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Loudoun County School Board, Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee (MSAAC) Meeting, Wednesday, February 15, 2023

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Place Loudoun County Public Schools / School Board meeting (see BoardDocs / LCPS-TV)
Length 1h 40m (video)

- Official meeting video (Vimeo / LCPS-TV): <https://player.vimeo.com/video/799159882?rel=0>
- BoardDocs (School Board): <https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/Public>

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[00:00:00] coming. It is so good to see your faces, especially the young ones today. Today we're going to be learning about equity in the learning environment. And so today we are going to be the ones that are going to be learning. And I'm so excited about the voices in the room. My name is Talia Bush. I'm the chair of MSAC. To my right, I've got a few of my executive board members. I've got my communications chair and secretary, Crystal and Cheryl. We've got our vice president out somewhere hanging out.

[00:00:34] Andrea Weisskopf to my right, got our liaison to LCPS, Ms. Lottie Spurlock, Harris Mahedovey cannot be with us today, but we also have several esteemed guests. And like I said, students, delegates, thank you all for coming. Thank you all for being on air and tuning in remotely.

[00:00:57] I think today's conversation is going to be enlightening in so many ways. So thank you so much for joining us. Today I have a few announcements that I want to get in the way before we get started. Again, we have a pretty packed agenda, so I want to take my suit as soon as I can. As far as our meeting notes, we're going to go ahead and forego that for today. The approval of the meeting notes, we had a few notes that we needed to add to them, so we're going to approve those in our March meeting. But I do wanted to announce that we will be accepting nominations for those interested in being

[00:01:31] part of our executive committee for 2023-24. So if anyone is inspired by what you've heard and want to be a part of this exciting executive board and this conversation, get a little closer to it, there will be information coming out and all of the positions will be open.

[00:01:51] So my position, the chair, the vice chair, secretary, as far as the officers go, and And then as far as the subcommittee officers, our communications and membership chair, that will be at the discretion of the incoming chair.

[00:02:07] So we welcome everyone who is interested to, again, throw your hat in the ring and please be a part of this conversation because it's very rewarding. All right. We've got a new brochure. You guys see our new tablecloths. We're pretty proud of those in the front.

[00:02:22] And they will be accompanied by new brochures that we are asking people to come out to our March meeting and distribute so stay tuned for that and of course we've got our annual report that's coming up and we're looking forward to that stone bridge and for black history month has really really stepped up to the plate and they're doing quite a bit in this space they've got their minority student council african-american history class and girl up club are sponsoring a distinguished women of color event but I want to encourage sons and daughters to

[00:03:00] To come and be a part of that that's taking place on February 28th from 5:00 to 7:00 5:00 to 7:00 p.m Special guests will be judge Laurie Sinclair Taylor. That's Loudoun County's first black judge Susan Mitchell who's the CEO of authority biosciences and she's devoted to equity in the medical field and then dr. Daphne King Who's an assistant professor at GMU?

[00:03:25] Both of these events was at both but that event as well as another That is being sponsored by Hampton University at several High schools light Ridge. I don't want to I don't want to light bridge Stonebridge and and Rock Ridge. Okay, great. Thank you for so yeah So there's a project display at all three of those schools I think there are three are there four there may have been a fourth one but anyway go online on the MSAC website behind me and not the website excuse me Facebook go on the Facebook page and you'll see both of those events

[00:04:03] featured there so you can register really exciting I'm really excited about that I will definitely be attending yesterday I gave our update to the school board talked about several things and was really excited that several of our delegates were able to participate in the teach-in which is really a way for, you know, people of color to educate one another, educate the school board about the importance of black history.

[00:04:33] A lot of times you'll find that people will say black history is American history at the end of it. But if you did not get a chance to make it out to the school board meeting yesterday, there's another one coming up on the 28th. So please attend. It's really an exciting time to just really celebrate the contributions of people of color.

[00:04:52] All right, so I want to go ahead and get started. Today we have several guest speakers. I'm really excited about our superintendent and our chief of staff who have joined us today and have asked to give remarks and just address everyone in the room and online to just share their thoughts and their hearts about what's going on, especially in terms of goal three. That was just briefed.

[00:05:16] I believe it was our last school board meeting, not the 14th, but the one preceding that. And then after that, we will be hearing from Dr. Triff Nicola and Dr. Stephanie LaPaula. Okay, great. Thank you.

About equitable practices and discipline.

[00:05:33] And then after that, we will hear from our students. So without further ado, Dr. Smith and followed by Dr. Slevin. All right. Well, good evening. My name is Daniel Smith. I'm excited to be here with you tonight.

[00:05:49] The last time I was here with you, I think was at the beginning of the school year as chief of staff and we had the opportunity to talk through uh the policy review process which we'll talk maybe just a little bit about tonight but i just wanted to come and uh be here with you tonight and my new role is acting superintendent and just share my commitment to partnering with you to lead lcps forward um you know as you know we've got a lot of work to do and i'm committed to working alongside of you to um make sure that we can raise all voices and we can support each and every one of our students.

[00:06:25] I do appreciate you being here tonight and I just wanna reiterate how much your voice matters. Ms. Bush, I was gonna thank you for being at the school board last night and providing comments on behalf of MSAC. And I think if you didn't watch that meeting or you haven't seen some of that, I think you should see how your voice is really playing a pivotal role in some of the work taking place across LCPS.

[00:06:50] Each and every time policy goes out, I know I spoke about policy a second ago, but each and every time policy goes out, I'm seeing more and more feedback from MSAC, which I think is incredible, and I really appreciate it. I know I heard Mr. Mahedovey speak about it last night, about how much our board members appreciate the feedback.

[00:07:09] I can speak for staff in terms of how much staff appreciate the feedback as we go through that policy review process, because we do want to make sure that all perspectives are considered, and then we take a look at that, that we're making sure our policies are equitable and we're really making sure we're being thorough with our policy review process.

[00:07:29] In fact, I will share that we recently changed our policy review process as a result of some of MSAC feedback. And so, for example, one of the things that we do now with all of our policy reviews, if it comes through an advisory committee, that someone has to, if it says, hey, I'm with MSAC, they have to put, all right, their name is required.

[00:07:51] And then we go back to Ms. Bush and some of your executive committee members to say, is this person a member? Are they a representative? And so we do that with all of our advisory committees. And so that was a suggestion that we came from MSAC, that we saw that as a need. And that's been some improvement.

[00:09:26] About equity and our work to ensure that each student is provided what they need to be successful. And I firmly believe that we owe it to each and every one of our kids to make sure they have the access, The resources and the opportunities to have that high quality learning experience and have that feel of that sense of belonging in each and every one of their classrooms, in their schools, in every one of their activities.

[00:09:58] You know, as I as I was looking through tonight's agenda and also thinking about our comprehensive equity plan from from August, I appreciate your agendas and how you continue to make keep equity at the forefront of our work.

[00:10:15] I think we know how important that is. We know we have some folks that may not see equity as a priority, and I appreciate your continued focus to make sure that it remains our focus. It's embedded in our strategic plan. Equity and opportunity is one of our core values, and I think that that speaks volumes about our work.

[00:10:37] We see that as we look at our strategic plan and each one of the goals, goal one on empowered students, goal two on exemplary staff, goal three on enriched division, and goal four on engaged community, each one of those goals has embedded metrics for us to measure to make sure are we meeting the needs of each and every one of our kids?

[00:10:59] Are we providing the access, the resources, and the opportunities for each and every one of our kids to provide them support to be successful? And so I'm not going to go into detail on all of those tonight or those in detail, but happy to talk with you more about those as we move forward and to share your feedback on our strategic plan, the metrics, and the work that we're really doing to make sure that we are making progress on that strategic plan, that we're seeing progress on each of our aligned actions, each of our subgroups, and each of the areas that we're focused on.

[00:11:33] I also wanted to take a moment and just share a couple things from each of the goals that we're working on within our strategic plan that I think is relevant and important. So in terms of empowered students, we have our superintendent student advisory group that I meet with monthly that represents each and every one of our high schools and they've been an incredible group to lean on and to provide that student voice to make sure that's represented in our work.

[00:12:03] We have student equity ambassadors from each of our middle school and high schools. We are working to increase the global majority student participation in advanced courses and across programs, and that's a metrics that we are tracking. When we look at exemplary staff and look at goal two, our office of equity is leading a lot of the professional learning around this work, equipping each of our staff to do this work.

[00:12:29] We know that our teachers and our staff work with our students each and every day, and we want to make sure that they're equipped to support our kids. And so we have lots of professional development in terms of family engagement, asset-based approach to teaching and learning, student culture is a pathway to deeper learning, sensitive conversations, et cetera.

[00:12:54] In goal three, I will say a couple of things with goal three. we really look at our departments and how are our departments centering equity in our work. And so I think that starts with the office of the superintendent as we look to one of the big pieces of the office of the superintendent is the span across departments.

[00:13:12] So as we bring different departments together, are we looking at things through an equity lens? Are we considering all perspectives? And so that's one of the key pieces of our office as we have the Office of the Ombuds.

[00:13:29] We also have the Office of the Auditor General, which I know was spoken about earlier in the year, and our Chief of Staff that helps to support that work. In the Department of Instruction, Mr. Slevin's gonna speak about that in just a minute, but we really, our Department of Instruction has been focused to ensure that equitable practices and opportunities are implemented and available throughout our school division as a primary function and we want to make sure that our teachers are equipped to do that work

we're also focused on there's a new standard six for teachers and licensed employees around from the department of education and the evaluation metric around

[00:14:08] cultural competence and to make sure that we're implementing that with fidelity in our department of student services we have our united mental health teams and really making sure that we're educating the whole child and so they work through the student counseling school social work and psychology and really make sure we provide those wraparound services so our students can attend our students can be provided that support so they can be present and and get the support that they might need and then hrtd our human resources and talent development is responsible for making sure we have a high quality, diverse workforce.

[00:14:47] So that students have adults leading, teaching, cleaning and supporting their buildings that can support them, that look like them, have similar backgrounds and can be tied to stronger levels of student engagement. And then in goal four, as we looked at enriched division, you're gonna hear from goal four here next month.

[00:15:06] They'll be providing their first update, which Ms. Spurlock is one of our goal co-chairs around goal four that thinks about how do we use our engaged community? How do we engage our community to really support this work? We can't do it alone, and how can we make sure that we do that in a meaningful way?

[00:15:22] And some of the ways that we're focused on that is through our new Office of the Ombuds. We now have a new client management system that helps us to identify and address concerns and also have some internal accountability. We're looking at culture and identity celebrations in schools, and how do we not only make sure we have a welcoming and affirming environment for each of our kids, but how do we ensure that that's taking place?

[00:15:48] We have our language line, our on-the-spot translation services. We have our established partnerships with our community organizations. And then how can we find opportunities to strengthen our relationships and deepen trust in our community through listening structures? And so thinking about some ways that we can do that differently to really make sure that we're tapping into engaging all of our voices.

[00:16:10] I do believe that our commitment to equity is not just evident in the statement that you see hung in many of our schools that you see in our in our offices but it's rather the really the actions and the steps that we're taking to make equity a reality for each and every one of our students as I shared earlier you know we have a lot of work to do and I appreciate your partnership as it's critical to moving our work forward in a meaningful and productive way and so I appreciate you having me here today and just to share a little bit about some of the work taking place.

[00:16:44] I do believe our strategic plan is our roadmap to equity. And I believe that it helps us to continue to stay focused on the important work that we have taking place. And so I'm looking forward to engaging with you and the partnership as we move forward.

[00:17:02] So with that, you may turn things over to Mr. Slevin. - Thank you, Dr. Smith. So I don't have a ton to add to all that information that was just shared by our superintendent, but I appreciate the overview.

[00:17:19] So as I was introduced, I'm Neil Slevin. I'm the acting chief of staff for Loudoun County Public Schools. I don't have a doctorate, but I appreciate being assigned when I get introduced at functions like this. I joke sometimes, maybe I have a doctorate in Loudoun. I've been in Loudoun for 20 plus years.

[00:17:35] I started as a classroom teacher at Riverbend Middle School, had the opportunity to be an assistant principal and a principal, and I've been a division level leader middle school office and most recently as the executive director of teaching and learning which i'll be returning to when this period of transition is over when a new superintendent is eventually named within lcps i appreciate the long-standing commitment to equity that i've had the opportunity to be a part of as a loudon county educator msac has been a part of my career

[00:18:12] as a teacher as a as an administrator coming to these meetings so i just want to express appreciation for you all continuing the commitment to the work and being here and representing your community because really that's what public education is all about it's about engagement with our local community and making sure people are connected to our to our public schools as the acting chief of staff as the executive director of teaching learning as a leader in lcps i think it's incumbent upon loudon if we want to talk about equity we need to make it actionable it It needs to be real. It needs to be baked into the work of our schools.

[00:18:48] We need to have really clearly defined outcomes around it. And that's why the strategic plan within LCPS is such an important part of that. My why as a principal and now as a division leader has always been teachers.

[00:19:05] Of course it's all about the kids, but what I believe is if the vision we have for education in Loudoun is going to occur, It's going to occur in the classroom between the teacher and the student. So the question I'm always asking myself in my role in LCPS is how can we best be supporting our teachers in LCPS in the classroom?

[00:19:29] How are we equipping them with tools? How are we equipping them with training? And how are we equipping them with policies and guidance about the path to success in the classroom? In my role in teaching and learning and working in the Department of Instruction over the past number of years, we've had the opportunity to answer some of those questions through our culturally responsive framework the development of that came through the department of instruction and now is division wide the whole idea of creating and sustaining classroom environments where students are treated with dignity and are recognized for who they are the navigation of difficult sensitive and

[00:20:08] controversial conversation conversations i know that our social science supervisor and the team has joined msac in the past to talk a little bit about how we're supporting our teachers navigate those topics in the classroom and in the curriculum and then evaluating resources decisions about what is put in the hands of our students what's being put in the hands of our teachers so that they do their jobs in a way that ensures representation and cultural appropriateness and responsiveness this hasn't been done just by simply wanting to have it happen it's done by being really thoughtful about policy it's done by the development of guidelines about being

[00:20:45] honest about where the problems are and facing them and trying to do something about it and that I think that commitment is displayed across LCPS in terms of what we're trying to do when it comes to equity let's name what we're trying to solve let's bring our community to the table and try to move forward to a solution for those problems there are many opportunities that dr. Smith mentioned in the strategic

plan particularly around goal three and goal four around an enriched division and an engaged community but really I think what we're trying to answer in those goals is how are we connecting with our community authentically opportunities such as this

[00:21:20] supporting our advisory committee making sure we have amazing staff here to share the work that's happening and answering questions how are we supporting staff with the right direction I do believe our teachers want to do right we need to help them help them on that path and then how are we creating an environment where focus our equity is focused through policy regulation procedures that are clear reviewed regularly and MSAC plays such a big part in that so I appreciate the membership and the leadership of MSAC with Miss Bush we'll see that evidence hopefully in student outcomes the stories of student success

[00:21:58] that we get to brag about all the time and celebrate but we're also going to see that in our perceptual data what feedback are we getting back from our community the use of our engagement tools attendance at these meetings continuing to have the level of engagement that we have because we can't do this alone we need everyone in this room we need the students here we need our teachers we need our staff because the work of public education and the promise of public education can be done in isolation so I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you all for a few minutes I appreciate the the the privilege of working in Loudoun County Public Schools and serving this

[00:22:35] community and so with that I think we have time for a couple questions if you'd like yes we do we have time for about two questions before we move on this is your opportunity this is our acting superintendent and chief of staff we don't get a chance to have access to these individuals very

[00:23:03] often so I encourage you all to ask your questions while they're here well I want to say thank you um is there a question in the back okay please okay forgive me if this has been asked or reiterated But as acting superintendent, what is being done to actively search for a superintendent and to bring in diverse applicants?

[00:23:41] Thank you for that question. I am actually, I think I'm going to defer that question to Mr. Mejedevi as a school board hires that superintendent. If you don't mind, Mr. Mejedevi. Not at all. We have just finalized a firm to start the process.

[00:23:59] So, I think this is really early stages of just finalizing a consulting company to help to the question that we ask is to help us find a diverse and a qualified pool of candidates. So, the process has just begun. We are on a time frame from when the action was taking place in December.

[00:24:20] So, our hope and the goal is that by end of May, we should have a contract and assign superintendent. But the process just, we had to go through a procurement process to make sure that we get a very open number of companies to apply for and then go through a process of selecting that can provide a good pool of candidates.

[00:24:42] So that's the process we went through and we just engaged with them to start the process and start the journey. So you'll be more hearing about that. There should be more communication coming about, the timeframe, the timeline, and the community to engage with that. So it's not going to be similar to what we did last time.

[00:24:58] There would be parents' panels, there would be teachers' panels, students' panels to provide input into the criteria of what we're selecting and then hopefully go through the process for that. So thank

you for the question. So I wasn't part of it last time, so I'm not familiar with that.

[00:25:18] How do you go about putting that information out And as to what extent is it brought when we have these three candidates that look like they're good for the position and this is when you bring it to the public? When do you bring it to the public or to the community or parents?

[00:25:35] I think it's a great question. So first is for the search firm to help define the criteria that our community is looking for. So to develop the profile of the superintendent that we as a collective body are looking into it. So board members are one of the stakeholders, the administration, the teachers, the parents.

[00:25:58] And not only that, I think we also select input from the board of supervisors and just taxpayers, too. So it don't have to be another cohort of input that goes into it. So the process would be to first define who are we looking for. I mean, one of the criteria you described has to be diverse pool.

[00:26:15] What are the qualities we're looking for for a superintendent? And then using that as a criteria, a pool of candidates, they go through and identify a pool of candidates, and they go through a sort of review vetting process. The board member is really engaged with it.

[00:26:31] But when we identify, I think, three or four candidates, there is a group of parents that actually get to meet with the superintendent, supposedly, and get to interview and get to engage with them. And they actually provide input back to the board members.

[00:26:47] So it's not done just with the board members. And similarly, so you have to sign an NDA and so on and so forth. But it's a, so there was a group set up, I believe almost 20, 30 parents. And it was through, I would say, pretty diverse and represented the entire county.

[00:27:06] So it didn't come from one particular district as such. And they provided quite a bit of good feedback into the process as well. So I presume that that's similar to that. And again, I said this consulting firm we hired to see what the new approaches that they offer us and how we can continue to engage with our community in making the final decision as well.

[00:27:28] Sorry. If anybody else has a question, I'll turn it over. But one last question is, with the LCPS being very high up in the media and kind of in the public eye, what are you doing to attract candidates that are willing to take that on with the transparency that has not been there so i'll speak for the county part of it i mean i think that is we are starting the journey right now so i don't have a good sort of lens to say

[00:28:03] what kind of pool of candidates are going to be doing but what i'll say to your fault this the the second and third part question a lot of county you know i think i i take a lot of pride i think you should all i mean minus we'll talk about the third part of the question it's one of the best counties in the country the division is phenomenal the staff is phenomenal the student body is phenomenal we are i believe i think that one of the studies that or one of the research firms came back with student body greater than 26 000 we are number one school district in the in the

[00:28:40] in virginia so there's a lot of positive things are happening and it's not minus the noise all the feedback I get from other divisions they look look up to Latin County for what the things what the programs we're doing how we are again you know uplifting the children or at least putting the students back on focus how we are working towards increasing the salary increasing the compensation providing

better benefits better working conditions for our staff so there's many positive things, minus the media, the education community recognizes that and well aware of

[00:29:20] all the good and positive things that we're doing. So I don't think it's lost. I mean, there's a lot of news. I agree with you on that part. There's definitely a lot of attention on this thing, but there's a lot of positive that our division is doing, which is not unnoticed by many, many folks within the country about what we do with it. So as far as the third question, I think there is a lot of progress being done into make improvements from what we have learned through those incidents.

[00:29:51] And it's not shy. It's all public. I think we've shared that. And many more things need to be done with that. So I think I'll focus on the action plan that we're doing, an action plan that we'll continue to work on to make this division better, make this division safe. So there's definitely a big action plan working with the acting superintendent and staff.

[00:30:10] But overall, I think this is still one of the best school systems in the country, and I think we, I don't want to take that away because of some, you know, incidents that happened, which is as, you know, really bad.

[00:30:27] Those incidents never should have happened, but I also want to remind that we have 85,000 students that are doing a phenomenal work in a school division as well. Thank you. Ms. Bush, I have a question over here, Riverside table.

[00:30:44] So just to follow up on her question about selecting a diverse candidate, I'm going to assume, and I'm asking this in front of everyone, that you guys will involve MSAC in that hiring pool of decision-making or influence, I'm assuming?

[00:31:01] Yeah, absolutely. They were involved in the last time. And I mean, like I said, MSAC, the equity, they were all involved. SEAC was involved, just to kind of name some advisory. And I believe they will be definitely involved and engaged during the process as well. I have a question.

[00:31:23] So we're running low on time. If you can make it really brief, then please go. Thank you. I have a question about the EDGE program, empowering diversity and gifted education. If there was an update on if it's been implemented county-wide and at least at the elementary school level.

[00:31:43] So the EDGE program is a longstanding program in Loudoun County Public Schools. and recently we have recommitted to the implementation, the support behind it and making sure that it is offered in all of our elementary schools.

[00:32:02] We have an amazing edge coordinator in our gifted programs office, Dr. Lindsey Bland. She may have been to a meeting in the past, but she is doing amazing work there. And it's part of our strategic plan. If you look, I believe it's in goal 1.2 in terms of expanding the number of students receiving edge services.

[00:32:21] Part of it is tuning the staffing. Our gifted model in Loudoun is something that we've tinkered with over the past couple of years. And so, you know, we ask our gifted teachers to be involved in search and Futura and edge. So we've slowly been plussing up our staffing for gifted and the expansion of edge is one of those opportunities within the school day, identifying those students that need that opportunity.

[00:32:46] but it's part of our strategic plan. It's something we're monitoring and we have a great coordinator. If she hasn't been here, she would be a great guest to MSAC. Not that you're taking

suggestions, but she'd be really good. - Thank you for that question. Thank you, that was a great question.

[00:33:03] Mr. Mahed, if you had to leave, he is our liaison to the school board. Thank you for your questions. He left some cards, so if anyone wants cards for him or has any follow-up questions, please see me. I'll go ahead and put them on the back table. At this time, sorry.

[00:33:18] I just wanted to say one last thing. So I just wanted to thank you for having us here tonight. We are getting ready to have some listening sessions. Each school board is partnering with me to have one session per district. So we'll share that information. I shared it last night for the first time at the school board meeting, but we'll share with you those dates.

[00:33:36] We'd love to have you attend and share your voice. And so I just wanted to continue the partnership. So thanks again for having us. Thank you. And I want to thank you for reaching out to speak. I mean, you said some great things. Definitely looking forward to some actionable outcomes, as you mentioned, Mr. Slovin, Dr. Slovin.

[00:33:56] Yeah, absolutely. So, yeah, thank you so much. I do want to move on. We don't have a whole lot of time, and I definitely want to get our student voices in. I'm going to call Mrs. Lottie Spurlock up. She is our equity director and liaison, and she's going to talk about the documents that you see in blue, the comprehensive equity plan evaluation final report that came out of her office. It has a lot of information that speaks specifically to equity logic models and basically their themes that align with MSAC focus areas so one of those focus areas is discipline disproportionality so I know that

[00:34:33] some folks in the room are not unfamiliar with situations you know whereby you may see one child disciplined and then you know another child disciplined differently and that's something that has a conversation that has taken place in my home, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. And so we really want to hear from all the folks who are overseeing and managing that process and thankfully they are in the building and without further ado, this is Spurlock will tell us more good evening in sack and I will actually be brief as I try to cue up this team that is ready to share with you tonight and then hear some of your questions

[00:35:10] So it's not a surprise those of you who have been in the room and been able to attend the meetings and/or watch virtually, you know that it has not been a secret that we have been slowly unpacking this report throughout the whole school year up until this point and so those of you here in the room if you have a couple of table copies if you quickly turn to page three, you'll see a visual there. Figure one, it's called the framework.

[00:35:37] And so you've actually heard about these prioritized areas. We've talked about what it means for work around culturally responsive instruction and professional learning and coaching, how important it has been as an equity focus for us to look at family and community engagement.

[00:35:57] The bottom turquoise colored figure talks about a multi-tiered system of support and really a focus on academic and behavioral and social emotional learning you're actually going to hear more about that in a few moments paired with what's on the bottom left the focus on eliminating discipline disparities and opportunity gaps and so what I'd like you to if you're able to flip in the report to page 15 if you'd like to follow along I know some people

[00:36:33] like to have their notes right there. If not, I know some of the same graphs and visuals and content in this report will also be on the slides as the group is presenting. And so before I cue them up and

call them by name, I do want to really circle back to a little bit of what Dr. Smith said. He shared a lot of great work that is happening over the last few months. You've had an opportunity to hear sort of the experts in the room and talk about some of the real programming and some of ways that lcps is really centering equity and even with all this great work we really are doing an

[00:37:09] injustice when we are not truthful in naming that there are challenges and so we have to really face those challenges and so i want to cue up one of my favorite quotes from james baldwin in the spirit of black history month i think about the when he says not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced and so in this comprehensive equity plan evaluation report we dared to face some of the things that were areas that have come up over several years

[00:37:43] where some students may not feel included or some students may have felt that they have not felt welcomed and so this is not about a majority this is about each and every student so at this time I'm going to call up some awesome leaders from two different offices.

[00:38:02] One is from the Office of School Administration, and the other office is the Office of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. I hope I have that right. If not, that's what it is for now, and then Dr. LaPaula will clarify. So at this time, I'll ask Dr. Stephanie LaPaula, who is the supervisor of MTSS, if she will come up.

[00:38:24] Dr. Tripp DeNicola, he is actually the supervisor of school administration, but he is serving in the interim director role right now in Dr. Fulton's absence, and Dr. Tara Wooliver is working as the interim supervisor of school administration, and she lives a double life at John Champ as assistant principal, right?

[00:38:47] That is correct. Okay. Thank you so much, team. Thank you so much for having us here this evening. We are being very cognizant of our time because we know that we want to hear from our students. And so, as Lottie mentioned, we want to let you know that you are hearing from two different departments.

[00:39:08] You're hearing from the Department of Student Services and the Department of Instruction. I appreciated the Office of MTSS. We're not there yet, but my work lives in the Office of Diagnostic and Prevention Services. And just very quickly, so you know who's speaking with you today.

[00:39:25] This is my current role. I have been in the county my entire career. This is my 16th year. I started as a school psychologist. I was the PBIS coordinator, and now I've been in the supervisor for MTSS position for the last six years. Do you want to expand more on your roles, or do you feel like they have been covered? Okay. Good evening. I'm Tripp DeNicola. I'm the interim director of school administration. I started teaching in 1996. I was a French, Japanese, and Spanish teacher before I became a school administrator. I've been in Loudoun for 21 years now open River Bend middle school as a Dean and that I think I taught French there as well and then smarts from middle school

[00:40:04] I opened as an assistant principal in 2004 Broadbent High School for nine years a top French there and served as a department chair and then assistant principal at Riverside High School before taking on this role in the office of school administration. Hi, good evening. It's an honor to be here I'm Tara Williver. I am currently the interim supervisor office of school administration But as was said, I'm part of that John Champ cluster, and I'm happy to see our folks here this evening.

[00:40:35] This is my 24th year in education, and I did not start in Loudoun County. I actually started across the mountain in Frederick County Public Schools. And I started as a social studies teacher, and then

I moved to another high school to open a new high school as a department chair.

[00:40:50] And then I started a journey next as a social studies supervisor and health and PE supervisor, and then I crossed the mountain. I am now in my seventh year in Loudoun County Public Schools and I've enjoyed every moment of it I started my journey in Loudoun at Trailside Middle School as an assistant principal and also as a special education designee I then made my way across the county to South Riding where I am currently an assistant principal at John Champ High School And I'm still the special education designee So just a little bit and I'm excited now in my new role in adventure, which is temporary And so what we wanted to have an opportunity to do today is to show you how our

[00:41:29] work really complements each other in terms of looking at behavior across the continuum. This is not a standalone presentation on PBIS. This is not a standalone presentation on our discipline process. So we're trying to bring this together, and I'm certain that it will evoke some questions, some comments, and we certainly encourage you to reach out, ask those questions, give us feedback, because this is a very iterative process. This is something that we refine over and over and over again. We have constant conversations. So what you see before you is the

[00:42:06] mission and vision of a multi-tiered system of supports. As it's been mentioned, it's highlighted and emphasized throughout our new strategic plan. And really, I'm hoping some main words jump out at you. We're looking at words like supporting the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional mental health needs of all of our learners, really making sure that we are providing equitable experiences for them and providing environments in which they feel culturally affirmed, welcomed, engaged, and have opportunities to make academic and social risks because that's how we learn.

[00:42:41] And you'll also see that we do this through a process of not only providing high quality core instruction that's differentiated to meet the needs of learners, but then also layering on top of that either targeted or intensive evidence-based interventions when our learners need a little bit more. Here is our triangle, which we put in every single presentation that we do. But the main thing that I want to highlight here is that when we in Loudoun talk about a multi-tiered system of supports, we're talking about three big domains. We're talking about

[00:43:18] academic, and that includes core instruction, and then interventions in all content areas. We're talking about behavior, that is things like PBIS, evidence-based interventions like check-in, check-out, mentoring, restorative practices.

[00:43:37] And then we talk about things like social-emotional mental health, that are things like our social-emotional learning, our unified mental health teams, all of the work that we're doing to provide a comprehensive model of integrated support for all of our students. Why this is important and why I wanted to highlight this is because I could have spent my entire evening talking just about probably this and how all of these things fit together, tonight's focus is on the behavioral lens and specifically what we're doing to try to harness most of our efforts in the realm of preventing discipline incidents from occurring. So the

[00:44:16] majority of the work that my office works in is that tier one area. And I'll remember what Mr. Slevin mentioned earlier which is really about how are we supporting our teachers and then how are we helping our teachers foster those meaningful relationships with the learners in their classroom community and so this work has been going on for a long time and in highlighting the work that we're

trying to do to reduce the gap in discipline and discipline disproportionality we have to think about prevention what we know is that if we can predict it we can most likely prevent it and so

[00:44:55] we try to work really hard in looking at our school as a system and what are we doing how are we contributing a staff to the system and how are the students responding to the system and continually making changes to that so implementation of PBIS school-wide which includes teaching and reteaching behavioral expectations making sure that our students understand what is expected of them as a learner in the schools that they attend making sure that students are provided with not only praise when they've completed something, but process praise along

[00:45:30] the way to keep that level of engagement, those opportunities to respond, and that level of authenticity high for them. Professional learning is something we focus on, looking at classroom strategies, so trying to support our classroom teachers in how do we reteach behaviors.

[00:45:48] If a student makes what we view as an academic mistake, let's view behavior from the same lens. Let's view it as a behavioral mistake and let's address it through strategies, possibly intervention as opposed to punishment because that doesn't help us learn and that doesn't help us correct our behaviors.

[00:46:08] And then finally, my team has the privilege to visit all of the schools across the county and we meet with PBIS coaches, with teachers, with school leaders, and we often sit down and look at discipline data together.

[00:46:25] We have, in fact, built a data application where schools can look at incidents by location, time of day, grade level. They can break it down by subgroup, IEP, EL, and they can really get an idea of what's happening across the school so that they can look for trends and patterns to address it in a timely manner.

[00:46:49] And then my last slide here is some of the continued work that we've been, you know, we always are thinking about how to propel the work forward. So one of the things that has just been created this year is a Tier 1 Behavioral Strategies Toolkit, and this is actually a resource document that is teacher-facing to be used directly in the classrooms so that teachers can take an inventory of behaviors that they might be seeing, and it provides them with some guidance on how to make environmental adjustments, on how to make some instructional adjustments, and also how to link the behavioral skills up with some social-emotional learning

[00:47:26] so that we can again try to set our students up for if there's a need that they are communicating through a behavior as opposed to words. Maybe it's because they don't have the words for example or they don't have the tools in order to be able to do that and so we are trying to provide some additional coaching at the classroom level. We've also been really highlighting our evidence-based interventions particularly at tier two so doing things like check-in check-out which is an evidence-based intervention in which the literature says is highly effective. And this is really about building relationships across the school because we know if we don't have relationships, we don't

[00:48:03] feel safe, we don't feel welcomed, we may not want to be engaged in classroom instruction. That all comes first. We've obviously invested in our unified mental health teams and our mental health practitioners as well as a second step social emotional learning curriculum across our schools and really trying to be intentional again about the coordination and the coherence between SEL and PBIS.

[00:48:31] Additionally, we have created a culturally responsive tiered fidelity inventory, which is an assessment that our PBIS teams use to assess their PBIS practices to make sure that they're not just

working for a portion of students, but that they're working for all students.

[00:48:47] This year we extended that further to help guide staff towards SIP goals, school improvement planning goals that they might want to target and should think about targeting to help reduce things like discipline disproportionality or high rates of office referrals.

[00:49:03] And finally, here's my volley to my colleagues. We have collaborated with our Department of Instruction, specifically in this sense, our Office of School Administration, to help to provide upfront guidance to our schools and our school leaders as they not only, again, support their teachers in the use of these classroom practices, but then also play a role in the discipline process for students.

[00:49:30] Thank you, Dr. Lopala. So speaking of the classroom, the discipline referral process begins in the classroom. you can see from the graphic that's on the screen often classroom behaviors are managed best in the classroom by the teacher by the student in a process that involves a conversation about what has occurred and then reteaching or relationship building so that the behavior is addressed but it's addressed in a way that discipline is not issued and it's addressed in a way hopefully where the behavior is not repeated we hope to address most behaviors in the classroom and so teachers are encouraged to follow this model and we start often

[00:50:10] in the yellow that you see on the screen again the focus here is really looking at equitable culturally responsive staff responses in the classroom environment to address behaviors if behaviors can't be addressed or managed in the classroom there is the next process and dr. Di Nicola will describe that so as you can see here in terms of office preferred behaviors that are managed They are required to be documented as part of the VDOE process in terms of student discipline.

[00:50:41] However, I would like you to say something with me, these two words. Communication, we can say it together, communication, relationships. So there's still the ever-important focus on whenever we get to office-preferred behaviors that are required in terms of state code that may lead to more dispositions that are exclusionary in practice as a result of that, we're constantly focusing on trying to find ways to try to keep students in school and in classrooms and to hear your feedback too about how we can improve our discipline practices.

[00:51:12] Not sure if you can see the blue arrow on the right hand side, it's kind of cut off and goes back to that first piece. So it's always about recycling back, being reflective on our practices, thinking about when we can incorporate functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans to improve student behaviors to not get to the point where we get to the higher level office referrals.

[00:51:35] This slide is just showing you that we are required as a division. to report all office referrals at the state level with their dispositions and disciplinary responses, but constantly focusing on equitable practices, methods by which we can improve student behaviors collaboratively and ultimately gaining your feedback as well to improve our student code of conduct, which is a major project that I know we'd like to work on this year with you.

[00:52:00] So you may not have heard of this. This is new for a lot of administrators this year. It's called the Student Behavior Administrative Response Chart. And I remember when I first became an administrator, We used to have this tool that we used that would say the first time something happens, then this. The second time something happens, then this.

[00:52:16] I would say we've moved very much away from that, and we're focusing a whole lot more on the individual child, what the needs are, and how we can focus on the education and improvement in line with our strategic plan. So I'm going to use a tool here that is available to you called the Student Code of Conduct.

[00:52:32] We're going to go to page six. It's got this wonderful device here in terms of being able to view the documents. we have to increase the size of the page to show you the piece we would like to focus on for you. All of our policies and practices, and especially all of our work with our student code of conduct, focused entirely on non-discriminatory practices.

[00:52:54] Dr. Oliver, Dr. Fulton, and I work every month with elementary, middle school, and high school deans, assistant principals, and principals to reflect on discipline, practices, and interventions to constantly improve ways that we can help student behaviors. and also including the student voice in ways that we can improve our practices.

[00:53:13] I think that is the most essential key piece where we need your help to be able to continue to improve our work. So the chart that you see here is the tool that school administrators will use. There is, as you can see here, these are all VDOE violation codes.

[00:53:30] And if you look on the left-hand side, you'll see some sample codes, and on the right-hand side, you'll see leveled responses. So that is not necessarily the first, second, and third time. It's more about focusing on the specific child, what the disciplinary infraction might be, how we can work with the families, the students, staff as a team to be able to try to appropriate the behavior and help correct it.

[00:53:56] We are focused constantly on safety, precautionary measures, and as you can imagine, there are certain infractions, such in the state of weapons, drug violations, that have state co-responses that we must follow as a division. however we still are trying to use a lot of the MTSS practices and all of the work that we do to a discipline to constantly focus on the preventive measures and ways that we can avoid some of those exclusionary practices so one thing to note if you're interested that's just this is just a screenshot of the first page of the document that administrators use in the county you can

[00:54:34] actually access the other pages that administrators use in Loudoun County public schools same link in the presentation but you're going to move to the last few pages of the code of conduct document and if you look you can see on screen you can actually see all of the pages that administrators in Loudoun County Public Schools actually use to make decisions about discipline okay so we just want to make sure we pointed that out now when Miss Furlock emailed she had asked for two things there were two words improvement and

[00:55:09] movement are two things that that were requested for this evening's discussion so we have data for you to look at and I think that I want to make sure that we are all looking at it through the lens of we can always do better we know we can always do better we always want to do better so as you look at the data that you see on the screen you're gonna see on the left side that's actually a screenshot from the blue docket at the blue page document the comprehensive equity plan that you have at your tables and then on the right side being very

[00:55:43] vulnerable this is live data that was just I brought to the presentation this evening so this is the current date as of today when you look at the screen you're going to notice this data is about office referral comparison rates so when you look at data the left hand side is going to show you a year-long snapshot of

data the right hand side is going to be from August to present you can look and see that there is a you can compare line for line as we look there are we there yet well we have some work to do I believe that's going to be part

[00:56:19] of the discussion this evening after looking at the data so if you'll take a look at it we can certainly move to questions after we get through the slideshow okay so this is one snapshot unless you have current no okay all right we're gonna here we go keep moving the next slide compares suspension rate data left side is from the comprehensive equity plan right side is current data as of today last thing we want to next the last thing we want to highlight we are making great strides using restorative practices and you can see in the top left we are getting better at offering restorative practices as an

[00:56:56] alternative to disciplinary practices or measures the bottom the bottom text box with data it's amazing if you look at how many more conferences and circles are taking place to improve relationships repair relationships and then be able to move forward without the use of discipline just a quick note if you look at our disp our suspension data over the time period listed it actually is decreasing and that's certainly something to celebrate and as we wrap up

[00:57:30] tonight dr. Dina Cola one of our major projects the year this year to focus on opportunity gaps in the work that we do with student discipline and responses to behaviors is to help provide professional development for every single administrative team in our district in terms of focusing on equity reflections and student discipline so if you look at the bulleted goals of this particular project I've already visited three schools so far and we have four scheduled and then in the coming weeks so promoting equitable approaches to determine administrative responses to student behaviors with a pulse on the

[00:58:06] various student groups delineated by VDOE to ensure alignment collaboration communication and calibration among administrative teams and among staff members and responding to student behaviors and to also work collaboratively to find methods by which the administrative team can improve its efforts with your feedback with the staff's feedback to continually align that SBAR chart in support of positive student behavior improvement which circles right back to the MTSS strategies that Dr. LaPaula spoke about earlier that is our last slide so if you have questions yes let me oh one second Andrea I just want to

[00:58:44] make sure everybody is clear on what's been said so far there's a lot of technical data here so I want to make sure everyone is clear on exactly what has been shown so far would do you mind going back a few slides the yeah go back back the live data that you referred to okay yeah all right so office referral race comparison I want to make sure everyone is clear on what they're seeing before we go to questions okay all right so I just wanted to kind of set the stage I don't want us to move beyond this because there are a lot of numbers there's a lot of technical you know terms that are being

[00:59:23] thrown around I want to make sure we're on the same page before we go to questions go ahead Andrea okay so keeping that ratio that number two is is the magic number, if it is further separated by gender, does anyone go over that magic disproportionality once you take out, separate for gender?

[00:59:54] So that is definitely one of the categories at which we look as part of our VDOE school quality profile factors, and it is part of the equity reflection work that we're doing with our school administrators, so I would say wholeheartedly that's one of the areas that we're focusing on to try to make improvements but does it have a huge impact on those numbers and ratios and is there a specific group where it has

[01:00:31] more of an impact on changing the ratio of disproportionality here comes the guru of all data dr. Ryan Tyler so thank you for the question in my this is my 11th year in Lowell County Public Schools if you remember the discipline task force we had eight years ago the focus was on racial differences and we've hovered around that disproportionality of two to one for black and hispanic students for years but it has been most

[01:01:08] disproportionate for students of ieps special education and that hovers around four to one even though our rates are the lowest some of the lowest suspension rates overall so in order it's It's been students of disabilities, most disproportionate, then gender, then some of the racial group differences.

[01:01:40] - Question, is there any data being collected around, because I know for certain areas of discipline, I'm aware that there's been an uptick on use of the N word and other inflammatory arguments that surround race and things like that.

[01:02:01] Now, when those situations take place and there's discipline that takes place, Is there any accounting for kind of the nexus of these incidents? Is anyone taking stock of kind of if there's a fight, how did the fight happen? Is anyone gathering that data?

[01:02:20] Can you speak to that? - So here is where my office would collaborate with or intersect with the Office of School Administration. So the Office of Equity is one of multiple offices who receives a live incident reporting.

[01:02:41] And actually I had this by way of announcements that I was going to say that last Thursday at the equity committee of the school board meeting for this year, I presented where we have landed for the first two quarters of this school year.

[01:02:58] And I understand that data also is in one of the local news outlets as well. And so part two of that conversation is coming up in the March meeting, But I will say the office, our office receives the incident reporting when it is specific to the slurs and or offensive language.

[01:03:19] Our office works with administrators to denounce it and to work on the restorative part of it in concert with other leaders from student services. But we are not directly involved in the discipline. So here's where I would toss it to Dr. DiNicola to talk about what that looks like on the discipline end.

[01:03:40] So there are violations that are in the VDOE codes that I showed you earlier on the chart that are actually specifically focused on those very behaviors. And a lot of the level responses are tied very much to restorative practices, the educational piece.

[01:03:56] And we work very collaboratively with school administrators constantly whenever there is an incident that's reported through a Google form, actually, where we tally all the data. But then it is always that connection between that school administrative team looking at the individual children and then working with Lottie's office to be able to remedy the situation and improve the resources to support the improvement of the behaviors. Is that data being collected is my question. Yes, it's tracked in the student information system. It's also tracked in terms of what we have in terms of collecting all of the incidents that are that occur.

[01:04:30] School administration is required to submit the Google form as part of the Protocol and policy. Okay, and what code would that be? I mean, I know we I know you guys there are several codes Do you know offhand? I can show you the code and the student and the the student code of conduct if you would

like to see what they look like Okay, well other questions are being asked us. That's fine. I just had a quick question or wondering I'm noticing looking at this data black students Are racially minority more minoritized students overall sped students all students

[01:05:06] are still disproportionate in kind of all categories. So not just in discipline, but also in suspensions. And then I see that suspensions are going down, but it doesn't seem like it's becoming less disproportionate for those students.

[01:05:21] So I'm wondering if there's been an investigation or an inquiry into why restorative practices are not working effectively for certain populations of students. And if we have an idea of what we might be able to do about that to make them potentially little bit more culturally responsive or sustaining you were able to analyze the data very quickly that was impressive as I try so when I was presenting I I highlighted the idea of improvement and movement right and I want to focus on

[01:06:00] the word movement this time clearly the data indicates we need more movement one of the ways that we're trying to do it trying to change the data that you're seeing is what dr. D Nikola mentioned on the last slide having the cut that the reviews and the reflections with administrative teams at schools to really take a hard look at the discipline data and how disciplinary decisions are being made i can tell you also from a personal perspective and this goes to what you had asked as well school administrators do call the office of school administration and do try to talk through situations and we do try to cut we coach

[01:06:36] and guide and help administrators in schools try to make decisions using an equitable lens as well we hope that those as well as the professional development that was mentioned to do hope shift or change the data that you're seeing so that it would be a match right where you would see lower suspensions but you would also see the disproportionality shifting as well so I hope through those measures that we do see change and we see change while you're still with us without a doubt in Loudoun County Public Schools. I can tell you it's a continual focus. So movement is the word there. We want to continue to make continuous movement.

[01:07:15] Hi, I'm so sorry. I had a really quick question. So I'm not really sure how the like discipline protocols work. And I understand there's like a lot that goes into it. And I really don't want to jump to like any conclusions. But this is an example when the use of racial language or derogatory terms happens in a school and then an altercation or a fight kind of results from that something i've noticed is that the fight or altercation is punished a lot more severely than the use of the slur or the derogatory term that resulted in that fight in the first place

[01:07:55] so what is that being considered in any way and if it is how does the school board plan on addressing it? I would say in terms of looking at combination effects like the ones about what you're speaking, individual cases of student discipline in terms of focusing on behaviors oftentimes are dependent on situations and in terms of what the root origin cause of certain

[01:08:29] behaviors might be. A lot of that is really determined, I think, by unraveling the origin of the behavior like the one that you're mentioning in terms of fighting. I would say that nine times out of ten the physical conflict is rooting back to relationships comments unwanted commentary just in terms of perhaps racial slurs or biases but I would say that part of the work that we have to do to be able to try to look at our responses would be to make sure that we're focusing on eradicating the behavior and the exclusionary practices at times doesn't really

[01:09:04] resolve that in many cases so I would say that it really depends upon the individual student circumstances sometimes the patterns of behaviors that we see over time and whether or not they're they're continuing and oftentimes we have to have deeper measures to be able to resolve some of those behaviors so I think that it's a unique collaborative approach that we can try to continue to do in our work with the Office of Equity I think it is as mentioned it's an area of growth on which we have to continue to work and I think that that's only going to be able to happen by getting more feedback about how we can really focus on behaviors such as racial slurs or biases that eventually lead to other

[01:09:42] disciplinary infractions to completely eradicate them altogether and that is through teamwork and discussions among students admin team staff parents I'm glad you mentioned feedback and this is something a lot of my classmates that I have been discussing that we don't really have an avenue for us to directly communicate with the disciplinary board disciplinary board on how something should be handled and it's I'm me personally I've been feeling like this for a hot minute now and a lot of my friends share in these feelings so something we've been discussing is that when

[01:10:18] the fight or the physical aspect is punished a lot like more severely than the root cause like the use of a racial slur or derogatory term what that sends like the message that sends to the people that are doing those is they will be punished more than I will and at the end of the day I will come out on top so they will continue to do it and like I said I'm not really qualified I'm just on the other end but from our end I feel like it would do a lot more it would lead to a lot

[01:10:52] more progress if we were to focus on targeting the root cause which is the use of those terms and the people that use those terms feeling empowered use them and focus a little bit less on the punishment aspect of the fight. And I'll just jump in.

[01:11:10] Well said. Yes, thank you so much. Yes, definitely worth the applause. And this is actually sometimes not the most comforting thing for people to hear specific to this, but this is where the learning has to take place.

[01:11:28] And I know some people would push back and say, oh, no, they know exactly what they're doing. In many cases, yes. And there is still learning and direct teaching that needs to occur with this. once we continue to do that as well as denounce it every time every time we send the clear message as well as combine it with any disciplinary practices there is a code and is am I reading that right RB 9 yes that speaks directly to the slurs and so yes perfectly noted that a lot of times yes it may result in a

[01:12:05] fight a physical altercation but when we think about what actually started it we need to get to the root. So I just want to, again, reiterate, here's where the direct teaching and learning comes into play, not just for staff, but also for students. And it has also been noted as an area that we've received pushback, but there is absolutely a need for it. I just have a quick question. We have a question in the back. Oh, I'm sorry. One second. We've got a student question and we'll answer yours. Okay. I wanted to also ask on figure eight in the packet, it points out that

[01:12:42] staff discipline students the same way for the same behavior with black and african-american students having the lowest percentage so i just want to question how does admin address racially based issues if it's pointed out in the data that they do have issues treating students the same

[01:12:58] on figure eight of page 18 where it talks about middle school student perceptions by race for the

[01:13:43] statement staff disciplines students the same way for the same behavior I just want to question how policies are carried out and how consequences are carried out for students if within the data it's shown that they're not disciplined or they're not perceived the same way to begin with so how are racially based issues how are they treated when staff don't perceive students the same way even within the data and thank you for noting that and so what we're looking at on page 18 is really the results from student

[01:14:17] perceptions by race for the statement and so what we know perception is actually your experience and your reality and so it we are noting here that this is an area for improvement and growth what we're showing here is that our black and african-american students are experiencing this at a lesser rate and feeling that staff discipline students in the same way and so this is some this represents again some of that need for a specific work that we're doing with the adults across the division adults in this building who support schools and adults who work in the schools so

[01:14:55] your teachers as well as administrators and I would say in combination with that feedback in being able to use the information that this committee provides us really all of our stakeholders in terms of looking at our LCPS responses to student discipline in association with the violations to continue to look at what other ways we can remedy the situation and to eradicate behaviors that on which we have to have greater focus such as SARS in terms of our protocol and

[01:15:32] we had a question in the back so with the impact of social media in terms of what's happening in

[01:16:09] our communities if it comes into the school environment and creates a safety concern or it impacts the school environment in any way it can absolutely be incorporated as part of our work to try to promote appropriate behaviors in our school. So yes, it can be addressed. There are actually codes that are part of VDOE's violations that focus on that very aspect and educating our students to use technology better and to avoid those types of discussions and conflicts.

[01:16:35] Okay, I want to go ahead and give them a hand for their time and for coming out and taking these questions. I know this is a hot topic. We only have 15 minutes. I wanted to make sure we got a chance to hear the student voices, and I wanted you all to have a chance to ask your questions.

[01:16:53] I wanted you all to see this data and know that we're tracking it and know that we care about this. So that's why we went a little over time. But I did want to make time for the discussion about affinity groups and then feel free at that time to still continue to talk about your own observations around some of the topics that we've discussed.

[01:17:11] Right now I'm going to ask Dr. John Walker, thank you so much, to talk to us about affinity groups. want to give as much time as we possibly can tonight for the students and the

[01:17:50] adult sponsors of the affinity groups we have several students here in the first two tables so I think hearing straight from them what an affinity group has helped them with a supported them in how it's helped them maybe survive and thrive in school would be good so I would like to skip over a good part of this presentation and get right to what they what's on their minds and in their hearts because we only have about 12 minutes left right so yeah so I think that's the really important way to go I just want to start with like well what are affinity groups you know maybe you might not know I mean it's just groups of students with similar racial ethnic or social backgrounds that provide a

[01:18:29] opportunity for connection and conversation which is incredibly important right because you got it think you know if it wasn't for the relationships in your life where would you be and affinity groups are all about relationships and creating safety acceptance and belonging even in situations where you may not feel that way so I want to jump right from there there's my quick introduction to it and you can just look at page 13 and 14 in the comprehensive equity report there and it explains the things that I had in the slides anyway but I'd like to go right to the students and right to the adult sponsors maybe we start out with introductions adult sponsors do you

[01:19:07] want to introduce yourselves and then students you want to introduce yourselves or should we go straight to questions? Okay, would you like to go first, Kristen Quimby? If you guys can use the microphone, just pop that little button there on the, there you go.

[01:19:32] Sorry, I'm Dani Vons, I'm a junior at Briarwoods High School. I'm Bia Sale, and I'm a senior at Briarwoods High School. I'm Sahana Suriram, and I'm also a senior at Briarwoods High School. And then we'll go over here to Aline Zappala.

[01:19:51] I'm Aline Zappala, I'm a school social worker at Stonebridge High School and sponsor of the Minority Student Council. I'm Afton Herkey from Stonebridge High School, and I'm in 10th grade. I'm Gia Padam, and I'm a sophomore at Stonebridge.

[01:20:12] I'm Adedeeb Hutt, and I'm a senior at Stonebridge. I'm Leona Days. I'm the Career Center Specialist at Broadrun High School. Hello, my name is Amel Rissmet, and I'm a senior in Broadrun High School. Hi, I'm Caitlin Levine, and I'm a senior at Broadrun High School.

[01:20:32] I'm also Vice President of BSU, and so is Amal. My name is Levi. I'm a freshman at Light Ridge High School and a leader at BSU.

[01:20:48] Can we just start out by giving them all a round of applause that they came out on a school night, you know, and they're still here, probably didn't even go home, maybe had a snack or hopefully some dinner before then. But me and Ms. Bush were talking prior to this, and I thought you had a great introductory question. Would you like to just kind of pose that to the students?

[01:21:09] Absolutely. Just want to know, why did you join? If you all would kind of go around the table and, you know, just in a, we don't have a whole lot of time, so if you could give us about a 30 second clip and talk to us about your, really what drove you to affinity groups.

[01:21:25] Yeah, so I guess we can start then. So MSC in Briarwoods started first with equity circling sessions. I know we talked a lot about restorative justice and restorative practices before this, so I think that was a huge part of kind of how MSC came to be.

[01:21:48] Coming back from COVID, honestly, it was a polarizing time because we were seeing this huge uptick in hate speech and kind of disrespectful behavior. And we wanted to come together in a way that gave us a shared identity and allowed us to have an avenue to share our experiences and our own identities in our school.

[01:22:10] So I was a part of the equity circling sessions, and that's a reason why I continued my involvement in MSC. My situation is basically the same as Sahana's. We also started out with the, well, I also started out at the circles, the equity circles and the discussions we were having. And one of the

reasons that I chose to continue with MSC was I didn't really feel like heard, I guess, before having those circles. I felt like those experiences were like a niche experience, I guess, to the black

[01:22:47] student population at Briarwoods and at the circles we kind of saw that it wasn't and there was like even it's kind of sad but it was like it created like a sort of solidarity I guess and it wasn't just it showed me that it wasn't just happening to us and it showed us that we also had like I guess allies and people we could rely on and have a we could build a community that we would feel included and just a community in which we felt like we belonged in and in a way that we don't have to change ourselves to feel like we could belong in a space.

[01:23:25] So I actually had a different experience. The main reason why I decided to join MSC was because actually like Breyer was as a whole. When I first moved here, I'm in the military, my mom was in the military, excuse me, and I had noticed like this was the first place that I actually ever felt welcome and felt like there was a community there.

[01:23:45] And I had heard from like students like Bea that they weren't experiencing the same thing that I was, Or at least I wasn't as aware of it and I wanted to make sure that with MSC We were able to like spread that community that I was feeling along with other students because it's important. It's necessary for us I joined MSC last year my freshman year because I'm middle school I didn't really feel represented or connected to other Minorities and so then I kind of just saw a little poster and decided to go to the meeting and it was really fun

[01:24:22] because I got to actually connect to a bunch of minorities in the school and I have a bunch of friends and stuff and we've gotten to do different things to help increase diversity in our school and so that just made me really want to join and stay and now as a sophomore I'm one of the co-presidents. So last year I joined MSC. Unfortunately I haven't really been as active this year as I wish I could be but I do agree that affinity groups do provide a sense of community especially with students that are stressed and trouble have trouble finding friends and then it

[01:24:58] also builds relatability with scenarios that happen at school so I do think they're really positive I joined MSC this year my senior year and I joined because mostly because of the reasons both Afton and Gia said I felt like I had the opportunity to display my culture a little bit better than I would have if I hadn't joined MSC so I actually didn't plan to join black student union when I first started at Broderon High School last

[01:25:33] year because originally the school that I came from didn't really at the time of being there didn't really have those type of clubs where you could come together with your ethnic groups and you're like have a sense of community so I wasn't really used to that thing type of like clubs and activities until one of my friends kind of like peer pressured me to join and once you have positive peer pressure and when I I remember first joining the group and finding like a sense of relief and like a community that I didn't really I didn't really know until I came to Broad Run and I haven't

[01:26:11] looked back since like I feel like joining Black Student Union was one of the best things I could have done I was able to like come at peace with where I came from and like my origins and be able to talk about things that happen in the black community with people around me who also understand what's going on and understand like what being a minority at a school is so I'm really it's become a sense of peace for me to be in that group so yeah so for me it was actually the opposite of my vice president because I moved here from Atlanta last year so there was really no need

[01:26:50] for us to have a black student union at a predominantly black school so when I came to BSU especially in Loudoun County there wasn't much emphasis on highlighting or lifting up students of color at the time that I came everyone was essentially treated the same which did come as an issue in important talks about racism or about discrimination where black people are used as a standard for racism or as kind of the token, what you use as an example, rather than speaking to the minority groups who are actually at the school.

[01:27:27] So when I came to LCPS at first, I didn't feel very welcomed by my peers and I didn't feel very comfortable in classes where I was the only black student. So I joined BSU sort of as a way to connect with my community away from home and a way to meet people who I relate to and who look like me because although a lot of people disagree but I personally believe that seeing people who look like you reflects kind of a sense

[01:27:55] of home it gives you a sense of peace I joined BSU because I personally felt that that if we have that if like if you see somebody that kind of like looks like you and then you're you're just talking to them in an environment where you can be in the area where people kind of like think like you, it's a lot more comfortable and it builds like a positive community.

[01:28:31] Like in my school, in my black student union, we start off with like a question, like a question on how um how like we feel like we're treated as um as um black students and um and lcps and how we um we have like topic discussions on like um what we feel is being done for us and

[01:29:03] what we feel is you know not done so and especially like just hearing people share what they um seeing seeing what people have to say about these topics, it really just brings you a sense of comfortability and community.

[01:29:23] It's like you can relate to them and you always can just kind of rely on them because it's kind of like you know them. I don't know about everyone else but I could listen to them all night long right, couldn't you? Because they put it out there in a real way.

[01:29:44] One last question because we really don't have much time and I guess I would ask for maybe three volunteers to sort of answer this question but how do you think it's changed you if it has and what would be one thing you would want to tell other people about your experience in an affinity group who would like to go first um i feel like joining msc like not just affinity groups in general but just msc specifically joining msc opened up a lot of opportunities

[01:30:21] that i didn't know were available to me that connected me to a whole new group of people that i normally wouldn't like have a chance to interact with or get to know about their culture and it introduced me to like a really really good people that like i now would reach out to for any need or any occasion that i would have what i would tell people about msc is if there's an opportunity for you to join a club like msc or even create one i feel like it's a wonderful

[01:30:54] opportunity that doesn't come around for a lot of people. And it's MSC and affinity clubs in general are a space for you to kind of build your chosen family, I guess. And it's a lot of people that share similar ideologies or even completely different ideologies, but look like you. So you're more likely to accept, not accept, but be willing to learn from the things they would have to say than it would have been to learn from a completely opposite person that does looks nothing

[01:31:29] like you or shares nothing with you or shares and no life experiences so my conclusion is msc and affinity clubs are great join them if you have them create them if you don't they're wonderful well said i know we come from the same school so i'll make this really short but i think we talked about or you guys talked about equitable lenses a lot so approaching things through an equitable lens and I think at the heart of that lies diverse perspectives and even if someone doesn't have the same experiences as someone else even if you're not a person of color I think joining that

[01:32:09] conversation and learning from the perspectives and stories of others storytelling is a really really big part of what we do at MSC I think that can help build an equitable lens that we can transfer from staff to students, students to students, students to staff, and that creates like a very wholesome cycle that can hopefully last for many years. So coming from Black Student

[01:32:44] Union at Broadbent High School, I think the club has mostly taught me that one, communication is key to understanding, and not necessarily that you must, that everyone in your club must be exactly like you but that people within an infinity group and people specifically within a race come in all different shapes and sizes and ideologies and perspectives so and then bsu has also taught me that you have a voice and your voice matters so you should use your voice to speak out against

[01:33:20] what matters to you so at black student union we often talk about the topics that interest us or how we feel like we are being perceived or how we perceive the world around us and I think everyone in our club specifically has a different point of view or a different interpretation of what happens in our day-to-day lives and using our voice within the club to speak out about how we see the world and how we feel we are treated by the people around us is very important to us So, BSU, for me, has taught me to use my voice in ways that can help people around me, and that also uplift me.

[01:34:02] Great word, uplift. And since the adults had so much time, and there really was a tie there, they both shot their hand up at the same time. Would you like to go next? You've got the closing words. What I'd say is these affinity groups, such as BSU, it brings different perspectives from different people together.

[01:34:28] Especially in my BSU, it's not 100% black. There are some white people, some Indian people, so it's diverse, but we're all there for one reason, to unite us all.

[01:34:48] to advance the, so we can understand how other people feel, how other people, or the way black people were just, or are just treated, like, it just deepens an understanding for black people, and it educates everybody, like, me and BSU, it definitely has educated me, I know it has, like, definitely educated a lot of other people, and I'd say being in

[01:35:27] BSU just showed me that I don't know it all, really. It's like I can still learn from everybody else, no matter what skin color I am and no matter where I come from, that we can always learn from each other and learn to accept each other.

[01:35:50] Certainly keeps it safe and open-minded, right? Thank you so much, everybody. Oh, yes? All right, let's hear from Stonebridge. We can do that, absolutely. I want to hear from Stonebridge.

[01:36:08] This is great. I guess Minority Student Count Cook Stonebury has kind of taught me, at least, and I know some other people in the club, that making things more inclusive and teaching other people about how to be more inclusive and also about different things such as, like, microaggressions and different behaviors that they have and how they can be offensive.

[01:36:31] And it's honestly not as hard as some people make it seem. And if you talk to them, people do kind of listen. And it's made me realize that it's really important to kind of get those conversations out there because people will listen and they will change.

[01:36:48] And then I kind of say that it's definitely worth joining a club like MSC or even just MSC because you get to meet a bunch of people who are like you or have something similar to you. So even though you all have different perspectives, you all have something in common.

[01:37:03] So also, even if you don't necessarily make a lot of changes in your school, you can at least meet people who are similar to you and who you kind of can connect and relate to. Excellent. Well said. Let's give him a round of applause. Got one more? One more. Okay. I can't say no. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

[01:37:23] I am so sorry. And I feel like I have done a very big disservice to my friend Danny here by sitting next to her because all I do is talk and I'm very opinionated. But I personally feel like she has a lot of very, very good points that need to be heard.

[01:37:41] So I'm going to turn it over to my good sis here. I am so sorry. I'm not going to go on a 20-minute soliloquy. I'm going to make this really fast. So I noticed at the beginning of Mr. Walker's speech that he brought up the definition of affinity groups. And I would love for it to not just be a group for minority students because I love that safe space.

[01:38:01] But it needs to be spread to the majority. so that they can actively participate in the conversations as well. Because if we're talking about it and they're not listening, nothing is going to change. And so I just wanted to say that the only reason I felt comfortable today to talk in front of you all is because you all wanted to come here and listen and you cared to hear our feedback.

[01:38:24] And I know that we all have better things to do, but you chose today and you decided today that this was your better thing to do. So I just want to thank you for that. Well, I couldn't say a better closing summary than that. Thank you. That was perfect for her to go, like, just last, right? And if you're interested in more about affinity groups, here's my contact information.

[01:38:43] There's a handbook for administrators on how to get them started at your high school, your middle school, your elementary school. So please give me a call whenever you feel like it. Send me an email, and we can talk more to see how to spread the support and the relationship and the love. Thank you all for coming tonight.

[01:39:05] Oh, Mr. Dr. Walker, thank you. He rounded out our evening so perfectly. I'm so proud of every student at this table. Please give them one more hand before we conclude the night. All right, we have gone over, and I think it was definitely worth it.

[01:39:23] We wanted to hear what you had to say. You have earned the right to take us over tonight, so thank you once again. And we are here for you. We come out once a month, and we talk about the issues that concern you all. So if you're able to come, if you're able to get your homework done in time, please continue to come out and join us and be a part of this discussion.

[01:39:40] We want to hear you every single time we have a general body meeting, okay? All right, with that, we'll say goodnight. Have a good evening.



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