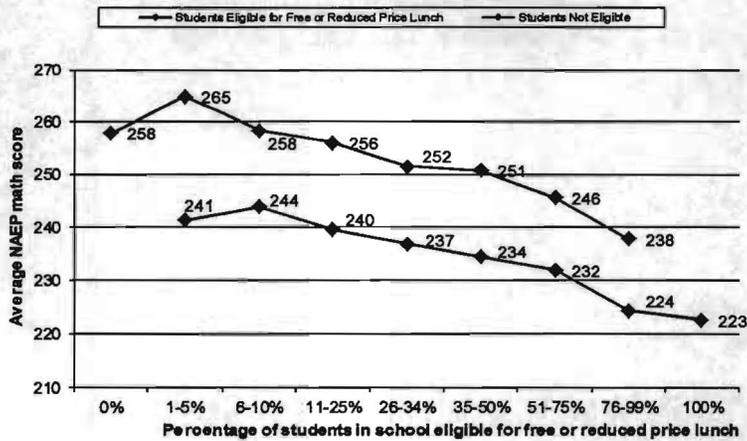
- 1966 Coleman Report: SES of family the biggest predictor of achievement; SES of school the second biggest predictor.
- 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15 year olds in science showed a “clear advantage in attending a school whose students are, on average, from more advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.” Finland least economically segregated.

## Percentage of Schools That are Persistently High-Performing, by SES



*Note:* High-poverty is defined as at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; low-poverty is defined as fewer than 50 percent eligible. High-performing is defined as being in the top third in the state in two subjects, in two grades, and over a two-year period.  
*Source:* Douglas N. Harris, "Ending the Blame Game on Educational Inequity: A Study of 'High Flying' Schools and NCLB," Educational Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University, March 2006, p. 20.

## Poverty Concentrations and Achievement National Assessment of Educational Progress 2011, Fourth Grade Math Results

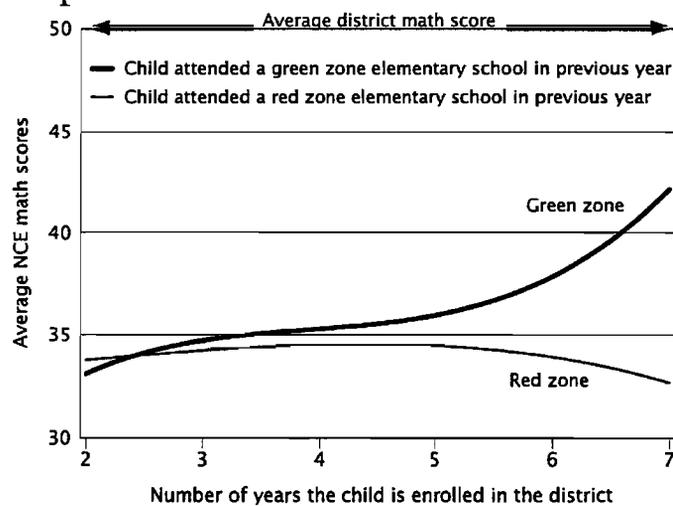


*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2011 Math Assessment, Grade 4.

## Heather Schwartz Montgomery County, MD Study

- RAND researcher Heather Schwartz tests the effectiveness to two strategies: extra resources (class size reduction, professional development, extended learning time) in high poverty “red zone” schools (\$2,000 more/pupil) vs. “inclusionary housing” policy that allows low-income students to attend low poverty “green zone” schools with fewer resources.
- Examined 858 children randomly assigned to public housing units scattered throughout Montgomery County and enrolled in Montgomery County public elementary schools 2001-2007.

### Public Housing Students in Green Zone Schools Outperformed Those in Red Zone Schools



Source: Heather Schwartz, “Housing Policy Is School Policy.” in *The Future of School Integration* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2012), p. 45, Figure 2.6.

## Montgomery County Study

- Low-income public housing students in low poverty schools performed at .4 of a standard deviation better in math than low-income public housing students in higher poverty schools with more resources
- Low-income students in green zone schools cut their large initial math gap with middle-class students in half. The reading gap was cut by one-third
- Most of the effect (2/3) was due to attending low-poverty schools, and some (1/3) due to living in low-poverty neighborhoods

## Effect on middle-class students

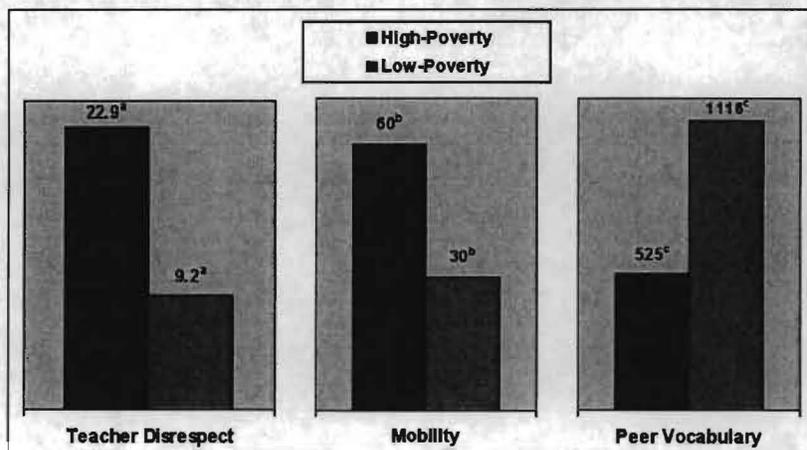
No negative effect on academic achievement so long as majority middle-class.

- Middle-Class children on average are less sensitive to changes in school environment than low-income students.
- Social and moral benefits of diversity. All students learn more when in a diverse environment where students bring different life experiences to discussions.
- Employers want employees who can get along with those from different backgrounds.

## Why Economic Segregation Matters

- Desirable to create an environment where all students are in a school community with a core group of academically engaged peers, actively involved parents, and excellent teachers.
- Very difficult to create those environments systemically without reducing concentrations of school poverty

### Classmate Characteristics, by School or Student SES



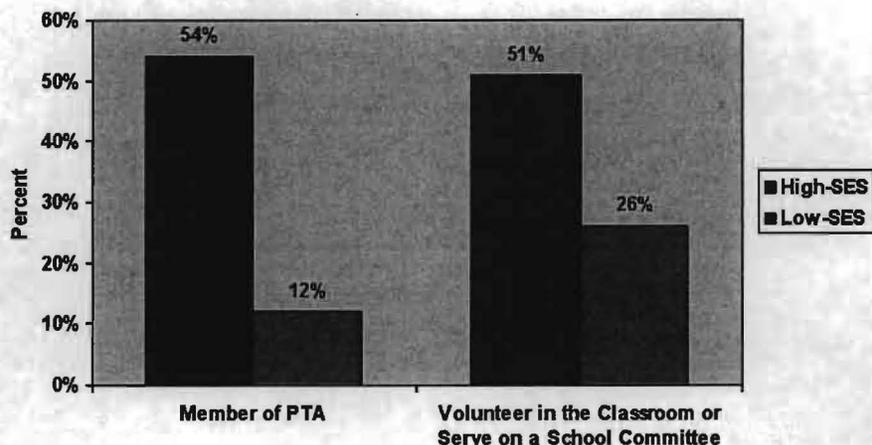
<sup>a</sup> Percentage of schools reporting student acts of disrespect for teachers in classrooms at least once per week. High-poverty refers to schools with 50 percent or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; and low-poverty refers to schools with 20% or less of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

<sup>b</sup> Percentage of students who have attended two or more schools between first and third grades. High-poverty refers to the study's lowest family income group (family income is less than \$10,000). Low-poverty refers to the study's highest family income group (family income is \$50,000 or more).

<sup>c</sup> Number of words in student's vocabulary by 36 months of age. High-poverty means child is part of a family receiving welfare, and low-poverty means child is part of a professional family.

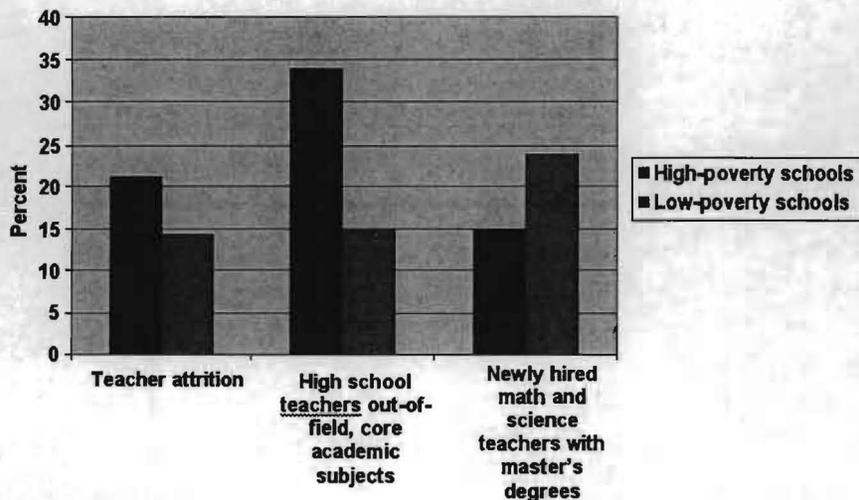
*Sources:* Rachel Dinkes, Emily Forrest Cataldi, and Wendy Lin-Kelly, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2008*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., December 2008, Table 7.2, p. 99 (teacher disrespect); U.S. General Accounting Office, *Elementary School Children: Many Change Schools Frequently, Harming Their Education* (Washington, DC: U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994) (mobility); and Paul Barton and Richard Coley, *Windows on Achievement and Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2008), p. 9, Figure 2 (vocabulary).

## Parental Involvement, by Student SES



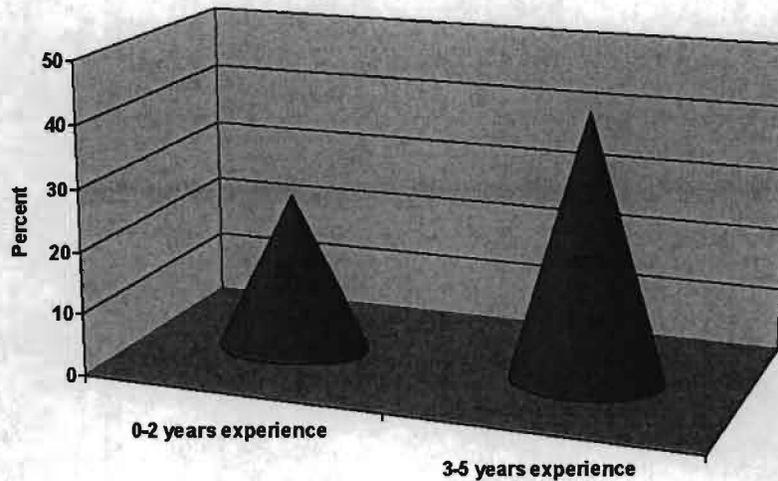
Source: 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study data on PTA membership cited in Richard D. Kahlenberg, *All Together Now* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), p. 62; National Center for Education Statistics, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education, 2006-07 School Year*, August 2008, p. 9, Table 3 (volunteer and committee service). NCES considers students living in households with incomes below the poverty threshold to be poor, or low-SES. Both studies gauge parental involvement based on the socioeconomic status of students—not schools.

## Teaching Quality, by School SES



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008), p. 51; Richard M. Ingersoll, cited in "Parsing the Achievement Gap," Educational Testing Service, 2003, p. 11; Linda Darling-Hammond, "Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching," National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997, pp. 25-27.

**Salary Increase Needed to Counteract Turnover Effects Caused by Differences in Student Characteristics Between Large Urban and Suburban Districts, by Experience Class of Teacher (for Female, Nonminority Teachers)**



Source: Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin, "Why Public Schools Lose Teachers," *Journal of Human Resources* 39:2 (2004): 326-54.

## II. New Approaches to Integration

- Old Stereotype from 1975: Compulsory Busing for Racial Desegregation in Boston as a Legal Remedy to Segregation.
- New Emphasis:
  - \* Choice, Incentives and Magnets
  - \* Socioeconomic Integration
  - \* Education Reform Strategy

## Two Reasons for Growth in Socioeconomic Integration

- Socioeconomic integration produces significant racial diversity in a manner that's perfectly legal
  - Among 4<sup>th</sup> graders nationally, 24% whites eligible free and reduced lunch; 70% African Americans; 73% Latinos
  - Graduated income tax legally fine by income, not by race.
  - Enormous benefits to preserving racial integration.
- Not just a clumsy proxy. Research: Academic benefits of integration not from proximity to whiteness but middle-class environment
  - Racial Desegregation in Charlotte vs. Boston (1970s)
  - Roosevelt Perry Elementary in Louisville.

## Socioeconomic Integration

- 80 U.S. Districts, educating 4 million students, using socioeconomic status as a factor in student assignment. Examples:
  - Cambridge, MA. All schools should fall within + or - 10 percentage points of district average for free and reduced price lunch (40%). Every school is a magnet.
  - Hartford, CT Region. Magnet schools to attract suburban residents and options for urban students to choose suburban schools. Two way integration.

### **III. Socioeconomic Integration in Montgomery County Public Schools**

- Model inclusionary zoning policy.
- Quality Integrated Schools Policy, and 34% FARM is allows for possibilities, but limited:
  - Magnets, but schools within schools (by contrast 89% of federally funded magnets are whole school).
  - Northeast and Downcounty Consortia look at socioeconomic factors, but don't draw broadly.
  - Little chance for students to choose to move from East to West.

### **A Way Forward**

- Dr. Starr's \$200,000 plan for reexamining school choice policies:
  - 1. Review the current status of school choice policies.
  - 2. Benchmark policies against those in other districts nationally.
  - 3. Public Engagement.

## Reasons for Cautious Optimism

- Dr. Starr's leadership in Stamford, CT public schools. Policy provides that:

"all elementary, middle, and high schools in the Stamford Public School system are expected to meet the district's integration standard to within +/- 10%, as determined annually," with the integration standard "determined by the percent of disadvantaged students [students receiving free/reduced lunch according to federal guidelines, or students identified as English Language Learners according to state guidelines, or students residing in income restricted housing] and the percent of advantaged students"

"Assignment of Students," Stamford Public Schools Board Policy 5117.1.  
[http://docs.stamfordpublicschools.org/filestorage/1702/3024/5463/102111-Magnet\\_Lottery.pdf](http://docs.stamfordpublicschools.org/filestorage/1702/3024/5463/102111-Magnet_Lottery.pdf)

- Appointment of a general counsel from the NAACP LDF.

## Political Coalitions for Integration

- Civil Rights Advocates
- Business Interests
- Teachers Unions
- Faith Groups
- Magnet School Parents

## Concluding Thoughts

- Poor kids can learn, if given the right environment.
- 95% of education reform about making separate but equal work rather than reducing the number of high poverty schools but diversity should be part of the equation.

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