



Budget Equity in Montgomery County Public Schools

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Budget Equity in Montgomery County Public Schools

OLO Report 2026-9

Executive Summary

July 14, 2026

Purpose. The County Council asked the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) to study budget equity within Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) operating budget to ensure that "every dollar is put to the best use to serve the greatest needs in our schools." Budget equity refers to students having the resources they need to achieve high levels of performance, rather than equal resources.

This project updates OLO Report 2019-14, MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps, describing how MCPS budgets its resources to address student needs. This report is organized across the following service groups, which are generally used by MCPS to deliver programming based on students' eligibility for services:

- **General education services** provided to all students;
- **Special education and related services** provided to students with disabilities;
- **Emergent multilingual learner (EML) programs** provided to EMLs;
- **Compensatory education programs** to offset the adverse impacts of household poverty on student achievement, such as Title I and Head Start, that are provided to students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) and to schools with high rates of FARMS eligibility; and
- **Gifted and talented education (GT) programs** provided to students eligible for GT.

Advancing budget equity in access and outcomes requires MCPS to allocate additional resources to service group students to enable schools to differentiate services to meet student needs. Toward this end, the federal government and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) allocate additional revenue to MCPS to help cover additional costs of educating service group students.

In addition to service group status, race and ethnicity often predict student performance and access to service group programs. Black and Latinx students, regardless of service group status, tend to experience lower levels of school performance compared to White and Asian students. However, MCPS does not allocate additional resources to schools based on race or ethnicity of students. Nor does the federal government or MSDE allocate additional resources to schools based on students' race or ethnicity.

Summary of Findings

Fifteen specific findings emerge from the information and data OLO reviewed:

1. Students eligible for FARMS account for MCPS' largest service group followed by EMLs, students receiving GT education, and students with disabilities.
2. Black and Latinx students account for most students receiving FARMS and EML services. White students with service group needs are primarily served in special education and GT programs, including GT programs that serve students with disabilities.
3. Students receiving EML services, special education, and FARMS generally demonstrate common low levels of proficiency and college readiness relative to program ineligible peers. EMLs, however, experience the lowest graduation rates and highest dropout rates among all service groups.

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4. Despite similar levels of performance among most service group students, MCPS budgets seven to twenty times more per student for special education than it budgets per student for EML services or compensatory education. In FY26, MCPS budgeted nearly \$30,000 per student for special education vs. \$4,000 per student for EML programs and \$1,400 per student for compensatory education.
 5. Differences in service group revenue do not explain differences in service group spending as MCPS allocates most state compensatory education revenue based on its FARMS enrollment to non-compensatory education programs.
 6. OLO cannot assess budget equity for GT programs because MCPS does not report school-based GT program costs separate from general education spending.
 7. OLO cannot assess how MCPS' budgeting practices align with or reflect the Blueprint for Maryland's requirements for advancing budget equity.
 8. While eligibility for EML services is a strong predictor of student performance, race and ethnicity are often stronger predictors of student performance than either eligibility for special education or FARMS, especially for Black and Latinx students.
 9. MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices center and privilege White students.
 10. MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices disproportionately harm Black and Latinx students.
 11. MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices especially harm Black students who are ineligible for either special education or EML services.
 12. MCPS' FY27 operating budget will likely widen budgeting and staffing inequities by service group.
 13. Students value MCPS budget and staffing allocations that build community in schools and enhance their learning opportunities.
 14. Students often experience MCPS budget and staffing inequities as unmet needs in schools.
 15. Community stakeholders believe there has been inadequate accountability for MCPS to meet the learning needs of its Black and Latinx students.

In sum, OLO finds that MCPS advances budget equity for students with disabilities by robustly funding its special education programs. MCPS' budgeting for programs to meet the learning needs of students eligible for FARMS and EML, however, is not equitable. The underfunding of compensatory education and EML programs combined with the concentration of inexperienced staff in schools with high-FARMS rates disproportionately harms Black and Latinx students.

Conversely, the higher funding of special education centers and privileges White students. MCPS' funding of GT programs may also undermine budget equity but cannot be fully assessed due to a lack of data.

Recommendations for Council Action

To assist the Council in advancing budget equity within MCPS to narrow racial and social disparities in educational outcomes, OLO offers two sets of recommendations for local action.

Recommendation #1: Increase accountability for budget equity for compensatory education, EML programs, high-FARMS schools, and Black and Latinx students.

To increase accountability for budget equity for compensatory education, EML programs, high-FARMS schools, and Black and Latinx students, OLO proposes four actions for Council consideration. These actions are aimed at increasing MCPS' resource allocations for compensatory education and EML programs, and general education staffing in high-FARMS schools.

- Require MCPS to relaunch its Program Budget to enable the County Council to track MCPS spending and outcomes by service group program.
- Require MCPS to expend all state revenue for compensatory education on local compensatory education programs that target additional resources to students eligible for FARMS and schools that serve the highest percentages of students eligible for FARMS.
- Require any MCPS funding requests over Maintenance of Effort to be earmarked for compensatory education or EML programs.
- Require any MCPS funding requests over Maintenance of Effort to be earmarked for reducing staffing inequities between low- and high-FARMS schools.

Note, requiring MCPS to execute a program budget without also requiring them to allocate additional resources and staffing to compensatory education and EML programs will not advance budget equity. OLO recommends the Council enact all four of these proposed actions to advance budget equity.

Recommendation #2: Center Black and Latinx students and students with low incomes in allocating budget resources for service group programs and general education.

To ensure that MCPS efforts to enhance budget equity improve learning opportunities for students eligible for compensatory education and EML programs, students enrolled in high-FARMS schools, and Black and Latinx students, OLO proposes several actions for local consideration. These actions are aimed at increasing the efficacy of how resources are allocated and utilized to improve outcomes among students eligible for FARMS and EML programs, students enrolled in high-FARMS schools, and Black and Latinx students.

- Require MCPS to partner with Black and Latinx stakeholders, especially Black and Latinx students and families eligible for FARMS and EML services, to co-develop a plan to advance budget equity.
- Encourage MCPS to allocate additional funding to:
 - Improve school culture in high-FARMS schools;
 - Address Black and Latinx students' unmet academic needs;
 - Address Black and Latinx students' unmet social needs; and
 - Improve information access to Black and Latinx students and their families.

For a complete copy of OLO-Report 2026-9, go to:
[Reports - Office of Legislative Oversight - Montgomery County, MD](#)

Budget Equity in Montgomery County Public Schools

Background

The County Council asked the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) to study budget equity within Montgomery County Public Schools' operating budget to ensure that "every dollar is put to the best use to serve the greatest needs in our schools."¹ Budget equity refers to students having the resources they need to achieve high levels of performance rather than equal resources. This is consistent with Educational Resource Strategies' definition of resource equity as:

*"the allocation and use of resources (people, time, and money) to create student experiences that enable all children to reach empowering, rigorous learning outcomes – no matter their race or income."*²

Further, budget equity requires narrowing gaps in resource inequities to narrow disparities in student performance by race, ethnicity, and income.³

Why does budget equity matter? Budget equity matters because resources matter. Students rely on educational resources, inside and outside of the classroom, to support their development and educational performance. Educational resources that matter include early childhood education, class sizes, credentialed staff, paraprofessionals, curricular materials, technology, staff development, and extracurricular opportunities. Budget equity, especially by race and ethnicity, also matters because schools cannot narrow racial and social inequities that foster racial and social disparities in outcomes without actualizing racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in their budgets.

Prior studies by OLO and others have revealed local racial and social inequities in school resources that foster racial and social disparities in student outcomes.⁴ Together, these studies show that a majority of MCPS' Black and Latinx students, emergent multilingual learners (EMLs), and students receiving free and reduced priced meals (FARMS) were concentrated among MCPS' highest-poverty schools. On average, these schools had lower levels of teacher experience and student performance. More specifically:

- Most Black and Latinx students, students impacted by poverty, and EMLs attended MCPS' highest-poverty schools;⁵
- MCPS' least-experienced teachers were also concentrated within its highest-poverty schools that experienced higher levels of teacher turnover;⁶ and

¹ [FY25 OLO Work Program](#)

² Education Resources Strategies Summary Report, Achieving Excellence and Equity Through Resource use, October 2019: [Microsoft PowerPoint - Board Report-Allsections-201901001.pptx](#)

³ See OLO Report 2023-6 [Addressing Racial Inequity in the School to Prison Pipeline](#) for background on how historic and contemporary racial inequities in education foster disparities in student outcomes by race and ethnicity.

⁴ OLO Report 2023-6, for example, observes that historic racial inequities in schooling and policing contribute to current racialized gaps in school discipline, opportunity, and power that foster disparities in the Prison Pipeline.

⁵ OLO Reports 2014-7, Performance of Montgomery County Public School's High Schools ([OLO Report 2014-7 Final.pdf](#)) and OLO Report 2019-14, MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps ([MergedFile](#))

⁶ OLO Reports 2014-7 and 2015-15, Resources and Staffing among MCPS Schools ([OLOReport2015-15ResourcesAndStaffingAmongMCPSSchools.pdf](#)) and Education Resource Strategies

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- Due to higher teacher salaries in low-poverty schools,⁷ MCPS spent more general education dollars per student in low-poverty schools than in high-poverty schools.⁸

Current data confirms the persistence of racial and social inequities in teacher quality where MCPS campuses with the highest FARMS and BIPOC enrollments have greater shares of inexperienced and emergency credentialed teachers than schools with lower FARMS and BIPOC enrollments.⁹

Prior OLO reports also show that racial inequities in service group spending foster racial disparities in educational opportunities and student outcomes. More specifically:

- While students eligible for special education, EML programs, and compensatory education experienced common levels of low school performance, MCPS expended eight to 14 times more per student for special education than it expended per student for EML programming or compensatory education in 2019.¹⁰
- Since Black and Latinx students are more likely to be eligible for EML services and FARMS and to attend schools with peers who are eligible for both programs, they are disproportionately harmed by MCPS' under-funding of EML and compensatory education programs.¹¹

Of note, MCPS' Antiracist Action Plan acknowledges that differentiating school resources to meet the needs of students and community is one of three best practices that must be implemented to improve student outcomes.¹² The MCPS Antiracist Audit further observes that many stakeholders experience racial inequities in access to school resources as evidenced by:

- Varying rates of agreement among stakeholders with the statement that MCPS provides equitable access to students regardless of their race, ethnicity, or culture (Observation 6.1); and

⁷ OLO Report 2014-7 and Education Resource Strategies

⁸ Education Resource Strategies

⁹ In 2025, 20.7 percent of teachers assigned to MCPS' campuses with high poverty rates had less than three years of experience compared to 8.0 percent of teachers assigned to low poverty schools; 8.8 percent of teachers assigned to high-poverty schools were teaching with emergency or provisional credentials compared to 3.3 percent of teachers assigned to low-poverty schools. Similarly, 16.0 percent of teachers assigned to schools with the highest BIPOC enrollment had less than three years of experience compared to 10.6 percent of teachers assigned to schools with the lowest BIPOC enrollment; 7.2 percent of teachers in high BIPOC campuses were teaching with emergency or provisional credentials compared to 2.6 percent of teachers on low BIPOC campuses. Maryland Report Card <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/EducatorQuals/15/XXXX/2025>

¹⁰ As observed in OLO Report 2019-14, MCPS budgeted \$22,900 for special education per student with a disability; \$2,800 for ESOL services per EML; and \$1,600 to \$2,000 for compensatory education per K-12 student eligible for FARMS. [OLO Report 2019-14](#)

¹¹ OLO Report 2019-14 and OLO Report 2015-15

(https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2015_Reports/OLOReport2015-15ResourcesAndStaffingAmongMCPSSchools.pdf)

¹² The other two best practices are to build staff capacity to create antiracist learning environments and consistency use structures of accountability. See page 5 of MCPS Antiracist Action Plan, May 2023

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/siteassets/district/antiracist/action-plan-final.pdf>

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- The perception among many stakeholders that Black and Latinx students are not provided equitable opportunities to enroll in advanced level courses that prepare for college and careers (Observation 6.4).

Yet neither the Antiracist Audit nor its action plan acknowledge the racial and social inequities in resource allocations that undermine MCPS' efforts to equitably differentiate resources by race and ethnicity to effectively address students' needs.¹³

Project Purpose and Scope

This OLO project seeks to offer an update on how MCPS has budgeted its resources to address student needs over the past six years since the publication of OLO Report 2019-14, MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps. Like that report, this budget equity project is organized by service group categories because MCPS generally organizes its delivery and access to educational programming by service group. MCPS programs delivered to service groups based on their eligibility for services include:

- **General education services** that are provided to all students;
- **Special education and related services** that are provided to students with disabilities;
- **Emergent multilingual learner (EML) programs** that are provided to EMLs;
- **Compensatory education programs** to offset the adverse impacts of household poverty on student achievement, such as Title I and Head Start, that are provided to students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) and to schools with high rates of FARMS eligibility;
- **Gifted and talented education (GT) programs** that are provided to eligible for GT; and
- **Multiple programs** that are provided to students eligible for more than one service group.

Generally, students receiving service group programming are eligible for such programs because they have greater educational needs and/or challenges relative to their peers in accessing educational opportunities that enable high levels of performance. Apart from students receiving GT programming, service group students also tend to experience lower levels of performance than their peers.

Advancing equity in access and outcomes requires MCPS to allocate additional resources to service group students to enable schools to differentiate services to meet student needs. Toward this end, the federal government and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) allocate additional revenue to MCPS to help them offset the additional costs of meeting the needs of service group students. As such, the presumption is that MCPS would expend more resources per student eligible for service group programming because (1) these students need more resources to access educational opportunities **and** (2) MCPS receives additional federal and state revenue toward this end.

¹³ OLO Report 2023-6 findings on the drivers of racial inequities in the School to Prison Pipeline suggest that historic and contemporary racial inequities in educational resources (i.e. the opportunity gap) and contemporary racial inequities in expectations for student success and power among community stakeholders fosters the inequities and disparities in student experiences and outcomes evidenced in MCPS Antiracism Audit.

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In addition to service group status, it is also important to recognize how race and ethnicity predict student performance and access to service group programs. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students, regardless of their service group status, tend to experience lower levels of school performance compared to their White and Asian peers. Yet MCPS does not allocate additional revenue to schools based on the race or ethnicity of students nor does the federal government or MSDE.

To the extent that MCPS targets resources to advance RESJ in education, it does so via general education and service group programs rather than targeting resources based on students' race and ethnicity. Yet, race and ethnicity also predict access to service group programs: most Black and Latinx service group students depend on compensatory education and EML programs that rarely serve White or Asian students while White students with service group needs rely on special education. Further, both White and Asian students are over-represented in GT programs that underserve Black and Latinx students.

Given differences in student need and access to service group resources by student race and ethnicity, ideally, this budget equity project would consider how MCPS advances budget equity within each service group program (e.g. special education and GT education) in addition to examining budget equity across service programs. Data limitations, however, preclude OLO from including a review of budget equity within each service group program within this project's research scope.

Methodology

OLO staffers Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Ph.D. and Janmarie Peña authored this report with assistance from Karen Pecoraro. To understand how MCPS budgets by service group and the drivers of MCPS' operating budget, OLO staff reviewed several documents and publications including:

- Prior OLO reports
- MCPS operating budgets and other budget documents
- Maryland Blueprint publications
- MCPS strategic plans and progress reports
- MCPS Anti-Racist Audit and Action Plan
- Student performance data published by MCPS and MSDE
- Enrollment data published by MCPS and MSDE

Relying on these data sources, OLO compiled and analyzed data to describe:

- Student enrollment trends by service group
- Race and ethnicity of students in service group categories
- Performance data by service subgroup, race, and ethnicity
- Spending, staffing, and revenue trends by service group category
- Student enrollment patterns by school poverty level

OLO staff also met with MCPS staff to request unpublished data aimed at improving our understanding of how MCPS allocates resources to advance budget equity. Toward this end, MCPS provided some data requested on special education and EML expenditures. MCPS, however, did not provide data on

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compensatory education and GT education expenditures and staffing.¹⁴ Nor did MCPS provide information on what programs should be included in GT programs or how their budget aligns with and reflects MSDE's Blueprint requirements. Of note, the absence of an MCPS annual program budget¹⁵ complicated and belabored the completion of this project.

Finally, OLO convened a series of community conversations with key stakeholders to solicit their perspectives on how MCPS advances budget equity to meet the needs of diverse learners and opportunities for improvement. Toward this end, OLO staff met with representatives from a dozen community groups and facilitated four focus groups with young people familiar with MCPS.¹⁶

Findings

Fifteen key findings emerge from the information and data OLO reviewed to assess whether MCPS advances budget equity within its annual operating budget:

1. Students eligible for FARMS account for MCPS' largest service group followed by EMLs, students receiving GT education, and students with disabilities.
2. Latinx and Black students account for most students receiving FARMS and EML services. White students are primarily served in special education and GT programs, including GT programs that serve students with disabilities.
3. Students receiving EML services, special education, and FARMS generally demonstrate common low levels of proficiency and college readiness relative to program ineligible peers. EMLs, however, experience the lowest graduation and highest dropout rates among all service groups.
4. Despite similar levels of student performance among most service group students, MCPS budgets from seven to up to twenty times more per student for special education than it budgets per student for EML services or compensatory education.
5. Differences in service group revenue do not explain differences in service group spending as MCPS allocates most state compensatory education revenue based on its FARMS enrollment to non-compensatory education programs.
6. OLO cannot assess budget equity for GT programs because MCPS does not report school-based GT program costs separate from general education spending.
7. OLO cannot describe how MCPS' budgeting practices align with or reflect the Blueprint for Maryland's requirements for advancing budget equity.
8. While eligibility for EML services is a strong predictor of student performance, race and ethnicity are often stronger predictors of student performance than either eligibility for special education or FARMS, especially for Black and Latinx students.

¹⁴ As a proxy to describe the compensatory education budget, OLO describes Title I and Head Start budget data, positions for these two programs, and positions for Focus staff, Pre-K, Judy Centers, and Community Schools. Further, OLO assumes that MCPS dedicates all state concentration of poverty revenue to Community Schools. Data for other compensatory education programs are not included because MCPS did not provide this data to OLO.

¹⁵ [Montgomery County Public Schools \(MCPS\) Strategic Plan FY 2022-2025](#) and Antiracist Action Plan include MCPS commitments to relaunch annual program budget last published in FY2017.

¹⁶ See Appendix for description of project interviews and focus groups.

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9. MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices center and privilege White students.
10. MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices disproportionately harm Latinx and Black students.
11. MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices especially harm Black students who are ineligible for either special education or EML services.
12. MCPS' FY27 operating budget will likely widen budgeting and staffing inequities by service group.
13. Students value MCPS budget and staffing allocations that build community in schools and enhance their learning opportunities.
14. Students often experience MCPS' budget and staffing inequities as unmet needs in schools.
15. Community stakeholders believe there has been inadequate accountability for MCPS to meet the learning needs of its Black and Latinx students.

A detailed description of each of these key findings follows.

Finding #1. Students eligible for FARMS account for MCPS' largest service group followed by EMLs, students receiving GT education, and students with disabilities.

As observed in Table 1, students eligible for FARMS account for the largest share of service group students. In 2025, they accounted for 43 percent of enrollment compared to students eligible for EML services accounting for 21 percent of enrollment, students eligible for GT programs accounting for 19 percent of enrollment, and students with disabilities accounting for 14 percent of enrollment. As such, there were twice as many students eligible for FARMS as compared to students eligible for EML or GT programs and there were three times as many students eligible for FARMS versus students eligible for special education services.

Students eligible for FARMS have experienced the largest growth in enrollment since 2020 as observed in Table 2. Compared to a 4 percent decline in MCPS enrollment, the number of students eligible for FARMS has increased by 14 percent since 2020, while students eligible for special education and EML services have increased by 10 percent. Since 2022, GT enrollment has declined by 8 percent.

Table 1: Service Group Enrollment as a Percentage of Overall Enrollment

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>
Emergent Multilingual Learners (EML)	18.5	21.5	19.0	19.6	20.7	21.1
Students with Disabilities (SPED)	12.6	11.8	13.3	13.7	13.5	14.3
Students eligible for FARMS	36.3	38.8	39.0	45.0	41.8	42.9
Students eligible for GT Programs	n/a	n/a	20.9	19.1	18.5	19.2

Source: Maryland Report Card, Data Downloads

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Table 2: Trends in Service Group Enrollment

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	#change	%change
All Students	165,267	160,564	158,231	160,554	160,223	159,181	-6,086	-3.8%
Emergent Multilingual Learners (EML)	30,758	34,416	30,614	31,732	33,440	33,698	2,940	9.6%
Students with Disabilities (SPED)	20,918	18,813	21,375	22,173	22,291	22,906	1,988	9.5%
Students eligible for FARMS	60,454	62,139	62,751	72,987	67,460	68,605	8,151	13.5%
Students eligible for GT Programs	n/a	n/a	33,666	31,037	29,803	30,711		

Source: Maryland Report Card, Data Downloads

Finding #2. Latinx and Black students account for the vast majority of students receiving FARMS and EML services. White students are primarily served in special education and GT programs, including GT programs that serve students with disabilities.

As observed in Table 3, Black and Latinx students accounted for 84 to 85 percent of students eligible for FARMS and EML services in 2025 while White students accounted for less than 5 percent of students eligible for FARMS or EML services. Asian students also accounted for less than 5 percent of students eligible for FARMS but accounted for 11 percent of students eligible for EML services.

Conversely, White students were proportionately represented among students with disabilities, accounting for 24 percent of all students compared to 22 percent of special education enrollment. Black and Latinx students were slightly over-represented among students with disabilities, while Asian students were significantly under-represented among students with disabilities. White students are also over-represented among GT programs serving students with disabilities and 504 plans, accounting for 64 percent of twice exceptional students in 2025.¹⁷

A review of the data also shows that White students were over-represented among students in GT programs as were Asian students. Compared to Asian and White students collectively accounting for 37 percent of MCPS enrollment in 2025, they accounted for 64 percent of GT enrollment. Black and Latinx students who collectively accounted for 57 percent of MCPS enrollment accounted for only 28 percent of GT enrollment in 2025.

Taken together, Latinx and Black students with service group needs are more likely to depend on EML and compensatory education programs while White students with service group needs are more likely to depend on special education and GT education, including GT programs that serve students with disabilities. Conversely, Asian students with service group needs are most likely to be enrolled in GT programs and least likely to receive special education services compared to their share of overall student enrollment.

¹⁷ Identifying and Serving Gifted and Talented Students, Montgomery County Board of Education, [May 5, 2025 Special Populations Committee](#)

Table 3: Distribution of Enrollment and Service Group Membership by Race and Ethnicity, 2025

	All Students	EML	SPED	FARMS	GT
Asian	13.6	10.6	7.7	<5.0	24.6
White	23.6	4.4	21.6	<5.0	39.5
Black	21.5	10.5	26.4	30.1	14.0
Latinx	35.6	73.7	39.3	54.6	13.7
Multiracial	5.4	0.5	5.0	<5.0	8.0
Native American	0.2	0.2	0.2	<5.0	0.1
Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1	0.1	<5.0	0.1

Sources: MCPS Data Dashboards,¹⁸ BOE Board Docs

Finding #3: Students receiving EML services, FARMS, and special education services generally demonstrate common low levels of performance relative to peers, with EMLs often experiencing the lowest levels of performance.

A review of data on English language arts (ELA) and mathematics proficiency and college readiness shows that EMLs, students with disabilities, and students eligible for FARMS generally demonstrate common low levels of performance compared to peers. More specifically, students eligible for EML services, special education, and FARMS are often less than half as likely as their peers to reach proficiency and college readiness benchmarks. For example, in 2025:

- 12 to 35 percent of EMLs, students with disabilities, and students eligible for FARMS demonstrated proficiency in English language arts (ELA) compared to 57 to 69 percent of all students, students ineligible for special education, and students ineligible for FARMS (Table 4).
- 9 to 15 percent of EMLs, students with disabilities, and students eligible for FARMS demonstrated proficiency in math compared to 36 to 47 percent of all students, students ineligible for special education, and students ineligible for FARMS (Table 5).
- Less than 5 to 12 percent of graduates who were EMLs, students with disabilities, and students eligible for FARMS demonstrated college readiness compared to 29 to 41 percent of all students, students ineligible for special education, and students ineligible for FARMS (Table 6).

Reviews of proficiency and college readiness data also show that some service groups experience wider performance gaps with their program ineligible peers versus others. More specifically, in 2025:

- The widest disparity in ELA proficiency occurred by EML status: an analysis of trend data (Table 4) shows a 45-point gap in ELA proficiency between all students and EMLs compared to a 39-point gap by disability status and a 34-point gap by FARMS status.
- The widest disparity in math proficiency occurred by FARMS status: an analysis of trend data (Table 5) shows a 32-point gap in math proficiency between students eligible and ineligible for FARMS compared to 26-point gaps by EML and disability status.

¹⁸ [Microsoft Power BI](#)

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- The widest disparity in college readiness also occurred by FARMS status: an analysis of trend data (Table 6) shows a 29-point gap in college readiness between students eligible and ineligible for FARMS compared to a 27-point gap by disability status and 24+ point gap by EML status.

Conversely, reviews of graduation and dropout data show that EMLs consistently experience the worse outcomes among student groups. More specifically, the widest disparity in four-year cohort graduation rates occurred by EML status: Table 7 shows a 22-point gap in graduation rates between all students and EMLs in 2025 compared to a 15-point gap by disability status and a less than one point gap by FARMS status. Further, as shown in Table 8, EMLs were more than three times as likely as all students, students receiving FARMS, and students with disabilities to drop out of their four-year cohort.

Table 4: MCAP ELA Proficiency Rates by Service Group, All Grades

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>#change</u>
All Students	54.0	54.4	55.3	57.0	3.0
EML	14.1	11.5	12.0	11.8	-2.3
Gap	39.9	42.9	43.3	45.2	
Non-SPED	58.6	59.1	59.9	61.9	3.3
SPED	20.1	20.5	21.8	22.8	2.7
Gap	38.5	38.6	38.1	39.1	
Non-FARMS	59.9	64.8	66.1	68.6	8.7
FARMS	30.1	32.0	32.9	35.0	4.9
Gap	29.8	32.8	33.2	33.6	

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Table 5: MCAP Math Proficiency Rates by Service Group, All Grades

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>#change</u>
All Students	30.2	32.8	33.4	35.7	5.5
EML	8.8	8.7	8.8	9.4	0.6
Gap	21.4	24.1	24.6	26.3	
Non-SPED	32.8	35.7	36.4	39.1	6.3
SPED	11.6	12.4	12.8	13.6	2.0
Gap	21.2	23.3	23.6	25.5	
Non-FARMS	35.1	42.4	43.5	46.9	11.8
FARMS	10.8	13.2	13.5	15.4	4.6
Gap	24.3	29.2	30.0	31.5	

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

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Table 6: College Readiness Rate among High School Completers

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>#change</u>
All Students	41.3	45.3	40.0	39.6	29.4	-11.9
EML	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	*
Gap	36.3+	40.3+	35.0+	34.6+	24.4+	
Non-SPED	44.9	49.1	43.6	43.0	32.0	-12.9
SPED	8.7	13.4	10.7	10.4	5.3	-3.4
Gap	36.2	35.7	32.9	32.6	26.7	
Non-FARMS	47.7	58.1	53.3	53.2	40.5	-7.2
FARMS	18.3	17.9	16.5	17.6	11.5	-6.8
Gap	29.4	40.2	36.8	35.6	29.0	

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Table 7: Four Year Cohort Graduation Rates by Service Group Status

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>#change</u>
All Students	91.37	90.34	89.63	91.85	88.77	-2.6
EML	67.43	64.84	61.17	73.13	66.64	-0.8
Gap	23.94	25.50	28.46	18.72	22.13	
Non-SPED	93.20	92.00	91.00	94.00	90.20	-3.0
SPED	74.22	75.28	77.75	74.91	75.66	1.4
Gap	18.98	16.72	13.25	19.09	14.54	
Non-FARMS	92.58	93.46	91.28	92.15	88.95	-3.6
FARMS	87.29	83.98	86.76	91.34	88.48	1.2
Gap	5.29	9.48	4.52	0.81	0.47	

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Table 8: Four Year Cohort Dropout Rates by Service Group Status

Student Group	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>#change</u>
All Students	4.47	5.48	7.18	5.14	8.27	3.80
EML	20.57	22.24	30.30	19.73	28.76	8.19
SPED	4.40	<= 3.00	5.21	7.26	7.89	3.49
FARMS	5.04	8.49	8.01	3.57	6.78	1.74

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

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Finding #4: Despite common levels of low performance among most service group students, MCPS budgets from seven to up to 20 times more per student for special education than it budgets per student for EML services or compensatory education.

As noted in Finding #3, students eligible for special education, EML services, and FARMS demonstrate comparable levels of low performance relative to all students and students ineligible for special education and FARMS. Moreover, while performance gaps in math proficiency and college readiness were widest by FARMS status, gaps in ELA proficiency, graduation and dropout rates were widest by EML status. Yet, MCPS expends inordinately more on special education per student than it expends on EML and compensatory education programs.

As observed in Table 9, MCPS budgeted the equivalent of \$30,000 per student with disability for special education in 2026 compared to budgeting \$4,000 per student eligible for EML services and \$1,400 per student eligible for FARMS for compensatory education.¹⁹ These per student service group expenditures are in addition to the approximately \$17,000 budgeted for general education that service group students, including students with disabilities, also utilize. Of note, most students with disabilities spend 80 percent or more of their instructional time in general education.²⁰

Another way to consider the magnitude of the difference in MCPS' spending per student on special education as compared to per student expenditures for EML programs and compensatory education is to analyze trends in staffing by MCPS program. For context, staffing accounts for 90 percent of MCPS' operating budget expenditures annually.²¹ As described in Table 10, MCPS budgeted for 5,619 full time equivalent positions (FTEs) in 2026 for special education compared to 979 FTEs for EML programs and 1,045 FTEs for six compensatory education programs described in detail in Table 11.

As noted in Finding #1, there are twice as many students eligible for FARMS as there are EMLs, and three times as many students eligible for FARMS as students with disabilities. Yet, MCPS allocated the fewest numbers of FTEs to its largest service group. As such, in 2025, MCPS budgeted:²²

- One special education FTE for approximately every five students with disabilities;
- One EML program FTE for approximately every 36 emergent multilingual learners; and
- One compensatory education FTE for approximately every 70 students receiving FARMS.

An analysis of data in Table 10 further shows that 52 percent of the growth in MCPS positions since 2020 were for special education: of the nearly 2,498 total FTEs added to the operating budget, 1,304 FTEs were allocated to special education. Alternatively, increases in EML program and compensatory education FTEs accounted for 10 and 16 percent of the growth in total FTEs between 2020 and 2026.

¹⁹ See Table 12 under Finding #5 for trend data on budgeted expenditures by MCPS program.

²⁰ In FY25, 72 percent of students with disabilities were serve in LRE A settings, spending 80 percent or more of time in general education; 8 percent were in LRE B settings, spending between 40 – 79 percent of time in general education; and 20 percent were in LRE C settings spending less than 40 percent of their time in general education. MCPS District Profile, [school-profiles | Montgomery County Public Schools | Rockville, MD](#)

²¹ <https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/budget-101/index.html>

²² Calculations based on 2025 enrollment (Table 2) and FTEs by service program (Table 10). MCPS also reported to OLO that in 2026 it allocated an additional 573.5 teachers to reduce class sizes and provide academic intervention supports in Title I and Focus Schools as well as 16.5 counselors for educational load and 119.4 paraeducators. However, these positions not included in Tables 10 or 11 because trend data not provided to OLO.

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Table 9: Operating Budget Per Student Expenditures by Service Group Program

Budget per Student	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	# change	%change
Total Budget	\$16,220	\$17,162	\$17,583	\$18,187	\$19,754	\$20,871	\$23,041	\$6,821	42.1%
SPED Budget	\$22,288	\$25,331	\$22,360	\$22,931	\$24,589	\$25,308	\$29,902	\$7,614	34.2%
EML Budget	\$2,672	\$2,535	\$3,037	\$3,154	\$3,356	\$3,667	\$4,006	\$1,334	49.9%
Comp Ed Budget ²³	\$626	\$586	\$596	\$697	\$1,044	\$1,209	\$1,440	\$814	129.9%
General Ed Budget ²⁴	\$12,672	\$13,423	\$13,738	\$14,080	\$15,193	\$15,932	\$17,154	\$4,481	35.4%

Source: MCPS, MSDE, and OLO Calculations

Table 10: Operating Budget Staffing by Service Group Program

Positions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	# change	%change
Total	22,907.37	23,396.49	23,845.76	23,989.87	24,516.14	24,447.62	25,405.60	2,498.22	10.9%
SPED	4,314.82	4,462.29	4,573.65	4,624.89	4,829.86	4,922.37	5,618.81	1,304.03	30.2%
EML	735.30	807.80	813.90	849.90	904.03	926.20	979.30	244.00	33.2%
Comp Ed ²⁵	645.67	690.05	718.10	841.02	943.73	976.56	1,045.02	399.35	61.9%
General Ed ²⁶	17,211.58	17,436.35	17,740.11	17,674.06	17,838.52	17,622.49	17,762.47	550.89	3.2%

Source: MCPS Operating Budgets and OLO Calculations

²³ Title I, Head Start, and Community Schools Budget per Student

²⁴ Remaining Programs/General Education Budget per Student equals the Total Operating Budget minus Special Education, EML, Title I, Community Schools and Head Start Budgets (Table 12) divided by Program Enrollment (Table 2). Estimate for 2026 service group enrollment based on 2025 service group rates.

²⁵ FTE's for Title I, Head Start, Community Schools, Focus Teachers, Pre-K, and Judy Centers.

²⁶ Equals Total Operating Budget FTE's minus Special Education, EML Program, and Compensatory Education FTE's.

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Table 11: Staffing for Compensatory Education Programs

Positions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	# change	%change
Total	645.672	690.047	718.099	841.024	943.734	976.559	1,045.02	399.352	61.9%
Title I	192.990	206.090	206.090	265.915	322.925	321.925	299.015	106.025	54.9%
Head Start	47.075	47.075	48.575	47.575	52.025	51.025	43.825	-3.250	-6.9%
Community Schools	*	8.875	22.475	41.500	77.500	110.00	173.800	173.800	
Focus Positions	238.300	238.300	238.300	239.800	240.775	240.775	235.725	-2.575	-1.1%
Pre-K	161.557	183.957	196.909	240.484	244.759	246.834	282.159	120.602	74.6%
Judy Centers	5.750	5.750	5.750	5.750	5.750	6.000	10.500	4.750	82.6%

Source: MCPS Operating Budgets and OLO Calculations

Finding #5: Differences in service group revenue do not explain differences in service group spending as MCPS allocates most state compensatory education revenue based on its FARMS enrollment to non-compensatory education programs.

Annually, MCPS relies on state and federal revenue to help fund programs for service groups. Differences in service group revenue, however, do not explain differences in service group spending as MCPS allocates most state compensatory education revenue to non-compensatory education programs. More specifically, unlike its dedicated use of special education and EML revenue on students with disabilities and EMLs, MCPS allocates most state compensatory education revenue to programs that neither target nor exclusively serve students eligible for FARMS or high-poverty schools.

Of note, unlike federal funds, MSDE allows MCPS to use compensatory education revenue awarded by the state based on MCPS' FARMS enrollment as Current Fund revenue rather than targeted revenue. Nevertheless, MCPS' use of compensatory education revenue for purposes other than compensatory education is inequitable given the unmet learning needs of students eligible for FARMS, as demonstrated by their lower levels of math and English language arts proficiency and college readiness under Finding #3.

Overall, MCPS expends exponentially more on special education programs than it receives in federal and state revenue for special education. For example, a review of budget data in Tables 12 and 13 shows that, in 2026, MCPS budgeted \$687 million for special education compared to receiving \$150 million in federal and state special education revenue. Thus, MCPS allocated nearly five dollars in local funding for each dollar it received in state and federal revenue for special education. Conversely, MCPS expends slightly more on EML programs than the federal and state EML revenue it receives and reallocates most of the state compensatory education revenue it receives to non-compensatory education programs.

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More specifically, in 2026, MCPS budgeted \$136 million for EML programs compared to receiving \$121 million in federal and state revenue for EML programs. However, MCPS only budgeted \$96 million for Title I, Head Start, and Community Schools compared to receiving \$284 million in combined federal and state revenue for compensatory education. MCPS also likely used state compensatory education revenue to fund Pre-K, Focus, and Judy Centers positions described under Finding #4 (Table 11).²⁷ Yet the unknown budget for these three compensatory education programs likely falls far short of the \$188 million difference in budgeted revenue and expenditures for compensatory education in 2026.²⁸

In sum, whereas MCPS essentially sets its budget for EML programs based on state and federal revenue it receives, it spends five times the revenue it receives for special education and diverts most of the revenue it receives for compensatory education for non-compensatory education programs.

Table 12: Operating Budget Summary by Service Group (000's)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	# change	%change
Total Budget	\$2,680,575	\$2,755,560	\$2,782,098	\$2,920,028	\$3,165,008	\$3,322,307	\$3,595,552	\$914,977	34.1%
Special Education	\$466,212	\$476,556	\$477,949	\$508,438	\$548,118	\$579,712	\$686,614	\$220,402	47.3%
EML Programs	\$82,186	\$87,250	\$92,968	\$100,091	\$112,221	\$123,560	\$135,718	\$53,532	65.1%
Title I (CompEd)	\$32,001	\$28,577	\$28,577	\$33,036	\$51,560	\$51,560	\$47,108	\$15,107	47.2%
Head Start (CompEd)	\$3,870	\$3,870	\$ 4,116	\$4,116	\$4,264	\$4,505	\$3,121	\$(750)	-19.4%
Community Schools (CompEd)	\$1,991	\$3,981	\$4,728	13,739	\$14,604	\$26,885	\$46,165	\$44,174	2218.68%
Remaining Programs	\$2,094,315	\$2,155,326	\$2,173,760	\$2,260,608	\$2,434,241	\$2,536,085	\$2,676,826	\$582,511	27.81%

Source: MCPS and OLO Calculations

²⁷ As observed in Footnote 22, MCPS also reported supporting 573.5 teachers to reduce class sizes and provide academic intervention supports in Title I and Focus Schools and 16.5 counselors for educational load and 119.4 paraeducators for academic supports with compensatory education funding in 2026. MCPS, however, did not report staffing trends for these compensatory education initiatives from 2020 to 2025.

²⁸ MCPS also did not report the budget for staffing class size reductions, academic supports, additional counselors, and paraeducators for Title I and Focus Schools for 2026 or prior years.

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Table 13: Federal and State Revenue for Service Group Programs (000's)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	# change	%change
SPED Revenue	\$108,550	\$113,079	\$104,282	\$117,855	\$132,356	\$143,480	\$149,553	\$41,004	37.8%
IDEA (Federal)	\$33,188	\$34,461	\$34,461	\$34,699	\$39,591	\$39,591	\$39,011	\$5,823	17.5%
Infants and Toddlers (Federal)	\$663	\$663	\$606	\$592	\$612	\$612	\$591	\$(73)	-11.0%
Medical Assistance Programs (Federal)	\$4,610	\$5,118	\$5,118	\$5,118	\$4,718	\$5,183	\$5,183	\$573	12.4%
SPED Formula (State)	\$42,511	\$44,503	\$45,048	\$58,397	\$68,385	\$79,043	\$87,819	\$45,308	106.6%
SPED (State) Reimbursement	\$18,446	\$19,202	\$19,051	\$19,051	\$19,051	\$19,051	\$16,951	\$(1,495)	-8.1%
Blueprint: Special Education (State)	\$9,133	\$9,133	-	-	-	-	-	\$(9,133)	-100.0%
Compensatory Education Revenue	\$181,092	\$184,999	\$171,212	\$170,935	\$256,443	\$258,094	\$284,206	\$103,114	56.9%
Title I A (Federal)	\$32,001	\$28,577	\$28,577	\$33,036	\$51,560	\$51,560	\$47,108	\$15,107	47.2%
Head Start (Federal)	\$4,040	\$3,870	\$4,116	\$4,116	\$4,264	\$4,505	\$3,120	\$(920)	-22.8%
Comp Ed Formula (State)	\$143,061	\$148,570	\$133,784	\$133,784	\$200,619	\$202,028	\$205,611	\$62,550	43.7%
Concentration of Poverty (State)	\$1,991	\$3,981	\$4,735	-	-	-	\$28,367	\$26,376	1325.0%
EML Revenue	\$79,939	\$85,041	\$80,249	\$97,754	\$107,648	\$116,778	\$120,664	\$40,725	50.9%
Title III (Federal)	\$3,092	\$3,080	\$3,080	\$3,080	\$3,080	\$3,080	\$3,080	\$(12)	-0.4%
EML Formula (State)	\$76,847	\$81,960	\$77,169	\$94,674	\$104,568	\$113,698	\$117,584	\$40,737	53.0%

Source: MCPS Operating Budgets

Finding #6: OLO cannot assess budget equity for GT programs because MCPS does not report school-based GT program costs separate from general education spending.

As observed in Finding #1, students participating in gifted and talented (GT) programs within MCPS accounted for 19 percent of enrollment in 2025. Yet, unlike other service group programs, MCPS does not report its school-based spending on GT programs separate from what it spends on general education. Moreover, MCPS did not respond to OLO staff requests for this data. As such, annual spending on GT programs within MCPS remains unmarked and unknown.

This lack of data undermines transparency and program accountability: as other service group programs and initiatives must annually justify the continued use of current funds, or expansion of funds to better address student needs, the cost of GT programs remains hidden within general education expenditures without the oversight placed on other service group programs or initiatives.

The lack of a GT program budget data is especially problematic given the disparities in GT enrollment by race, ethnicity, and income:²⁹

²⁹ Identifying and Serving Gifted and Talented Students, Montgomery County Board of Education, May 5, 2025

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- White and Asian students accounted for 64 percent of students in GT programs compared to 37 percent of all students, while Black and Latinx students accounted for 28 percent of students in GT programs compared to 57 percent of all students.
- Students receiving FARMS and EML services were also under-represented in GT programs, accounting for seven and less than one percent of GT enrollment compared to 44 and 19 percent of all students.
- Students with disabilities were also under-represented among GT programs, accounting for four percent of GT enrollment compared to 14 percent of all students. Yet, White students were over-represented among GT programs serving students with disabilities and 504 plans, accounting for 64 percent of twice exceptional students in 2025 compared to 24 percent of all students.

In addition to not reporting annual budget data for school-based GT programs, MCPS also does not separately report on the performance of GT students beyond describing data on AP and IB program participation and assessments. The combined absence of budget and performance data for GT programs undermines an assessment of budget equity for GT programs relative to other service group programs and comprehensive assessment of budget equity within MCPS overall.

Finally, several community stakeholders observed that the lack of program budget data for GT and other MCPS programs undermines transparency and accountability. More specifically, they observe that:

- Incomplete program budgeting undermines public trust;
- The absence of disaggregated performance data limits elected officials oversight capacity;
- Stakeholders cannot meaningfully assess budget equity without transparent school- and program-level financial data; and
- Accountability is impossible when expenditures cannot be tracked to outcomes.

Finding #7: OLO cannot describe how MCPS’ budgeting practices align with or reflect the Blueprint for Maryland’s requirements for advancing budget equity.

For this project, OLO sought to understand how MCPS’ budgeting practices reflect and align with the requirements for the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. The Blueprint seeks to transform public education in Maryland “into a world-class system” by increasing funding for early childhood education, teacher quality, college and career readiness, and programs for service group students.³⁰ Further, the Blueprint seeks to enhance governance and accountability for schools to achieve performance goals in these areas.

There are specific aspects of the Blueprint that intentionally advance budget equity. For example, the Blueprint requires that state and local school systems increase funding for compensatory education, concentration of poverty grants, multilingual learners, special education, transitional supplemental instruction, and pre-K.³¹ These requirements dedicate more resources to students eligible for FARMS, EML services, and special education. The Blueprint also requires local school systems to:

³⁰ Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, Maryland State Department of Education, <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/>

³¹ MCPS 2024 Blueprint Implementation Plan

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- Phase in the provision of per-pupil funding for wraparound services (e.g. extended learning time and social services) on a sliding scale through FY27 for schools with a concentration of students from low-income households above 55 percent;³²
- Ensure that novice teachers, out-of-field teachers, and long-term substitutes are not concentrated among “students with a particular racial, ethnic, linguistic, economic, or disability status characteristics;”³³ and
- Allocate 75 percent of its Blueprint funding for eight programs, including Compensatory Education, Multilingual Programs, Special Education, and Transitional Supplementary Education, and 100 percent of its Blueprint funding for Concentration of Poverty and Pre-K.³⁴

OLO posed several questions to MCPS seeking to understand how the school system implemented these Blueprint requirements and their implications for budget equity. OLO’s questions to MCPS, however, went unanswered. More specifically, MCPS did not respond to questions regarding:

- How MCPS’ projected revenue allocations for Blueprint programs were disaggregated by state versus local revenue?
- How closely have MCPS’ projections for revenue by Blueprint program tracked with actual expenditures by program?
- What wraparound services has MCPS provided and at what schools to comply with the Blueprint’s per pupil funding requirements?
- What is MCPS’ approach and budget to ensuring that novice and out of field teachers are not concentrated in schools with high-FARMS rates?
- What is MCPS’ approach and progress toward meeting the Blueprint’s Minimal School Funding requirements?

Given the absence of this information, OLO can neither discern nor describe how MCPS’ budgeting practices align with or reflect MSDE’s Blueprint requirements for advancing budget equity.

Finding #8: While eligibility for EML services is a strong predictor of student performance, race and ethnicity are often stronger predictors of student performance than either eligibility for special education or FARMS, especially for Black and Latinx students.

A review of performance data by race, ethnicity, and service group status shows that students eligible for EML services generally experience lower levels of performance than all students, regardless of their race and ethnicity. For example, as observed in Table 14, every EML subgroup by race and ethnicity had a lower ELA proficiency rate in 2025 than every race and ethnicity subgroup among all students.³⁵

³² 2025 Blueprint Comprehensive Plan Update, AIB Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, Task 4.4.4 on page 126

³³ Ibid, Subtask 5.1.3(e), page 145

³⁴ See MSDE Minimum School Funding Reports January 2025 – Google Drive

³⁵ An analysis of Table 12 data shows the ELA proficiency rate for EMLs ranged from 9 to 26 percent by race and ethnicity subgroup while the ELA proficiency rate for all students ranged from 34 and 80 percent across subgroups.

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Whereas EML status was often the dominant predictor of performance among measures reviewed, race and ethnicity were often stronger predictors of performance than special education or FARMS status: White and Asian students **eligible** for special education services or FARMS often outperformed Black and Latinx peers who were **ineligible** for special education or FARMS. For example,

- As observed in Tables 15 and 16, White and Asian students eligible for special education or FARMS demonstrated comparable or higher levels of math proficiency and college readiness than Latinx and Black peers who were ineligible for special education or FARMS;
- As observed in Tables 14 and 17, White students with disabilities had higher ELA proficiency and four-year cohort graduation rates than Latinx students without disabilities.

These performance patterns by race, ethnicity and service group, coupled with how MCPS budgets by service group, suggest that MCPS may target resources inequitably by allocating additional revenue to relatively higher performing groups (e.g. White students with disabilities) while the learning needs of lower performing groups remain under addressed (e.g. Latinx and Black students without disabilities).

Moreover, an examination of performance gaps by service group status, race, and ethnicity shows that special education and FARMS status were often stronger predictors of performance among White and Asian students than among Black and Latinx students. More specifically, there are wider gaps in performance between White and Asian students ineligible and eligible for special education and FARMS than among their Black and Latinx peers. For example,

- As observed in Table 15, the gap in math proficiency rates among students ineligible and eligible for special education (No SPED v. SPED) was 35 points for White students and 38 points for Asian students compared to 11 points for Latinx students and 18 points for Black students;
- As observed in Table 16, the gap in college readiness rates among students ineligible and eligible for FARMS (No FARMS v. FARMS) was 33 points for White students and 37 points for Asian students compared to 7 points for Black students and 9 points for Latinx and students.

These patterns suggest that special education and FARMS status serve as stronger predictors of performance for White and Asian students than for Black or Latinx students. These patterns also suggest that special education and FARMS eligibility may offer more sensitive and accurate measures of student need among White and Asian students than for Black and Latinx students. Thus, while MCPS advances budget equity by providing more resources for students eligible for service group programs, the strategy of targeting most service group resources by special education status is inequitable as special education status is not the most meaningful measure of student need for Latinx and Black students.

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Table 14: English Language Arts Proficiency Rates, All Grades, 2025

	<u>All Students</u>	<u>EML</u>	<u>No SPED</u>	<u>SPED</u>	<u>No FARMS</u>	<u>FARMS</u>
All Students	57.0	11.8	61.9	22.8	68.6	35.0
Asian	79.1	24.8	82.1	33.9	84.3	58.6
White	80.1	19.7	84.8	45.6	83.0	49.2
Black	48.3	19.2	54.0	13.5	57.9	40.7
Latinx	34.3	8.8	38.2	11.6	41.6	26.7
Multiracial	75.0	25.9	80.6	34.4	82.1	43.9
Native American	47.4	11.8	56.0	7.4	59.5	36.8
Pacific Islander	67.1	*	68.6	*	70.0	52.2

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Table 15: Math Proficiency Rates, All Grades, 2025

	<u>All Students</u>	<u>EML</u>	<u>No SPED</u>	<u>SPED</u>	<u>No FARMS</u>	<u>FARMS</u>
All Students	35.7	9.4	39.1	13.6	46.9	15.4
Asian	63.0	26.6	65.5	27.5	70.1	36.3
White	58.5	20.5	62.9	28.5	61.5	27.1
Black	22.9	13.6	25.5	7.7	29.2	17.7
Latinx	15.7	5.8	17.5	5.7	21.6	10.0
Multiracial	51.8	21.3	56.5	20.3	58.9	21.0
Native American	26.2	5.7	31.0	7.1	37.3	15.7
Pacific Islander	42.7	*	43.9	*	46.4	30.4

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Table 16: College Readiness Rates, High School Completers, 2025

	<u>All Students</u>	<u>EML</u>	<u>No SPED</u>	<u>SPED</u>	<u>No FARMS</u>	<u>FARMS</u>
All Students	29.4	<= 5.0	32.0	5.3	40.5	11.5
Asian	58.2	5.9	60.3	10.5	67.6	30.1
White	46.6	9.1	50.3	13.9	49.5	17.3
Black	15.8	<= 5.0	17.3	<= 5.0	19.7	12.3
Latinx	10.5	<= 5.0	11.2	<= 5.0	16.1	6.8
Multiracial	41.9	*	*	<= 5.0	47.9	12.0
Native American	18.2	*	*	*	*	<= 5.0

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

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Table 17: Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate, 2025

	<u>All Students</u>	<u>EML</u>	<u>No SPED</u>	<u>SPED</u>	<u>No FARMS</u>	<u>FARMS</u>
All Students	88.77	66.64	90.20	75.66	88.95	88.48
Asian	>= 95.00	88.52	>= 95.00	79.10	>= 95.00	>= 95.00
White	>= 95.00	92.16	>= 95.00	82.49	>= 95.00	89.25
Black	90.89	88.48	93.70	71.03	91.13	90.67
Latinx	78.98	62.39	79.50	74.26	70.47	85.87
Multiracial	93.96	*	>= 95.00	74.24	>= 95.00	86.14
Native American	91.30	*	*	*	*	*

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Table 18: Four-Year Cohort Dropout Rate, 2025

	<u>All Students</u>	<u>EML</u>	<u>SPED</u>	<u>FARMS</u>
All Students	8.27	28.76	7.89	6.78
Asian	<= 3.00	4.10	<= 3.00	<= 3.00
White	<= 3.00	5.88	6.21	6.19
Black	5.28	7.85	7.24	4.38
Latinx	17.17	33.01	10.30	9.20
Multiracial	<= 3.00	*	7.58	5.94
Native American	8.7	*	*	*
Pacific Islander	<= 3.00	*	*	*

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE

Finding #9: MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices center and privilege White students.

MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices prioritize special education over EML and compensatory education programs while leaving unmarked what is spent on GT education. Among the three service group programs with budget data, the one that serves a significant portion of White students is the best funded program by many degrees: special education. Additionally, MCPS does not publish program budget data for the service group program that disproportionately serves White students: GT education.

As described in Finding #4, MCPS funds its special education programs at seven to up to twenty times the rate it funds EML and compensatory education programs per student. In 2026, MCPS budgeted nearly \$30,000 per student with a disability for special education compared to budgeting \$4,000 per EML student for EML services and \$1,400 per student eligible for FARMS for compensatory education programs. These differences in budgeted per student expenditures were driven by differential program staffing where in 2025 MCPS budgeted:

- One special education FTE per five students with disabilities;
- One EML program position per 36 students eligible for EML services; and
- One compensatory education position per 70 students eligible for FARMS.

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These differences in spending by service group were also driven by how MCPS uses the state revenue it receives based on service group enrollment. An analysis of 2026 budget and revenue data described in Tables 10 and 11 under Finding #5 show that:

- For special education, MCPS added \$537 million in local funding to the \$150 million it received in federal and state special education revenue to budget \$687 million on special education.
- For compensatory education, MCPS used \$50 million in federal revenue for Title I and Head Start and \$46 million in combined state concentration of poverty and compensatory education revenue for Community Schools but diverted up to \$188 million in state compensatory education revenue to its Current Fund for non-compensatory education programs.
- For EML programs, MCPS added \$15 million in local funding to the \$121 million in federal and state revenue it received on EML programs to budget \$136 million on EML programs.

The disproportionate funding of special education programs relative to funding for EML and compensatory education programs coupled with MCPS leaving the budget of GT programs unmarked suggests that MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices center meeting the needs of White students in resource allocations that in turn privilege White students.

As described in Findings #2 and #6, White students rely on special education and GT programs rather than on compensatory education or EML programs to meet their learning needs. In 2024, White students comprised 22 percent of students with disabilities and 40 percent of students in GT programs compared to 24 percent of all MCPS students. Further, they accounted for 64 percent of students in twice exceptional programs (e.g. GT/Leaning Disability, GT/IEP) but accounted for less than five percent of students eligible for EML programs or FARMS.

Additionally, Asian students are under-represented in special education relative to overall enrollment while both Black and Latinx students are slightly over-represented among students with disabilities. Disparities in performance by race and ethnicity among students with disabilities,³⁶ however, suggest that MCPS' special education program centers White students despite the slight over-representation of Black and Latinx students among MCPS students with disabilities.

Given MCPS' more favorable funding and staffing of special education programs over EML and compensatory education programs, MCPS' inequitable budgeting practices privilege White students. MCPS' funding of GT programs that allocate additional resources to high performing students who are disproportionately White and Asian also privileges White and Asian students. The budget equity consequences of GT programs, however, are difficult to discern because MCPS does not publicly report school-based spending on GT programs separate from its budget for general education.

³⁶ See data from Tables 14 - 17 under Finding #7

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MCPS' budgeting practices centering White students are consistent with MCPS staffing practices that place more experienced and credentialed staff in low FARMS schools that disproportionately enroll White and Asian students. Centering White students in budgeting practices also privileges the schoolmates of White students in low FARMS schools who benefit from being in proximity to resources rather than to unmet needs. As observed in Table 19, a majority of White, Asian, and multiracial students attend schools with low FARMS rates in MCPS.

Table 19: School Enrollment Patterns and FARMS Level, 2025

Race or Ethnicity	Low FARMS	High FARMS	Overall
Asian	19.4%	8.2%	13.6%
White	36.6%	11.3%	23.6%
Black	16.5%	26.5%	21.6%
Latinx	20.4%	50.4%	35.8%
Multiracial	7.1%	3.7%	5.3%
Native American	*	*	2.0%
Pacific Islander	*	*	1.0%

Source: Maryland Report Card, MSDE³⁷

Finding #10: MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices disproportionately harm Latinx and Black students.

Given MCPS' under-funding of EML and compensatory education programs relative to student need compared to its robust funding of special education programs, MCPS' inequitable budgeting practices disproportionately harm Latinx and Black students who are more likely to depend on EML and compensatory education programs. The under-funding of EML and compensatory education programs also disadvantages Black and Latinx students regardless of their FARMS or EML status because they are more likely to attend high FARMS schools with high levels of unmet needs due to the under-funding of EML and compensatory education programs.

As described in Finding #2, Latinx and Black students are over-represented among EMLs and students eligible for FARMS and under-represented among students in GT programs. Black and Latinx students comprised 84 to 85 percent of students eligible for FARMS and EML services while White students comprised less than five percent of students eligible for either. As such, Latinx and Black students depend the most on EML and compensatory education programs to address their needs.

As described in Finding #9, Latinx and Black students are also over-represented among students enrolled in high FARMS schools that are more adversely impacted by the under-funding of compensatory education and EML programs. More specifically, as described in Table 21, Latinx and Black students comprised 77 percent of students enrolled in high FARMS schools compared to 37 percent of students enrolled in Low FARMS schools.

³⁷ OLO Analysis of MSDE 2025 Enrollment and Students Receiving Special Services Data (Enrollment_By_Race_2025, 2025_Special Services)

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MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices that decenter the service group programs that primarily serve Black and Latinx students are consistent with MCPS staffing practices that concentrate inexperienced and emergency credentialed staff in high FARMS schools. Thus, the budget and staffing inequities evident among service group programs are consistent with budget and staffing inequities in general education that adversely impact Black and Latinx students.³⁸

Finding #11: MCPS' budgeting and staffing practices especially harm Black students.

Given MCPS' under-funding of compensatory education compared to special education programs and, to a lesser extent, EML services, and that most Black students are ineligible for special education or EML services, Black students are especially harmed by MCPS' current budgeting and staffing practices.

Many students eligible for compensatory education and EML programs, such as Latinx students, often at least receive EML services. However, Black students are often only eligible for compensatory education programs, either because they are eligible for FARMS or because they attend schools with high-FARMS rates. Thus, Black students often do not receive any meaningful specialized services.

This is especially the case for Black students enrolled in MCPS' secondary schools. As observed in prior OLO reports,³⁹ MCPS allocates most of its compensatory education funding to elementary-aged students and elementary schools via its staffing of pre-kindergarten programs, Title I and focus schools, and its class size reduction initiative.

As such, Black students with compensatory education needs, particularly at the secondary level, are especially harmed by MCPS' racially inequitable budgeting and staffing practices because they are the least likely to receive specialized educational services to address their learning needs.

Finding #12: MCPS' FY27 operating budget will likely widen budgeting and staffing inequities by service group.

As observed in Finding #4, MCPS budgeted from seven to 20 times more per student for special education in FY26 than it budgeted for EML or compensatory education programs. This difference in per student service group spending reflects differences in staffing, where MCPS budgeted one special education FTE for every five students with disabilities in FY25 compared to one EML program FTE for every 36 EML students and one compensatory education FTE for every 70 students receiving FARMS.

For FY27, the County Council approved a total of \$3,724,289,307 for the MCPS operating budget. This represents a 3.6 percent increase (\$128.7 million) in funding and 0.3 percent increase in staffing (69 full-time equivalent positions)⁴⁰ over the FY26 budget despite an anticipated 3.1 percent decrease (-5,024 students) in budgeted enrollment.⁴¹ The approved MCPS FY27 operating budget, however, includes even more significant increases in special education spending and staffing that will likely widen disparities in spending and staffing for compensatory education and EML programs relative to special education.

³⁸ See footnote 9

³⁹ See OLO Report 2019-14, MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps ([MergedFile](#)) and OLO Report 2015-15, Resources and Staffing among MCPS Schools ([OLOReport2015-15ResourcesAndStaffingAmongMCPSSchools.pdf](#))

⁴⁰ MCPS budgeted for 25,405.5957 FTEs in FY26 compared to 25,474.6385 FTEs in FY27.

⁴¹ MCPS budgeted for 159,915 students in FY26 compared to 154,891 students for FY27.

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More specifically, the FY27 MCPS operating budget includes a 5.6 percent increase (\$38.4 million) in special education spending⁴² and 2.7 percent increase (149.9 FTEs) in special education staffing⁴³ compared to an anticipated 3.1 percent decrease in special education enrollment.⁴⁴ Thus, MCPS' per student special education spending is anticipated to increase by 9 percent (\$2,695) from \$29,902 per student in FY26 to \$32,597 per student in FY27.

Conversely, MCPS did not budget any significant increases in compensatory education and EML spending for FY27 beyond increases in staff compensation for all represented staff. As such, the FY27 operating budget for MCPS is likely to widen existing budgeting and staffing inequities by service group.

Finding #13: Students value MCPS budget and staffing allocations that build community in schools and enhance their learning opportunities.

OLO convened four focus groups with young people familiar with MCPS as current and former students. To center the perspectives of BIPOC students and students from low-income households, OLO partnered with community-based organizations to extend focus group invitations to a cross-section of youth that included BIPOC students, students who had been eligible for FARMS, and students enrolled in schools with high FARMS rates. As such, OLO was able to glean the perspectives of youth from a sample of focus group participants who had been directly impacted by MCPS' budgeting and staffing decisions.

In response to questions regarding what they liked best about their experiences in MCPS and their school experiences, focus group participants cited experiences that fostered community and well-being in schools, enhanced their learning opportunities, or both. More specifically, regarding:

- **Fostering community and well-being**, some of the favorable experiences youth focus group participants shared included their school's diversity, celebrations of culture, opportunities to engage with peers, clubs, athletics, student government, school-wide programs that provided free meals to all students, Outdoor Education in middle school, physical education classes, Wellness Centers, liaisons in Community Schools that assist families with connecting to resources and social services, and afterschool and enrichment programs offered by Excel Beyond the Bell, including programs sponsored by the 480 Club.
- **Enhanced learning opportunities**, some of the favorable experiences youth focus group participants shared included having teachers who make learning fun and take the time to help their students, access to advanced and specialized classes, the ACES program, SAT preparation classes, career and technical education opportunities that prepare students for the future, foreign language classes, and ESOL programs especially during elementary school.

Collectively, these responses suggest that students, especially BIPOC students, students eligible for FARMS, and students enrolled in high-FARMS schools, value MCPS budgeting and staffing allocations that foster community and enhance their learning opportunities.

⁴² From \$686.8 million in FY26 to an estimated \$725.0 million in FY27.

⁴³ From 5,586.3527 FTE's for State Budget Category 6 (Special education) in FY26 to 5,718.2355 FTE's in FY27.

⁴⁴ With students with disabilities estimated at 14.3 percent of MCPS enrollment in FY26 and FY27, the number of students with disabilities estimated to decline from 22,962 students in FY26 to 22,241 students in FY27.

Finding #14: Students often experience MCPS' budget and staffing inequities as unmet needs.

In response to the question of how MCPS could better utilize its resources to meet students' needs, focus group participants offered recommendations for MCPS action aimed at enhancing school communities, student well-being, and learning opportunities. More specifically, they advocate for improving school culture, providing more assistance to students who struggle in school, and providing more accessible information to students and families with four recommendations for MCPS action:

- **Shift school cultures away from stressing out students to building stronger communities.** A persistent theme shared during focus groups was the stress students often experience in MCPS resulting from two drivers: a "hustle-culture" of excessive competition and pressure for students to perform that exists especially in high schools; and a focus on enforcing rules that are considered unfair or counter-productive. For example, focus group participants complained that changes to MCPS' grading policy encouraged many students to give up rather than to catch up.⁴⁵ They also felt that hall sweeps and detentions fostered racial profiling and encouraged more absenteeism rather than stronger connections between students and staff that could improve attendance.

Recommendations for improving school culture offered by youth participants include:

- Expanding guidance and mentorship opportunities;
 - Rewarding school attendance rather than punishing absenteeism;
 - Investing in building services to improve schools' physical environments;
 - Expanding restorative justice programs;
 - Employing more lenient and kind teachers who enjoy working with youth;
 - Offering more after-school programs and enrichment opportunities; and
 - Integrating students across service group programs to strengthen school communities.
- **Allocate additional resources to assist students who struggle academically.** Several focus group participants shared that students often struggle to develop a mastery of their course materials given the pace of instruction, especially in advanced courses, and the perception of inconsistency in grading and instruction among courses. They also expressed frustration with teachers who seemed unable to teach content beyond their textbooks and with a lack of foreign language translation services available for math courses exclusively taught to EMLs. They observed that the absence of supplemental resources to assist students who struggle academically contributes to the stress related to "hustle culture" where they feel penalized for not being able to keep up in their courses despite their best efforts.

Recommendations offered for allocating additional resources to assist students include:

- Providing no-cost and low-cost tutoring opportunities for secondary students;
- Providing classes and digital resources to help students organize their assignments;
- Providing students access to office hours with teachers;
- Offering more extensive SAT preparatory classes;
- Offering translation services for EMLs;

⁴⁵ MCPS grading policy requires students to submit outstanding work within 10 days of returning to school rather than by the end of the quarter.

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- Offering individualized attention and support for students; and
- Offering spaces where students can ask for help without being judged.
- **Allocate additional resources to assist students who struggle socially.** Focus group students also thought there were insufficient resources allocated to assist students who struggle socially or who experience anxiety and other mental health issues. They offered several recommendations for allocating more resources to assist students who struggle socially that could also work to shift school cultures away from stressing out students to building communities. These include:
 - Ensuring teachers understand students' emotions;
 - Instituting later school start times;
 - Hiring more pupil personnel workers, social workers, and school counselors;
 - Improving school food; and
 - Providing direct assistance and support to students that struggle with anxiety and absenteeism.
- **Provide information about programs and resources to the students and families who need it most.** Focus group participants and community stakeholders⁴⁶ shared their concerns and frustrations about themselves and others not being aware of available MCPS programs and resources in part because they may not be connected to social media. There was a perception that BIPOC families, households eligible for FARMS, are EMLs are unaware of existing MCPS resources or become aware of them after they become ineligible. To ensure that information is accessible to the students and families who need them the most, several recommendations for MCPS action were offered including:
 - Increasing information shared with culturally and linguistically diverse families about available programs in accessible formats;
 - Eliminating gatekeeping of information about and access to GT, AP, and IB programs for Black and Latinx students; and
 - Making it easier for students to sign up for FARMS.

Collectively, these responses suggest that the students over-represented among focus group participants – Black and Latinx students, students eligible for FARMS, and students enrolled in high-FARMS campuses – often experience MCPS' budget and staffing inequities as having their needs go unmet due to insufficient resources being allocated to address their learning and social needs.

Finding #15: Community stakeholders believe there has been inadequate accountability for MCPS to meet the learning needs of Black and Latinx students.

In addition to convening four focus groups with young people familiar with MCPS, OLO also spoke to 25 adult community stakeholders (or CBO leaders) representing BIPOC youth and families in the County via several interviews and four community conversations to understand their perceptions of budget equity within MCPS and recommendations for improving budget equity.

A common sentiment shared during OLO conversations with community stakeholders is that MCPS has not been held accountable for meeting the learning needs of Black and Latinx students. Examples of this sentiment cited by community stakeholders include:

⁴⁶ Engagement of adult community stakeholders described in the next section.

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- The Board of Education requesting additional budget revenue from the County Council annually to support programs that narrow performance gaps by race, ethnicity, and income without following up to see how additional revenue was utilized and with what results;
- The inadequacy of MCPS efforts to more equitably allocate teachers among low- and high-FARMS schools given the persistence of the most experienced teachers being assigned to the lowest poverty schools; and
- Frustration with MCPS attempts to advance educational equity that center exclusively on expanding access to GT programs for Black and Latinx children without addressing larger systemic budget and staffing inequities that adversely impact Black and Latinx children.

Several stakeholders further shared that MCPS has historically relied on performative stakeholder engagement and public messaging rather than implemented transparent accountability structures tied to improving outcomes for Black and Latinx students. This has fostered distrust among some Black and Latinx families who have experienced a pattern of reports commissioned, recommendations discussed, and community input solicited, but inconsistent implementation, transparency, and measurable progress by MCPS. Moving forward, these stakeholders desire more meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to MCPS resource allocations, staffing priorities, school improvement planning, boundary processes, program access, curriculum implementation, and accountability metrics.

To increase MCPS' accountability for meeting the learning needs of Black and Latinx students, community stakeholders shared the following recommendations for local action:

- MCPS should focus on fixing the system rather than individual children;
- MCPS should create accountability (consequences) for staff who do not care about Black and Latinx children;
- MCPS should use the budget to encourage more equitable staffing, including assigning the most experienced teachers to schools and students who need them the most;
- MCPS should amplify the voices of staff within the school system with expertise on how to improve outcomes for Black and Latinx students to lead efforts aimed at improving outcomes among Black and Latinx students, especially those eligible for FARMS and EML programs;
- MCPS should regularly describe the return on investment for specific budget allocations;
- MCPS should (re)launch an annual program budget describing how its expenditures in general, compensatory, special, and gifted education, and for EML programs, advance budget equity for all student subgroups and their progress especially for Black and Latinx students;
- MCPS should report on equity investments by school that include the following measures: per pupil spending, staffing experience levels, teacher retention rates, access to advanced coursework, counselor ratios, intervention staffing, extracurricular participation, and student outcome data disaggregated by race, income, disability, and language status;

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- MCPS should adopt a participatory budgeting process where families and students closest to the impacts of budget inequity have structured opportunities to help shape compensatory education priorities, interventions, community school investments, and mental health supports; and
- The County Council should stop giving MCPS a blank check to do business as usual and instead require MCPS to demonstrate how they are utilizing resources to advance budget equity, particularly for Black and Latinx students, as a condition of the Council appropriating any funds above state Maintenance of Effort requirements.

Recommendations

Overall OLO finds that MCPS advances budget equity for students with disabilities by allocating additional resources to special education programs to address their learning needs. MCPS' budgeting for programs to meet the learning needs of EMLs and students eligible for FARMS, however, are not equitable. The underfunding of EML and compensatory education programs relative to student need combined with the concentration of novice and under-credentialed staff in schools with high-FARMS rates disproportionately harms Latinx and Black students. Conversely, the higher funding of special education programs centers and privileges White students. MCPS' funding of GT programs may also undermine budget equity, but this cannot be fully assessed due to a lack of program budget data.

To assist the Council in advancing budget equity within MCPS to narrow racial and social disparities in educational outcomes, OLO offers two sets of recommendations for local action as follows:

Recommendation #1: Increase accountability for budget equity for compensatory education, EML programs, high-FARMS schools, and Latinx and Black students.

To increase accountability for budget equity for compensatory education, EML programs, high-FARMS schools, and Latinx and Black students, OLO proposes four actions for Council consideration. These actions are aimed at increasing MCPS' resource allocations for compensatory education, EML programs, and general education staffing in high-FARMS schools.

- **Require MCPS to relaunch its Program Budget** to enable the County Council to track MCPS spending and outcomes by service group program. This should include describing trends in state and local funded compensatory education programs serving students eligible for FARMS and high-FARMS schools, school-based GT programs, and general education expenditures in low-FARMS and high-FARMS schools. This recommended action is consistent with MCPS' prior commitments to relaunch its program budget made as part of its prior strategic plan and Blueprint Implementation Plan.

In the short term, OLO recommends MCPS' program budget track spending for each service program (e.g. special education, compensatory education) overall and by eligible student and track per student general education expenditures in low-FARMS and high-FARMS schools. In the long term, OLO recommends MCPS' program budget should also track spending for each service program overall and per pupil by student race, ethnicity, and income to track budget equity progress within each service group program.

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- **Require MCPS to expend all state revenue for compensatory education on local compensatory education programs** that target additional resources to students eligible for FARMS and schools that serve the highest percentages of students eligible for FARMS. This recommended action is consistent with prior recommendations for advancing budget equity made in OLO's 2015 Resources and Staffing among MCPS Schools and 2019 MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps reports.
- **Require any MCPS funding requests over Maintenance of Effort to be earmarked for compensatory education or EML programs.** This recommended action is consistent with recommendations offered by adult community stakeholders and recommendations for advancing budget equity made in OLO's 2019 MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps report.
- **Require any MCPS funding requests over Maintenance of Effort to be earmarked for reducing staffing inequities between low- and high-FARMS schools.** This recommended action is consistent with recommendations offered by adult community stakeholders in conversations with OLO. This recommended action also aligns with the Blueprint for Maryland requirements for school systems to ensure that novice, out-of-field, and long-term substitute teachers are not concentrated among students based on their race, ethnicity, income, language, or disability status.

Of note, requiring MCPS to execute a program budget without also requiring them to allocate additional resources and staffing to compensatory education and EML programs will not advance budget equity. OLO recommends the Council enact all four of these proposed actions to advance budget equity.

Recommendation #2: Center BIPOC students and students with low incomes in allocating budget resources for service group programs and general education.

To ensure that MCPS efforts to enhance budget equity improve learning opportunities for students eligible for compensatory education and EML programs, students enrolled in high-FARMS schools, and Latinx and Black students, OLO proposes five actions for local consideration. These actions are aimed at increasing the efficacy of how resources are utilized to improve outcomes among students eligible for FARMS and EML programs, students enrolled in high-FARMS schools, and Latinx and Black students.

- **Require MCPS to partner with BIPOC stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan to advance budget equity.** OLO recommends that the Council encourage the Board of Education and MCPS to partner with BIPOC stakeholders - including BIPOC students and community stakeholders representing BIPOC students - to develop a comprehensive plan to advance budget equity. In addition to co-developing the plan with BIPOC community stakeholders, OLO recommends that MCPS partner with BIPOC stakeholders to implement and evaluate their budget equity plan. This recommended action is consistent with OLO's recommendations in the 2023 Addressing Racial Inequity in the School to Prison Pipeline report.
- **Encourage MCPS to allocate additional funding to improve school culture in high-FARMS schools.** OLO recommends additional MCPS investments in compensatory education and EML programs that focus on improving school culture, especially for Latinx and Black students and students eligible for FARMS in MCPS' secondary schools. Recommendations for improving school culture offered by youth focus group participants include:

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- Expanding guidance and mentorship opportunities;
 - Rewarding school attendance rather than punishing absenteeism;
 - Investing in building services to improve schools' physical environments;
 - Expanding restorative justice programs;
 - Employing more lenient and kind teachers who enjoy working with youth;
 - Offering more after-school programs and enrichment opportunities; and
 - Integrating students across service group programs to strengthen school communities.
- **Encourage MCPS to allocate additional funding to address BIPOC students' unmet academic needs.**
OLO recommends additional MCPS investments in compensatory education and EML programs that address BIPOC students' unmet academic needs. Recommendations for assisting students who struggle academically offered by youth focus group participants include:
 - Providing no-cost and low-cost tutoring opportunities for secondary students;
 - Providing classes and digital resources to help students organize their assignments;
 - Providing students access to office hours with teachers;
 - Offering more extensive SAT preparatory classes;
 - Offering translation services for EMLs;
 - Offering individualized attention and support for students; and
 - Offering spaces where students can ask for help without being judged.
 - **Encourage MCPS to allocate additional funding to address BIPOC students' unmet social needs.**
OLO recommends additional MCPS investments in compensatory education and EML programs that address BIPOC students' unmet social needs. Recommendations for assisting students who struggle socially offered by youth focus group participants include:
 - Ensuring teachers understand students' emotions;
 - Instituting later school start times;
 - Hiring more pupil personnel workers, social workers, and school counselors;
 - Improving school food; and
 - Providing direct assistance and support to students who struggle with anxiety and absenteeism.
 - **Encourage MCPS to allocate additional funding to improve information access to BIPOC students.**
OLO recommends additional MCPS investments that improve information access to BIPOC students to ensure that information is accessible to the students and families who need them the most. Recommendations for improving information access to BIPOC students and families offered by youth focus group participants and adult community stakeholders include:
 - Increasing information shared with culturally and linguistically diverse families about available programs in accessible formats;
 - Eliminating gatekeeping of information about and access to GT, AP, and IB programs for Black and Latinx students; and
 - Making it easier for students to sign up for FARMS.

Appendix

Community Engagement Methodology and Demographic Summary

Methodology. To understand how stakeholders experience budget equity within MCPS, OLO met with community members and MCPS staff to solicit their perspectives. More specifically, OLO convened:

- One conversation with six MCPS central office staff to kick off the project.
- Several one-on-one meetings and focus groups with 25 community leaders representing the following community-based organizations (CBO):
 - 480 Club
 - Rose Pedals Consulting
 - Everyday Canvassing
 - Young People for Progress
 - Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families
 - Black Coalition for Excellence
 - Racial Justice Now
 - Montgomery County Progressive Asian American Network
 - IMPACT Silver Spring
 - VIBE CHECKUP
 - CHEER
 - Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County
 - Community Bridges
- Four focus groups with 35 current and former MCPS students organized with support from 480 Club, Young People for Progress, and the Montgomery County Collaboration Council.

CBO Community Leader & MCPS Staff Demographics. To track the demographics of adult stakeholders interviewed, OLO asked CBO leaders and MCPS staff interviewed to respond to a demographic survey. Of the 25 CBO leaders interviewed, eight completed demographic surveys (32% response rate); and of the six MCPS staff interviewed, three completed demographic surveys (50% response rate).

A review of demographic data observed in the tables below shows that most of the adult survey respondents identified as Black, not Latinx, and female. Further, all the adult survey respondents indicated that they were college educated, spoke English as their primary language, and were U.S. born.

Adult Respondents: Race

	CBO Leaders		MCPS staff		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
(blank)	0	0%	1	33%	1	9%
Asian	1	13%	0	0%	1	9%
Black or African American	7	88%	1	33%	8	73%
White	0	0%	1	33%	1	9%
Total	8	100%	3	100%	11	100%

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Adult Respondents: Ethnicity

	CBO Leaders		MCPS staff		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	0	0%	1	33%	1	9%
Not Hispanic or Latino/a/x	8	100%	2	67%	10	91%
Total	8	100%	3	100%	11	100%

Adult Respondents: Gender Identity

	CBO Leaders		MCPS staff		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Male (he/his)	3	38%	0	0%	3	27%
Female (she/hers)	5	63%	3	100%	8	73%
Nonbinary (they/their)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	8	100%	3	100%	11	100%

Adult Respondents: Highest Educational Attainment

	CBO Leaders		MCPS staff		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Bachelor's Degree	6	75%	1	33%	7	64%
Graduate/Professional Degree	2	25%	2	67%	4	36%
Total	8	100%	3	100%	11	100%

Adult Respondents: Age

	CBO Leaders		MCPS staff		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
18-24	1	13%	0	0%	1	9%
25-34	2	25%	1	33%	3	27%
35-44	1	13%	1	33%	2	18%
45-54	2	25%	1	33%	3	27%
55-64	2	25%	0	0%	2	18%
Total	8	100%	3	100%	11	100%

Youth Focus Group Demographics. To track the demographics of youth stakeholders interviewed, OLO asked youth focus group participants to respond to a demographic survey. All 35 young people interviewed completed the demographic survey (100% response rate).

A review of demographic data observed on the following next page shows that most of the youth survey respondents identified as Black, not Latinx, male, and high school aged. Further, all the youth respondents were English dominant with a fifth also being dominant in another language.

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Youth Respondents: Race

	#	%
Asian	1	3%
Black or African American	27	77%
Indigenous or Native American	3	9%
White	4	11%
Total	35	100%

Youth Respondents: Ethnicity

	#	%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	8	23%
Not Hispanic or Latino/a/x	27	77%
Total	35	100%

Youth Respondents: Gender Identity

	#	%
Male (he/his)	23	66%
Female (she/hers)	11	31%
Nonbinary (they/their)	1	3%
Total	35	100%

Youth Respondents: Dominant Languages

	#	%
English Only	28	80%
English and Spanish	4	11%
English and Another Language	3	9%
Total	35	100%

Youth Respondents: Age

	#	%
11	3	9%
12	3	9%
13	3	9%
14	1	3%
15	6	18%
16	6	18%
17	9	26%
18	4	11%
Total	35	100%