Disparities In Educational Outcomes Steering Committee
Virtual Community Meeting
Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020

On Dec. 10, 2020, the KCS Disparities in Educational Outcomes Steering Committee hosted a virtual community meeting. As part of that meeting, the committee invited members of the public to ask questions related to the committee's work.

Below we have provided answers to those questions, along with references to slides from the community meeting. We are grateful for everyone who submitted a question, and for the community's support as we seek to eliminate disparities in academic achievement and discipline.

Academics

The district received multiple questions about how we are identifying and supporting students who have fallen behind, including a question about whether the impact has been greater on some student subgroups than on others.

KCS is concerned about any student who falls behind and encourages teachers to proactively build individual plans for any student who is in danger of failing. The district is working with principals and school leaders to offer students additional opportunities to earn missing credits and to close gaps through expanded summer programs. The district is also working with teachers and principals to assess why students are not making progress and to provide intervention and support that addresses the causes.

As teachers, social workers, counselors, and principals call parents and guardians or visit them at home, they try to provide intentional interventions that address specific needs of the student and the student's family.

To date, schools have shared anecdotal data with the Central Office, but the district does not have data that assesses COVID-related learning gaps by subgroup. However, we anticipate that additional data will be available in the future. In addition, we are monitoring attendance and chronic absenteeism rates by subgroup, and those data can be found on pages 52-54 of the slide deck.

We remain committed to addressing disparities in educational achievement during the pandemic.

Will students in grades 6-11 who fell behind during the Fall 2020 semester have an opportunity to redo the semester, possibly through summer school?

Retention (formerly known as "holding back") is not an option for high school students because each student enters high school as part of a specific class, and they cannot be reclassified after beginning high school. Each student has four school years and a summer to graduate. Students move forward with their class each year regardless of the number of credits they earn.

For grades K-8, a significant body of research suggests that retention is not an effective strategy for students who have struggled with content. (For example, see this abstract from the Journal of Research on Education Effectiveness.) The elementary curriculum spirals so that students will have multiple opportunities to grasp the

content before leaving elementary school. KCS is working with principals and school leaders to offer students additional opportunities to earn missing credits and close their gaps through expanded summer programs.

How do absentee rates compare to previous years? If the absentee rate has been higher than usual, how will the absentee rate be addressed?
KCS did experience a higher absentee rate during the opening month of school, but we have begun to see that level out and absence rates are now more in line with previous years. We feel this is largely due to the work of the KCS Department of School Culture and the implementation of their "1-2-3 Connect" program that connects at least one caring adult from the school to each virtual and in-person student at the school. School administrators and counselors have also developed plans and programs specific to their schools to connect to families and students.

My daughter recently had to do a 2-week quarantine and her AP classes were not available. Apparently AP classes are not offered virtually, and as she goes back to school she is stressing about how far behind she will be.
In general it is the expectation for each principal to work with teachers to develop a plan to support all quarantined students. School-level administrators can best address a response to this specific situation.

What resources will be available for students that attend schools in low-income areas?
All students have access to high-quality instructional materials provided through the textbook adoption process and our teachers' work on curriculum committees. KCS believes that investing in high-quality instructional materials is an equity issue so all students have the opportunity to learn about the powerful ideas, language, facts, and skills in each subject from pre-K through 12th grade.

Schools reported promising student work from the pilot years, and we are eager to see how the students develop academically as a result. Each of our resources has a digital platform, so students and teachers can access them remotely if necessary. While we could not make a district-wide purchase for the elementary reading adoption because of COVID-19 budget impacts, we purchased "Wit and Wisdom" for the four elementary schools that were piloting it: Chilhowee, Green Magnet, Sarah Moore Greene, and Maynard.

Families can contact their school with questions or concerns about internet access at home. In addition, the district's "Internet @ Home" hotline is taking calls at (865) 594-4484 and outdoor WiFi is available at all schools. A list of schools with dedicated outdoor access points and signage is available at www.knoxschools.org/connect.

As students return to a traditional academic setting, will KCS provide after-school services with specific information to assist students' transition?
Knox County Schools cannot require students to attend school beyond the regular school year. Plans are underway to expand summer school opportunities to help students recover or earn additional credits they may have struggled to gain during the pandemic. We will not wait until summer to offer these opportunities. In the spring semester, each high school will provide additional recovery credit opportunities before and after school.

In addition, the virtual experience has led to many new opportunities. As an example, the district last summer provided virtual ACT tutoring to over 700 juniors.

What supports are in place to ensure that virtual students are learning at the same rate as in-person students? What are the economic supports provided to ensure tutoring and extracurricular support is provided to help students in lower income districts / neighborhoods access equitable resources?
KCS has always encouraged our teachers to review all assessment data and determine who performed well and who did not, and to make plans for remediation or enrichment based on the outcomes. This is also the case for our virtual students.

Our virtual teachers are working with their in-person counterparts to review assessments and to make instructional plans accordingly. Virtual teachers in the QuEST program meet with their principals once a week to do the same. Teachers and principals are reaching out to families and students with opportunities to make up missed assignments and receive additional help. As with in-person instruction, parents who do not feel they are getting the necessary support for student success should contact their principal first.

When students need a formal intervention, school teams are reviewing the benchmark data and classroom data in order to make a recommendation. Those students are placed in a mild or intense intervention depending on their needs, and several tutoring options have been provided. In addition, community members are helping us to structure additional tutoring options for the spring semester.

Will KCS embrace and work with entities (the Boys and Girls Club, Emerald Youth Foundation, etc.) that provide virtual learning pods or sites outside of KCS properties?
KCS is deeply grateful for its partnerships with community organizations that have been responsive and intentional in their efforts to support the students that we all serve. We recognize that the response to COVID-19 must be a community response with coordinated efforts to address issues as they arise.

Are there programs to help build equity through network building for high school students to help them successfully apply for college, access college resources, and navigate their first college years, through contact with more affluent and typically better-networked communities (either locally or throughout the South)? I've taught at public and private schools and am well aware of the resource discrepancies.
All KCS high schools have counselors who guide students through the application process. Counselors begin conversations as part of a student's high school course-scheduling and help students make a plan. During the junior year, they help students make a college application plan, and during the senior year, they provide support for the final applications. In addition, they hold FAFSA workshops to help every family complete the necessary paperwork to receive financial aid and scholarships.

There is a strong relationship between Knox County Schools, the Tennessee College of Applied Technology, Pellissippi State Community College, the University of Tennessee, and other local colleges. As a result, students have advising support to navigate each institution's expectations. TNAchieves also provides mentoring to students who qualify for their support.

Could the DEO make International Baccalaureate (IB) courses at Bearden Middle and West High available to all middle and high school students in the district if they want to do IB?
KCS's vision is for all high schools to have an advanced academic identity and to build a support structure from middle to high school. Students can apply for a transfer to any school in the district, but seat availability determines how many students the school can accept from out of zone.

All district high schools offer access to advanced programs. Four high schools (Karns, Farragut, Bearden and L&N) have launched a Pre-AP initiative – which aims to significantly boost the number of students who are prepared for AP courses – and have the full range of Pre-AP to Capstone experiences.

Two high schools (Carter and South-Doyle) will open in August as Cambridge International schools. The Pre-AP, Cambridge and IB programs, when implemented in their entirety, are commensurate with each other in terms of preparation and rigor.

More information about advanced academics was shared during the community meeting. Details about school-by-school participation in Early Post-Secondary Opportunities (including Advanced Placement, IB, dual enrollment and national industry certifications) is available in slides 20-23.

Given the sharp, swift decline in enrollment of young Black men in post-secondary education institutions, what must be done at the high school level to change this troubling event? What other things can be done in the middle and high school classrooms to ensure the success of Black children (especially young men) after completion of high school, regardless of what career path they choose?
According to our data, the percentage of African-American male students who enrolled in a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution fluctuated between 38% and 46% from 2014-15 to 2018-19.

Class of 2015 – 43%
Class of 2016 – 46%
Class of 2017 – 39%
Class of 2018 – 41%
Class of 2019 – 38%
Source: 20th-day KCS student enrollment files, National Student Clearinghouse (by cohort)

The district is working to provide counselors with more tools to guide students, and has implemented YouScience to gather information on individual students' aptitudes and interests. Counselors have access to this information for most of their 9th-grade students this year, although COVID interrupted our assessment timeline. 6th-8th graders are completing various aspects of the survey this year. Counselors will be able to connect students with career experiences and mentors in the fields that might be a good fit for them. They can then work with families to design a high school program of study that prepares students for their post-secondary plan.

As COVID continues to affect the learning gaps between gifted students, typical students, and students with additional delays or challenges, how is the district working to meet each group's needs? Specifically, would the district consider grouping elementary students by ability to provide teachers the time and resources to provide gifted students with challenging material while allowing other teachers the time and resources to help struggling students catch up?
Knox County has studied the evidence on various grouping structures and is committed to instructing all students on grade-level standards at every grade level and using flexible grouping throughout the school day to remediate, practice, and enrich as each student needs at the time of learning.

After whole-group instruction, teachers will pull students into small groups to differentiate the instruction for them. Students also have 30-45 minutes of core extension each day. That is another period dedicated to differentiating work for the students. Gifted and Talented coaches go into classrooms to provide enrichment experiences for students, and in some cases, they will pull students out for a small group. For those who need a more intensive intervention – as shown on benchmark assessments, progress monitoring, and classwork – we have specific reading and math interventions, English-language interventions, and specialized instruction.

Does KCS have data accumulated on achievement gaps of its students? Can that data be compiled by school and by ethnicity?
Please see Slides 9-14 for detailed information about academic achievement by student subgroup.

For the same categories as used in the 2016 report, what are the most recent data on disparities, both academic and disciplinary?
Please see Slides 9-14 for detailed information about academic achievement by student subgroup. Please see slides 41-46 for detailed information about discipline by student subgroup.

Maynard Elementary did not have an art teacher in 2019-20, and we don't have an art or music teacher in 2020-21. Also, our school does not have a regular nurse and our part-time nurse is only there for one half-day per week.
The district's Executive Director of Elementary Education is gathering information about this situation in order to identify a solution.

Are suspensions of students of different ethnicities and / or disability status similar if their academic progress is similar, or is ethnicity / disability more closely associated with suspension rates than is academic progress? Of the 1,349 Black students who received at least one out-of-school suspension in 2018-19, what is their distribution in the records (quartiles or quintiles) of academic performance? What are the same metrics for White and Hispanic students and for students with and students without disabilities?
KCS does not have reports that address these specific questions.

Within groups (e.g., black) how does proficiency correlate with suspension? For example, among all white students, what is the average proficiency of all students who have been suspended vs. those who have not? Please report this for at least all the categories of students addressed on page 14 of the Task Force report.
KCS does not have reports that address these specific questions.

Monitoring
Please provide a description of the method for disaggregating, tracking, and reporting discipline and academic data, as outlined in Action Step 3.5 of the May 2016 Final Report. Please show copies for the past 18 monthly reports.
The KCS Department of Research, Evaluation and Assessment provides district leaders, school administrators and their leadership teams with standardized testing data from TNReady, broken out by subject areas and special populations. The district also maintains a dashboard where district and school leaders can access school-level data and compare specific schools to other KCS schools across all accountability metrics (Achievement / Attendance / Grad Rate / ACT / TVAAS).

In addition, the department provides each school with monthly discipline and attendance reports broken out by student groups. Using these data sources as well as the TDOE report card, supplemental data requests, and the Inform TN dashboards, school administrators and leadership teams identify areas of strengths and weaknesses across each student group to develop plans and strategies to address gaps.

Monthly reports sent to school administrators contain student-level information that is protected by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Due to its protected status, any potential release of this information must be governed by and conform to the Knox County School Board Policy related to Open Records requests (Knox County Board of Education Policy B-210).

School Culture
Action Step 2.5 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for the district to develop and implement a student mentoring program in middle and high schools. Who is responsible for this action step? For each school, how many mentors serve students at that school? Also, for each school, provide the numbers of mentored students by race, ethnicity and other critical groups.
The district has not implemented an official student mentoring program, but we have taken significant steps to support middle and high school students and to promote a positive culture in our schools. These include ProjectU, a student-led initiative that aims to promote intentional inclusion of students and leads the #UChooseKindness campaign; and the Department of School Culture's 1-2-3 Connect initiative, which aims to connect every student with a caring adult in their building.

Action Step 3.4 of the May 2016 Final Report concerns the Restorative Practices to be implemented in 6 schools and on a multi-tiered basis. Do we have a specific accounting of how that is going in each school in regard to staff needed, implementations confirmed and results measured?
Please see Slides 73-74 for a detailed answer to this question.

How are Knox County and this committee tackling racial disparities that exist in our community? How are we supporting non-white kids and teachers and how are we making sure we are being inclusive? My son's school, Hardin Valley Elementary, is overwhelmingly white. How can we recruit more teachers and leaders of color and make sure we are teaching in a way that isn't always from a white perspective?
Slides 56-59 outline several ways that our Department of School Culture is working to promote cultural responsiveness within the district and to support students and employees of all backgrounds. Slides 18-19 provide a summary of work to ensure that our curriculum is inclusive and ensures positive representation of a variety of cultures.

On Nov. 11, the Board of Education approved restoration of the Director of Advancement and Diversity, a position in the Human Resources Department that is responsible for planning and administering the recruitment, screening, interviewing, selection and referral of applicants for teaching, leadership and other positions within the district. We believe this position will help us to recruit outstanding teachers and leaders who reflect the diversity of Knox County and its students.

<u>School Security</u>
Action Step 1.4 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for the district to train school resource officers to effectively address situations involving students with social / emotional/ mental health issues and to access appropriate resources. Which schools have officers serving who have not yet received this training?
Knox County Schools employs school security officers, not the school resource officers. Nevertheless, all but two of the KCS school security officers (SSOs) and school resource officers from the Knox County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) and Knoxville Police Department (KPD) have received this training. The two who have not taken this training are scheduled for an upcoming class. These topics are covered in three different ways: through a class entitled "Mental Health First Aid", through Crisis Intervention Team Training, and through training provided by KCS personnel.

Action Step 1.5 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for the district to utilize monthly arrest / discipline reports to identify areas of need for ongoing training. Please show copies of all reports on arrests sent to principals in the past 12 months.
KPD and KCSO do not provide reports to principals regarding specific arrests or summary data. However, principals are in regular communication with school security officers or SROs any time an arrest occurs within their schools.

Action Step 2.3 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for the district to implement the "Handle With Care" program in which law enforcement notifies schools of traumatic incidents involving students, in order to provide appropriate support to students. How many of each kind of "Handle With Care" traumatic incident have been reported to school personnel in the past 12 months?
The Handle With Care program has been implemented and appropriate KCS staff are notified by law enforcement. Student information is confidential and we are unable to provide specific information related to the "kind" of incident.

Action Step 3.9 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for monthly reporting of data from KCSO and KPD regarding on-campus student arrests by race, ethnicity, gender, offense, location and time of day. Please show copies of monthly reports since the 2019-20 school year.

The Knoxville Police Department will share school-related arrest data that can be made public. KCS is continuing to discuss this matter with Knox County Sheriff's Office officials.

<u>English Language Learners</u>
What is the long-term vision for supporting the integration of immigrants and refugee students and their parents into the Knox County School system? Is there a plan in place to hire additional employees / teachers / social workers speaking languages spoken by the students and parents?
The KCS Welcome Center is specifically designed to assist immigrant and refugee families with the transition into the school system. Services provided by the Welcome Center include translation support, educational screenings, and resource referrals in areas such as Adult ESL, citizenship classes and health care.

Family Community Liaisons who speak languages including Spanish, Chinese, Kirundi, Swahili and Arabic are available at the Welcome Center, and also provide in-school support.

KCS is currently in the process of formulating its budget plan for the upcoming fiscal year. While COVID-19 has provided significant uncertainty, the district remains committed to ensuring that multi-lingual employees are available to serve our ELL students and families.

What steps are being taken to address barriers for families who have limited or no English language skills and may not even be literate in their own primary language? During the COVID-19 pandemic and the many changes to the school year, what is being done to ensure that these families have equal access to pertinent information and educational opportunities?
The ELL Department has worked closely with the Department of Public Affairs to ensure that district communications are available to as many ELL families as possible. We recognize the importance of providing messaging on multiple platforms, and the district is working to share more multi-lingual messages on Twitter and on our language-specific Facebook pages. We are also working to ensure that key district-wide emails are translated.

In addition, we understand that some families may not have access to social media or email, so we have recently begun sending our Spanish-speaking families text messages with information about schools that are moving to online learning. In preparation for the spring semester, the district also aired a Public Service Announcement related to changing student learning models on WKZX-FM, a local Spanish-language radio station that generously offered to air the announcement for free.

The district is also exploring strategies to expand the use of voicemail as a communication tool for families who are not literate.

What is the plan to effectively engage parents of refugee and immigrant children to participate in their children's education and extracurricular activities?
KCS is in the early stages of developing a Newcomer Academy, which would help ELL students who have fallen behind academically to get back on track. More details about this initiative will be shared in the future.

<u>Access</u>
Can we have a list of special education students and a list of students by ethnicity who were without any internet service and a list of those who still are? No names, just numbers and schools. What is the future for those who are still without internet service as of December?
Student-level information is protected by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Internet access has been an important priority for the district since the fall reopening. This fall, the district sent an electronic survey to

all families seeking information about access to internet at home. Paper versions of this survey were also made available at each school, in six languages.

The district has worked closely with the eKnox Task Force, a public-private partnership that includes representatives of KCS, the Knoxville Chamber, United Way, the Knox Education Foundation, the City of Knoxville and Knox County. The Task Force has been instrumental in helping students and families secure access to affordable internet service.

Each school has an internet "navigator" to assist families with obtaining internet access at home, and the district's "Internet @ Home" hotline is available at (865) 594-4484. However, we will be working with school navigators to identify the best long-term solution for families. In addition, outdoor WiFi is available at all schools and a list of schools with dedicated outdoor access points and signage is available at knoxschools.org/connect.

Are the students charged as absent when their laptop is unable to function by whatever means caused it? For example, unable to connect to virtual classes from one to three days before it is repaired or replaced.
Students should not be counted absent in this situation. A student may temporarily be counted absent if the teacher is unaware of the problem, but each school's attendance secretary can adjust the "absent" to "present" upon discovering the issue.

<u>Community Partners</u>
As a youth serving organization, how can the Boys and Girls Club of the Tennessee Valley help KCS communicate needs and priorities to our members and their families? How can we partner to receive real-time data on students so that we can work to offer support in needed areas of improvement?
KCS is grateful for the work of community partners and non-profit agencies that do so much to support our students, families and educators. While we are unable to provide real-time data to third parties, community partners can work with school leadership to identify specific student needs.

<u>Nutrition</u>
Many virtual families have multiple students and are unable to go to a site to get meals at ten in the morning and / or having their child "miss class" in order to do so is an unacceptable answer. I feel that those of us that qualify for free or reduced meals do for a reason and are not being given enough options or opportunity to have those school-provided meals available to our virtual students. If students in person receive meals, virtual students should also as they are still a part of the district, and their schools. Please provide information on how this disconnect will be addressed.
Please contact the Department of Food and Nutrition Services, (865) 594-3640, with questions and / or concerns regarding meal distribution for virtual learners.

<u>Implementation / Communication</u>
Action Step 1 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for the district to craft a clear implementation plan for individual strategies / action steps that include timelines, outcomes, and milestones and implement the plan as prescribed. What is the implementation plan?
The district has created a timeline of actions taken to implement the recommendations and action steps outlined in the 2016 report. This timeline is regularly updated and is posted on the DEO website, and includes outcomes and milestones since the 2016-17 school year.

Action Step 3 of the May 2016 Final Report calls for the superintendent / ombudsman to make quarterly presentations to the Board of Education. Please provide the four most recent quarterly reports.
The Ombudsman provides regular updates and recommendations to the Superintendent and district leadership related to inquiries, concerns, and requests from students, staff and families. An Ombudsman Office update

summary is provided at quarterly DEO Steering Committee meetings and has been provided at previous community meetings hosted by the DEO, including the Fulton High School meeting in March, 2020. In addition, there is BOE representation on the DEO Steering committee.

At the same time, it has become clear since the creation of the Ombudsman office that it is imperative to build trust and give confidence to participants that details or summaries of their cases will not be made public in a way that is identifiable. In an effort to ensure stakeholder trust and to safeguard privacy, information and updates shared from the Ombudsman office are provided in a summary format. These summaries focus on data points including the number of stakeholder inquiries handled; inquiry types and themes; collaborations with district leadership and departments for service improvements; training supports and professional development; and feedback and strategies from the Family and Student Advisory councils to enhance engagement and educational experiences in KCS. The DEO Summary update from September is available at this link.

The Ombudsman office continues to build relationships, reflect, and revise supports based on stakeholder needs.