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ACCESSING GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

The past year has been tremendously difficult for everyone. Communities of color continue to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic experiencing disproportionate levels of not only the disease but also in the areas of employment, access to food, and housing security. Many of these issues will persist for years to come.

The pandemic has impacted everyone, but it has not impacted everyone the same way. According to the most recent data available, close to a quarter (24.5%) of Prince William County residents are foreign-born, double the percentage at the state level (12.4%). And a little over a third (33.7%) speak a language other than English at home.¹ Many of the County's residents did not and still cannot access the billions of dollars in federal pandemic relief accessible to the general public, such as unemployment benefits, stimulus payments, food assistance programs, and other forms of aid the state and county offer as safety nets. Often, these [safety net programs](#) require proof of legal status or other requirements that our communities can't always provide as easily (See Table 1). There are many reasons for this, with immigration status serving as one barrier to accessing such services, but another is the trust they have in their government. Trust between the community, government, and law enforcement continues to factor into their ability to reach out and obtain aid even if it is available to them. The County took a historic step last year to strengthen this trust by [ending the 287\(g\) program](#), but it was just one step down a long road.

PROGRAM	Citizen	Lawful Permanent Residents	Undocumented
American Recovery Plan (\$1,400 rebate)	YES	YES with SSN	NO
Unemployment Insurance	YES	YES	NO
SSI (Supplemental Security Income)	YES	5-year bar + 40 quarters work	NO
TANF (Temporary Assistance)	YES	5-year bar	NO
SNAP (food stamps)	YES	5-year bar	NO
WIC (Nutrition for Women, Infants & Children)	YES	YES	YES
Medicare	YES	5-year bar	NO
Medicaid	YES	5-year bar	NO
Emergency Medicaid	YES	YES	YES
ACA (Subsidized or Unsubsidized)	YES	YES	NO
CHIP (Children's Health Insurance)	YES	5-year bar	NO

Table 1. Eligibility for federal safety net programs.²

¹ Prince William County Virginia, "Fast facts." Geographic Information Systems, <https://www.pwccgov.org/government/dept/doit/gis/pages/fast-facts.aspx>
² ACLU People Power Fairfax, Budget Considerations re Trust Policy and Related Immigration Issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge leadership to begin implementing policies that seek to better our data collection and sharing practices to reduce the fear communities have. While it will not solve the issue, it is another important step in the right direction. Fairfax County implemented a [Public Trust and Confidentiality Policy](#) on January 26, 2021, to end voluntary cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The policy prohibits County employees from asking about or disclosing an individual's immigration status unless required by state or federal law, judicial warrant, or court order. The policy also limits the collection and sharing of other information with entities outside of the government. We strongly recommend Prince William County work to pass a similar policy and are committed to supporting these efforts in any way we can.

We also recommend the County reassess the requirements placed on eligibility for housing and financial assistance they can offer and consider other strategies of overcoming these barriers to get funding to those who cannot access it as the general public can. For example, one of the biggest concerns our community members have expressed is housing security. The housing crisis is an issue nationwide and with the federal moratorium set to end in June 2021, we face a wave of evictions that will further exacerbate the economic stability of families. Many residents have shared with us they have not been able to access rental assistance because a tenant's name is required to be on a lease. Unfortunately, the reality of these community members is they rent a room(s) within a single unit, and therefore, their name would not be listed on a lease, but they still pay rent and require assistance.

The pandemic will inevitably set many of these families economically behind, which will only increase the need for targeted services to these community members outside of the current community services offered to our residents because of the unique challenges these families face. We will continue to provide necessary services to these residents, expanding to the best of our ability to meet the demand. We hope to continue to partner with the County to address the most pressing and immediate needs of the Latino, immigrant, and working-class families and are fully committed to doing so and can do so successfully with the County's support.

POLICING PRACTICES

The state has done an incredible job recently in [passing legislation for police reform](#), and we are so proud the state and County recognize the issues that our country as a whole is facing. However, despite our efforts, recent events we have seen in Minneapolis and even in our state in the town of Windsor demonstrate that we still have a long way to go. Prince William County is rapidly growing, and with this growth, the demographics are changing.³ Over the last ten years, our Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino communities have increased significantly compared to other groups that have also experienced growth, increasing by 8.8% and 6%, respectively.⁴ We applaud the state for passing legislation to better traffic stop data collection to help us better understand these stops and determine if there is an issue or not.⁵ Nonetheless, that is one hurdle of many, and county residents have come out to leadership to share their experiences with law enforcement. We've heard both positive and negative experiences, and we are fully committed to assisting in improving the relationship our officers have with the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend law enforcement, including the sheriff's office and County Attorney's office, implement Trust policies. Fairfax County's Commonwealth's Attorney's Office also recently passed a [Trust policy](#) of their own in March 2021 that would apply to their office and staff.

³ Prince William County Virginia, "Annual Population Estimates." Geographic Information Systems, <https://www.pwcgov.org/government/dept/doit/gis/pages/annual-population-estimates.aspx>

⁴ United States Census, QuickFacts, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/POP010210>

⁵ Berti, Daniel, "New law aimed at racial profiling requires police to collect new data at traffic stops," Prince William Times, 2020.

https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/new-law-aimed-at-racial-profiling-requires-police-to-collect-new-data-at-traffic-stops/article_d05ec08e-bafd-11ea-92b6-83096896a518.html

Our members have shared they are concerned and fearful to call law enforcement in cases where they witness a crime or are the victim because they are fearful law enforcement will share their information with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The ending of the 287(g) program sent a message that is not the County's intent; however, a policy codifying what those intentions are and what is allowed and not allowed to be collected and shared would be a good step in bettering relationships with the community. We also recommend continuing to improve data collection methods and being transparent with residents because data will accurately demonstrate whether policing is an issue we are facing in our County. Better data will allow us to determine what is occurring in our County and will help propose effective policies to address the issues we are facing.

EDUCATION

Like the County, our schools are highly diverse. Generally, we see several inequalities in student academic success when stratified by race and ethnicity, and the County is not exempt from this reality. Around 40% of our students are economically disadvantaged, allowing them to qualify for free or reduced lunch.⁶ The Equity Scorecard of 2020, which presents school data on enrollment, performance, participation, and discipline, found that Hispanic and Black students underperformed in almost every academic category compared to their White and Asian American peers. Hispanic students were the group that scored the lowest in every academic category, such as in reading and math SOLs, SAT scores, advanced diploma rates, gifted program participation, and they had the highest dropout rate at 14%.⁷ Economically disadvantaged, English learners and students with disabilities also underperformed compared to counterparts.⁷ The reading performance of English Learners has dropped dramatically in recent years, from a proficiency level of 65 in 2016-17 to a proficiency level of 39 in 2018-19.⁸ When looking at disciplinary actions taken by schools, Hispanic and Black students received more discipline than their White and Asian American peers at both the middle and high school levels. Hispanic and Black students also had higher expulsion rates than any other group.⁷

There are also differences not only by race/ethnicity but also by zip code. Specifically, there are stark differences between the Eastern and Western sides of the county. Graduation rates of Eastern high schools, such as Freedom HS (87.4%) and Gar-Field HS (86.4%), differ from the graduation rates of Western schools such as Colgan HS (97.9%) and Battlefield HS (99%).⁹ Generally, the County falls behind neighboring jurisdictions in costs per pupil. According to the most recent data available for the fiscal year 2020, it was found Prince William County spends roughly \$11,875 per pupil, which is \$3,336 less than Loudoun County, \$4,168 less than Fairfax County, and \$8,046 less than behind Arlington County.⁸ The costs per pupil also differ between schools in Prince William County (See Table 2).

It's important to note that while Gar-Field High School may receive more funding per student than Battlefield High School, the number of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch, a proxy of household income, differed drastically. Roughly 11% of students who attend Battlefield qualified for free or reduced lunch, versus 64% of students who attend Gar-Field, demonstrating the vast economic disparities that exist between students and their households even within the same County.¹⁰

⁶ Prince William County Public Schools, "Student and Staff Demographics," https://www.pwcs.edu/departments/accountability_grants_records_testing/data_staff/equity_scorecard/student_and_staff_demographics#:~:text=Full%20Time%20Student%20Enrollment%20by%20Ethnicity&text=The%20percentage%20of%20Black%20students.2020%2D21%20was%2036%25.

⁷ Imon, Keith, and Jennifer Coyne Cassata. Equity Scorecard 2018-2019. Prince William County Public Schools, 2020. www.pwcs.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_340140/File/Advisory%20Councils/SACE/Equity%20Scorecard%202018-19%20updated%20March%206%202020.pdf.

⁸ "Prince William County Public Schools - Virginia School Quality Profiles", Virginia School Quality Profiles, schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/prince-william-county-public-schools.

⁹ Prince William County Public Schools, "Prince William County Near Dead Last in Per Pupil Funding," Fiscal year 2020 WABE Guide, https://www.pwcs.edu/news/2019-20_news/fiscal_year_2020_wabe_guide#:~:text=At%20%2411%2C875%20per%20pupil%2C%20PWCs.per%20pupil%20behind%20Arlington%20County.

¹⁰ Virginia Department of Education, "Prince William County Public Schools - Virginia School Quality Profiles," <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/prince-william-county-public-schools>

High school	Total student population	Total Budget	Changes to budget	Cost per pupil
Gar-Field	2,386	\$18,579,602	+\$384,144	\$10,379
Battlefield	3,043	\$21,077,278	+\$762,042	\$9,746

Table 2. Comparing Gar-Field and Battlefield High School FY 18-19 budgets.^{11,12}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prince William County has adopted a [Strategic Plan \(FY 2016-20\)](#) that seeks to address the numerous challenges and disparities in our education system. However, we recommend that future plans should have clear, attainable metrics to address the inequities outlined, and updates should be provided directly to the community annually reporting on whether we are on track to meeting our goals or not. If not, we should provide what changes will take place to meet them. While some progress is presented to the School Board annually, we need to be transparent with our students and their families, keeping them just as informed throughout the process and evaluate our progress along the way.

To increase educational opportunities, we strongly recommend having dual enrollment courses equally offered. Battlefield high school offers over 17 dual enrollment courses, versus Gar-Field high school that only offers 6 courses.¹³ These courses can substantially make a difference when a student is applying to college, allowing them to earn free college credits while in high school, reducing costs once they attend college. Additionally, we recommend offering multilingual information sessions for families to educate them on school specialty programs and how to get involved. Parent involvement in a student's education and school is critical for the success of a student. Every parent should have equal access to valuable information, and language should not be a barrier. To improve language accessibility there would need to be greater recruitment of bilingual/multilingual staff who can host these events, review materials sent to homes, and work on outreach to parents who traditionally do not engage with schools. We need to identify and prioritize schools that need that additional aid and assistance to address the challenges they are facing with their student populations, especially when we know the reality of our students is not the same throughout the County.

To address discipline issues, we recommend better defining disciplinary policies to ensure fair and consistent actions are taken and apply to all our students. We also recommend developing and implementing strategies for teachers, including the use of appropriate supports and interventions. Additionally, we recommend providing school-based support systems for struggling students whose behavior repeatedly disrupts their education and the education of their peers. Another way to address discipline in our schools is to conduct a forum (at least annually) with students, parents, teachers, and administrators, so they have the opportunity to discuss the issues relating to discipline and provide input on the school's disciplinary policies.

¹¹ Virginia Department of Education, "Gar-Field High," <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/gar-field-high>

¹² Virginia Department of Education, "Battlefield High," <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/schools/battlefield-high>

¹³ Prince William County Public Schools, High School Course Catalog 2020-21,

https://www.pwcs.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_340140/File/Migration/DEPARTMENTS/Student%20Learning%20&%20Accountability/Student%20Learning/Course%20Catalog/HSCourseCatalog.pdf