

STUDENT EQUITY REPORT

EQUITY REPORT

CONVERSATIONS WITH MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS  
AND RECENT GRADUATES ABOUT THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



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# WELCOME TO MPS

Young people are rarely asked to analyze their own experiences and inform the issues that need to be solved in schools, even though they are the most directly impacted. Throughout the Spring of 2019, we had over 50 conversations with students across Minneapolis to better understand their experiences, and the problems they face.

Student experience in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) is complex. It is painted with varied reflections on academic support, social factors, resources, and opportunities. Our hope is that future conversations about the issues facing Minneapolis Public Schools can be grounded in the reflections of the young people consulted for this report, and inspire opportunities to elevate their truth.

“ My experience in K-12 got me ready for college. Whittier really set me on the right track early on. The K-5 IB program was really good. ”

*Drew Byrne, Washburn High School*

“ I loved my experience in MPS. I made lots of good friends, and I had a lot of great teachers. ”

*Collin Robinson, Southwest High School*

“ I didn't really learn anything in high school. I just went through the motions. ”

*Shiheina Munye, Patrick Henry High School*

“ Being a Minneapolis student was really hard. It felt like we didn't have opportunities and resources. The opportunities that we did get felt very limited and we had to fight for them. ”

*T'nia Riley, North Community High School*

“ It became apparent there weren’t really many teachers of color, especially by 11th and 12th grade. There was a white teacher teaching African American studies, so I decided not to take it. ”

*Robeira Legese, South High School*

“ It’s been really good. I would say that is because I was considered a gifted child, so I would consistently get support from teachers and staff. ”

*Sandy Bolton, Roosevelt High School*

“ There were some teachers that really cared, and there were others that didn’t know how to work with me. I had a teacher who kicked me out of class for a week straight because he didn’t like me after I tried to tell him I wasn’t getting the support I needed in his class. ”

*Jia Lewis, Edison High School*

“ In terms of being transgender, my experience has gone exceptionally well compared to experiences I have had in other districts. But at North, the education is next to nothing. ”

*Gabriella Detzauer, North Community High School*

# SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY STUDENTS SURVEYED

- > Andersen United
- > Anne Sullivan
  - > Anthony
  - > Anwatin
  - > Bancroft
  - > Barton Open
- > Bryn Mawr Community
- > Burroughs Community
  - > Clara Barton Open
  - > Edison
- > Elizabeth Hall International
- > Emerson Spanish Dual Immersion
  - > FAIR School Downtown
  - > Field Community
- > Green Central Park Community
  - > Hale Community
- > Hiawatha Community/Howe Campus
  - > Lake Nokomis - Keewaydin
  - > Lake Nokomis - Wenonah
    - > Loring Community
    - > North Community
      - > Northeast
  - > Northrop Community
    - > Patrick Henry
  - > Pillsbury Community
    - > Roosevelt
  - > Seward Montessori
    - > Sanford
- > Sheridan Arts Spanish Dual Immersion
  - > South
  - > Southwest
  - > Washburn
- > Wellstone International
- > Whittier International
- > Windom Spanish Dual Immersion

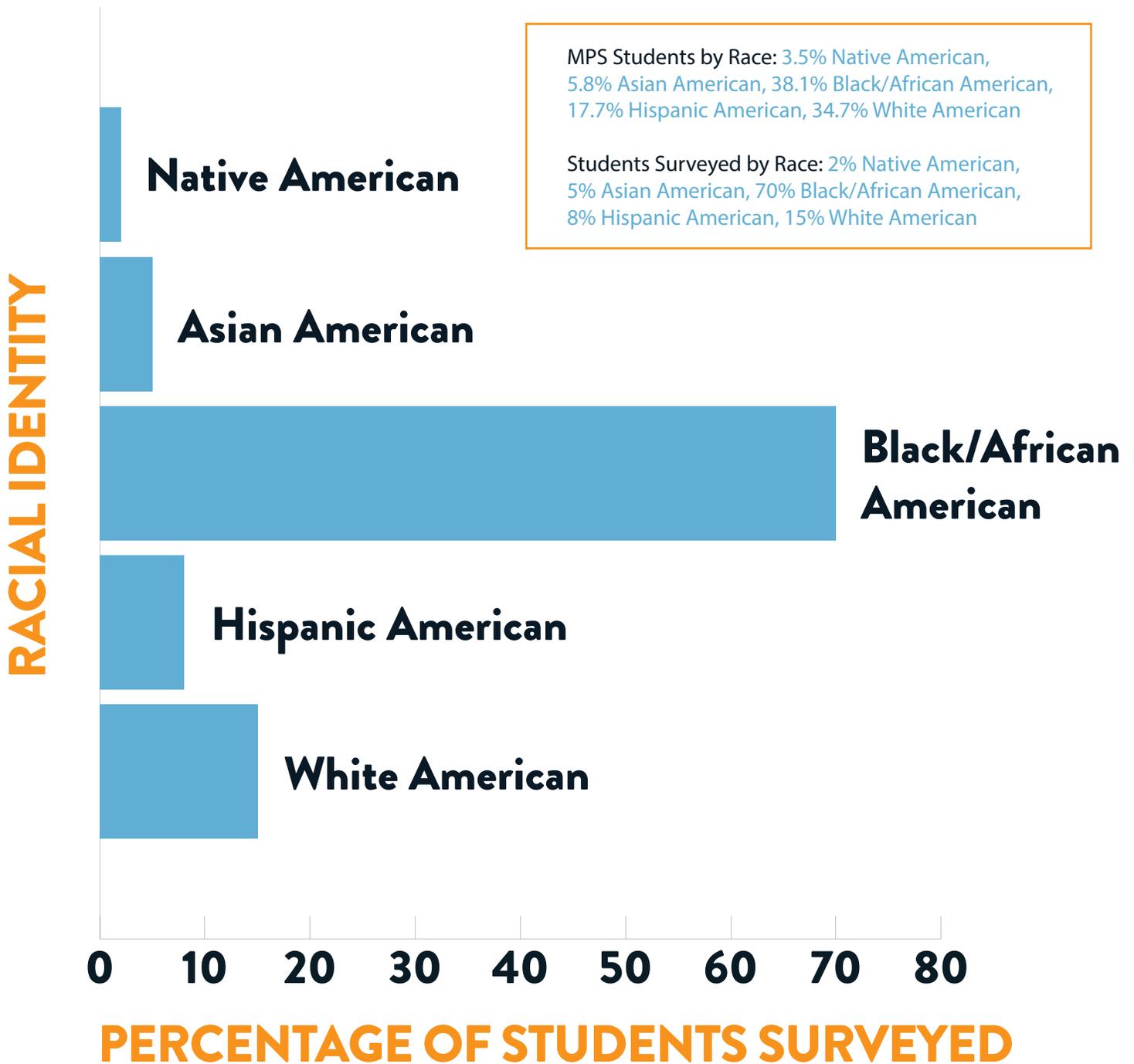
# ABOUT THIS REPORT

There were 36,531 students enrolled in Minneapolis Public Schools in the 2018-19 school year. It is one of the most diverse districts in Minnesota with 65% of students identifying as students of color, 20% as English language learners, 17% as special education learners, and 57% receiving free and reduced lunch.<sup>1</sup>

Student voices are not often heard in district evaluations, nor are students deeply engaged when considering what changes to make to school systems. **Young people are at the center of this report, sharing their lived experiences in schools day in and day out.** As products of the very system they are reflecting on, these students know first hand what is working for them and what changes can help shape a more equitable, meaningful educational experience.

**Our findings are based on a small subset of 53 current students and recent graduates of MPS, with a high proportion of students of color.** In the spring of 2019, we conducted interviews, documented anecdotes, and collected survey answers to share their observations, hopes, and feedback as a cumulative report for MPS as a whole.

# STUDENTS SURVEYED BY RACE



W A S H B U R N  
H I C H S C H O O L



**WELCOME  
TO  
WASHBURN**

## KEY FINDINGS

- MAJORITY OF STUDENTS FEEL ENCOURAGED BY TEACHERS, YET RECOGNIZE SOME FORM OF BIAS
- STUDENTS IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO QUALITY EDUCATION
- STUDENTS FEEL SYSTEM-WIDE RACIAL INEQUITY

# 1. MAJORITY OF STUDENTS FEEL ENCOURAGED BY TEACHERS, YET RECOGNIZE SOME FORM OF BIAS

We asked students about teachers' belief in them and an overwhelming majority felt encouraged and supported by their teachers -- **82% of students responded that teachers believed they could be successful.** We know that teachers are one of the single most impactful factors in a student's educational success, especially for those who are struggling.

Yet, further exploration of student comments revealed nuances in how students understand teachers' beliefs. What we found was consistent with the existing body of evidence and research on bias in the classroom -- that teachers who underestimate their students' abilities have an impact on both the students' academic expectations as well as their GPAs.

A study published in *Social Science Research* found that math and English teachers were more likely to perceive their class as too difficult for students of color compared to white students, even after controlling for standardized test scores, homework completion, and a host of other factors. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University explains that biases are favorable and unfavorable assessments deep in our subconscious, and we tend to favor our own ingroup -- the social group to which-

we psychologically identify as belonging. Students from our interviews observed or perceived similar treatment of students based on race and ethnicity, even if they were not directly involved, primarily noting favoritism of white students.

More prominently, students felt that teachers believed in students who were "putting in effort" and believed less in students who were "troublemakers" whether it was connected to race or not. Lastly, there was a general empathy among those interviewed toward teachers who they felt were unequipped to support all students.

**> FROM OUR INTERVIEWS STUDENTS IDENTIFIED A DIFFERENCE IN HOW TEACHERS TREATED STUDENTS BASED ON RACE AND PERCEIVED EFFORT OF STUDENTS.**

In implicit and explicit bias, "instructors can hold assumptions about students' learning behaviors and their capability for academic success which are tied to students' identities and/or backgrounds, and these assumptions can impede student growth."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Staats Cheryl et al. (2017). *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2017*. Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/ImplicitBiasAwareness>

# PATRICK HENRY

**82%** OF STUDENTS SAID  
TEACHERS BELIEVE IN THEM

**60%** OF STUDENTS SAID  
TEACHERS BELIEVE  
IN OTHERS



## RECOGNIZED BIAS

“ MPS mostly supported students who were nice and doing well in school, not troublemakers. Rarely did I ever see my teachers prioritize students who got in trouble. They would just let a behavioral interventionist deal with you. ”

*Shiheina Munye, Patrick Henry High School*

“ Students in advanced classes. White students. Students who have money. Those are the ones teachers equate with capability. ”

*Collin Robinson, Southwest High School*

“ I just saw it so much. White popular kids would get away with talking in class or not doing their work. Teachers seemed more like friends with these students. ”

*Lilly McLaughlin, South High School*

**“ Teachers believe in the students who have better grades and put in effort during class. As a student in that group, I get a lot of support. At the same time, I see MPS fail to support students who aren’t putting in effort. ”**

*Sandy Bolton, Roosevelt High School*

**“ I’ve seen how teachers believe in me and students who try. It’s hard for teachers to support students who don’t try or aren’t even coming to school. Teachers still believe in those students but don’t know how to support them. ”**

*Gabriella Detzauer, North Community High School*

**“ Teachers believe in students that put in the effort. I had a friend in summer school and his teacher offered to help him all the way through it, but when it came time for the student to step up, he didn’t, so the teacher didn’t provide him with any more support. ”**

*Meek Stalling, Southwest High School*



## 2. STUDENTS IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Using advanced courses as a proxy of grade-appropriate (or higher) assignments and strong instruction, we followed the structural barriers of access, as well as the stories of overcoming academic challenges for two student subgroups. The first group included 19 students who had a heavy course load of advanced courses (6 or more) and the second group included 17 students who had no or very few advanced courses (0 to 2).

**Students were asked about their racial identity, ability to read by 3rd grade, the conditions of their school buildings, and access to advanced courses.** We compared some of this information with district wide data from MPS.

TNTP's *Opportunity Myth* reports that “classrooms that served predominantly students from higher-income backgrounds spent twice as much time on grade-appropriate assignments and five times as much time with strong instruction, compared to classrooms with predominantly students from low-income backgrounds.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/> + <https://educationpost.org/forget-implicit-bias-lets-talk-about-explicit-bias-in-education/>



# READING

**“ My parents would read to me a lot at home. That supplemented what I was getting at school. In my elementary school, I had really good teachers. We had a lot of books in the classroom and we spent a lot of time on reading. ”**

*Drew Byrne, Washburn High School*

**“ I didn't have books that really interested me at school. I wasn't really pushed to read at home either; we didn't have a lot of children's books and I wasn't read to. Whether it was the activities we were doing or the materials we were reading, I didn't really feel supported until 3rd grade where they realized I was behind. Teachers really supported me then. ”**

*Gabe Spinks, Edison High School*

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development.<sup>4</sup>

A national study links failure to read proficiently by third grade with being four times more likely to drop out from high school than proficient readers.<sup>5</sup>

**Young people identified a wide variance of support and effectiveness in reading instruction across MPS, which leads a student's reading proficiency to depend on the amount of support provided at home.**

**“ There wasn't any guided reading. I would learn the skill and go home and lose the skill. I was scared to read out loud in front of anybody and I would find ways to avoid reading. All of the staff members and teachers couldn't relate to what I was going through and I realize it's hard to support someone you can't relate to. ”**

*Xavier Goodman, Patrick Henry High School*

<sup>4</sup> Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters, A KIDS COUNT Special Report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

<sup>5</sup> Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation

**“ If you don’t like the school building you’re going to, you’re just not going to want to be there. I barely went to school the last two years. I got headaches everyday because of the heat during some months I just couldn’t learn like that. ”**

*Shiheina Munye, Patrick Henry High School*

## SCHOOL FACILITIES

**Research on school facilities and productivity suggest that the quality of buildings affects learning.**

Conditions like clean air, good light, quietness, comfort, and safe learning environments encourage higher academic outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Comments from students regarding the quality of their school buildings were the most detailed and recognized as a physical consequence of inequity.

**We compared the number of students who had negative opinions about the quality of their school building and materials (desks, books, etc.) with MPS’s heat map showing the concentration of students who identify as white. Buildings in areas with a low concentration of white students were lower quality, according to respondents.**

**“ My school building doesn’t have many windows, so it feels like a prison. Where I live shouldn’t determine how good of a facility my school provides. ”**

*Glenda Young Shinnick, North High School*

**“ Our school building is really good, a whole half of the school was recently remodeled. I like the design of the cafeteria, there are three levels and it looks really nice, new, and clean. I think the ideal school building would be like Southwest. ”**

*Khalid Hassan, Southwest High School*

**“ It all boils down to money. North is worse than Southwest because it can be. This school should not have all these things when another school is working with hand-me-downs. It’s not a coincidence when you think about a school that is a predominantly white versus black school. ”**

*Azhae’la Hanson, North High School*

**45%** OF STUDENTS HAD  
UNFAVORABLE OPINIONS OF  
THEIR SCHOOL BUILDING



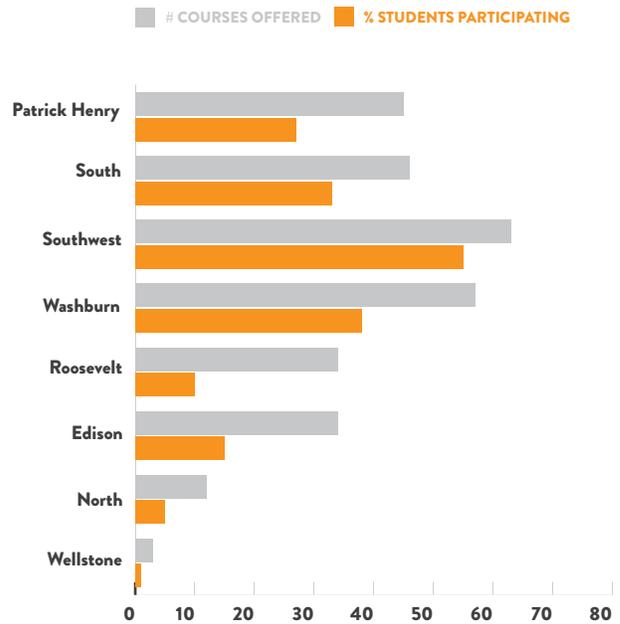
**WELCOME to SOUTH**  
Prompt, Respect, Integrity, Discipline, and Effort  
Puntual, Respeto, Integridad, Disciplina, & Esfuerzo  
Diyaarsanaan, Xaqdhowr, Sharaf, Edbin/anshax barid, & Dadaal/isku day



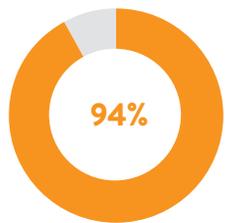
# ADVANCED CLASSES

We asked students if they knew how to access advanced courses and compared their answers with MPS data on course availability and participation. The results suggest that the higher number of courses offered often leads to a higher participation rate.

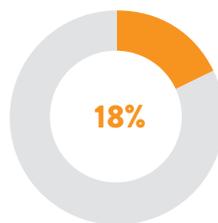
MPS HIGH SCHOOLS ADVANCED COURSE OFFERINGS AND PARTICIPATION RATE



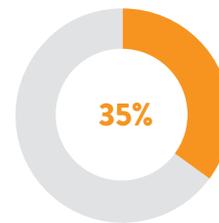
RACIAL IDENTITY, READING PROFICIENCY AND ACCESS RATE OF STUDENTS SURVEYED BY ADVANCED COURSE LOAD



IDENTIFY AS STUDENTS OF COLOR

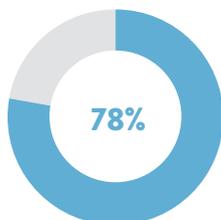


WERE ABLE TO READ BY 3RD GRADE

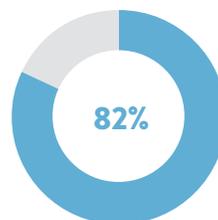


KNEW HOW TO ACCESS ADVANCED COURSES

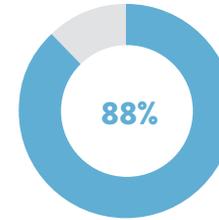
2 OR FEWER ADVANCED COURSES (17 STUDENTS)



IDENTIFY AS STUDENTS OF COLOR



WERE ABLE TO READ BY 3RD GRADE



KNEW HOW TO ACCESS ADVANCED COURSES

6 OR MORE ADVANCED COURSES (19 STUDENTS)



**MORE THAN 50%**  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAID  
STUDENTS OF COLOR ARE TREATED  
DIFFERENTLY BY TEACHERS  
AND ADMINISTRATORS

# 3. STUDENTS FEEL SYSTEM-WIDE RACIAL INEQUITY

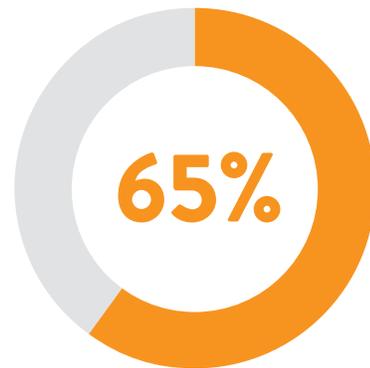
Students connected their experiences of racial inequity to structural K-12 systems with less access to advanced courses or high quality facilities. At the same time, students are invested in improving MPS and believe there are equitable solutions that exist to create a district with high expectations for all students.

MPS's school climate data provides another layer of analysis in students' experience of racial inequity:

- **STUDENTS OF COLOR WERE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND THAT THEY DO NOT ENJOY BEING AT THEIR SCHOOL COMPARED TO THEIR WHITE PEERS.**
- **STUDENTS OF COLOR WERE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND THAT THEY THEY DO NOT FEEL LIKE THEY BELONG AT THEIR SCHOOL.**
- **STUDENTS OF COLOR WERE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND THAT THEY DO NOT FEEL SAFE IN THEIR CLASSROOMS. WHITE STUDENTS WERE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND THAT THEY ALMOST ALWAYS FEEL SAFE IN THE CLASSROOM.**

There are major differences in what is offered, and the quality of education that is received, based on the school students are enrolled in. Young people often mentioned resources and the district budget as the mechanisms that create this inequity.

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS OF COLOR ACROSS MPS



There were 36,531 students enrolled in Minneapolis Public Schools in the 2018-19 school year. It is one of the most diverse districts in the state of Minnesota with 20% of students identifying as English language learners.

“ Lower level classes were explicitly students of color and students living in poverty. Standard classes were more diverse, and upper level courses were very white. If I didn’t see them in the halls, I wouldn’t know there were 500 black students at Southwest. Teachers in the advanced classes really pushed critical thinking skills, especially around race and gender. However, students walk into these classes and talk about these issues with almost all white students. ”

*Collin Robinson, Southwest High School*

“ I had to fight tooth and nail to get out of ESL because I knew I didn’t need it. I’m a first generation American and I started learning how to read in Pre-K. I was a little loud East African girl and always challenged what teachers were saying because they didn’t believe I was capable. ”

*Hamda Yusef, Southwest High School*

“ I don’t see how one half of the district gets to receive some classes and the other half of the district doesn’t. I think if we are going to close the achievement gap and come together as a district we need to give students an equal opportunity to different types of courses. ”

*Jada Lewis, Edison High School*

**“ Each high school should offer the same number of course electives. It makes students on the North side feel less than. ”**

*Eliana Branch, Patrick Henry High School*

**“ The difference in rigor is because of the wealth and prestige in Linden Hills. These students come from wealth, have parents with a college degree, and schools that are meeting their demands. ”**

*Collin Robinson, Southwest High School*

**“ The students I know at other schools talk about classes I’ve never heard of. The district is not letting the great minds of students of color reach their full potential. ”**

*Shaadia Munye, Patrick Henry High School*

**“ I shouldn’t have to drive across the city to get access to different classes. The quality of education I get shouldn’t be dependent on where I live within the same city. I should be getting an MPS education, not a North education or a Southwest education. ”**

*Noah Branch, Patrick Henry High School*

# STUDENT SOLUTIONS

**Student experiences are rich with nuances. They indicate key factors that have a major impact on academic achievement and well-being.** Young people are able to identify the barriers that are causing inequity in their schools, and the solutions to combat it, because they are facing it directly. Students are also capable of identifying the solutions based on what's worked for them.

**> HERE IS WHAT STUDENTS SAY IS NECESSARY TO IMPROVE THEIR EXPERIENCE, STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, AND EQUITY ACROSS THE DISTRICT.**



“ More transparency about the pathways to advanced courses; I didn’t know early on what courses led to future courses. Start in freshman year to figure out how we can introduce students of color to advanced courses. ”

“ MPS needs more diverse teachers that can relate to students’ backgrounds and more bias trainings for teachers. ”

“ More funding to schools who need it, so the budget needs to be handled differently. ”

“ Offering a more diverse range of advanced courses in different subjects and different areas. ”

**“ More people of color being hired as staff, not just treated like tokens. A budget focused on making people of color feel more welcome. ”**

**“ There needs to be changes to how counselors decide who is qualified to be in advanced courses. MPS needs to improve its English language learner system, including have more teachers versed in certain languages. ”**

**“ I would love to see more black male teachers. I’ve never had a black male teacher in my entire life. ”**

**“ Administration should find ways to make classes that students are interested in count towards core classes requirements. ”**



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