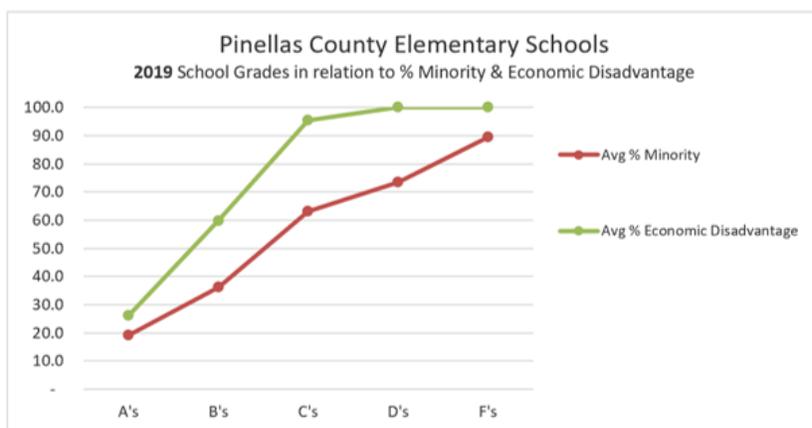


Racial Disparities, Equity and the School to Prison Pipeline

The next 100 years in America will be what we make it. What we must do for a proud, just and thriving tomorrow is cultivate and unleash the innate capabilities of our Black and brown children the way we have our white children, and education is the cornerstone of this possibility.



Racial Disparities.

The above graph shows the direct-line correlation between race and school grade; and, as mentioned in the section about School Grading, we will move the needle by identifying and ameliorating the impacts of socioeconomic issues as well as systemic inequities in our society.

The Pinellas County School district formally recognized the racial divide when in 2016 they started their "Bridging the Gap Plan" focused on closing the achievement gap between Black and non-Black students. There are six goals in that plan. Two of them are quantitative, academics-related metrics, and four of them are recognition that non-academic systemic biases exist that impact academic achievement. Those four areas that will have improvement impact include:

- *Advanced coursework.* Ensuring the identification of capability in our Black students as we do in our white students and getting them in advanced coursework early.
- *Student discipline.* Since 2013-2014, the number of referrals has dropped 30% and out-of-school-suspensions (OSS) have dropped 56%. There still exists a disparity in the risk ratio – the measurement of Black vs non-black – in both referrals and OSS. Black students are 2x as likely to be referred and 4x as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions. PCS is measuring, training, implementing, and committed to achieving a 1.0 risk ratio.
- *ESE identification, and*
- *Minority hiring & retention.* While 18% of our students are Black, only 8% of our professional instructional core is Black.

In addition to the Bridging the Gap plan, a few things further that I believe are/should be at the top of the list for improvement impact include:

- *Early childhood education.* Many studies demonstrate that the achievement gap is recognizable by five years old. A 2019 report by Georgetown University, “Born to Win, Schooled to Lose,” demonstrates that 74% of Kindergartners in the top SES quartile are already at above-average math, while only 26% in the bottom SES quartile are the same. The study demonstrates how this disparity remains a significant impact through 8th grade, and into college admissions.
 - 68 of our elementary schools offer VPK for 4-year-olds, free for 3 hours, \$65/wk for an additional 3 hours. 61 of our elementary schools offer Pre-K3 for 3-year-olds, \$75/wk for “full day” of 6 hours.
 - This is a good start. What I would like is for every single elementary school to have Pre-K 3 and 4, and for the “full day” to be available 8-10 hours/day, ensuring scholarships and/or sliding scale is readily available so that any financial or transportation barrier is removed. I know that JWB is doing great work in this area as well.
 - The 3-5 age is vital. We must do more here.
- *Extended schedule opportunities with enrichment.*
- *Wrap-around social and community services.*

Equity.

Equity and Equality are not the same thing. Schools, children, communities, access, inherent resources, and external impacts are not equal. Our response to them, therefore, must be customized and absolutely cannot be one-size-fits-all. Yes, resources may look different from school-to-school when they are responsive to needs-based allocation. That is the financial resources piece.

Working with our teachers and staff to identify conscious and unconscious bias is crucial. I am encouraged by the work that Hillary van Dyke is doing in our school system as the Senior Professional Development Coordinator for Equity. This work started just four years ago, and she now has two additional people working with her. They provide conscious and unconscious bias training throughout the district and have seen great personal acknowledgement and growth. They have trained 1,000 individuals and have 400 certified Equity Champions. We need more. We need to invest and require this training for all 14,000 employees (including School Board members!) throughout the district.

School-to-Prison Pipeline.

The school-to-prison pipeline is a criminal justice injustice, and must be acknowledged and addressed. I see it and care about and have read work on it. The PCS Bridging the Gap Plan does do some of the crucial work in this area. One piece that I will highlight specifically is the fourth goal around Student Discipline. Yes, the number of referrals and out-of-school-suspensions have dropped since 2015, but there still exists a disparity in the risk ratio as defined above.

There are other areas to address with respect to the pipeline to include:

- racial bias,
- lack of culturally inclusive material and experiences,
- the role of police in schools,
- and the disproportionate assigning of behavioral or learning challenges.

I am committed to listening, learning and doing work to impact the preschool-to-prison pipeline.