



Annual Report to the Community / Key Research Findings / 2017-18



**Executive Summary**

Bridging the Gap (BTG) is a Pinellas County Schools (PCS) initiative designed by the district to close or greatly narrow educational achievement gaps between black students and their non-black peers by the year 2027. The BTG Plan outlines educational equity gaps across six goal areas as follows:

- **Goal 1:** Graduation Rate
- **Goal 2:** Student Achievement
- **Goal 3:** Advanced Coursework
- **Goal 4:** Student Discipline
- **Goal 5:** ESE Identification
- **Goal 6:** Minority Hiring

The initiative's overarching goal is to provide supported pathways to improve the educational outcomes of black students, particularly with regard to equitable performance on standardized assessments, improved graduation rates,



participation in advanced level coursework, reductions in disproportionate disciplinary consequences and overrepresentation in Exceptional Student Education (Emotional/Behavioral Disability in particular). Additionally, the district has prioritized increased teacher diversity in developing strategies to recruit and retain teachers of color.

The key findings presented in this report represent a summary of the conclusions and recommendations prepared by the district's Assessment, Accountability and Research division regarding the Year One implementation efforts for the six goals stated above. The district's ongoing evaluation of its efforts is designed to accomplish the following: (1) identify the extent to which PCS has developed structures and systems to support educational equity and meet stated BTG goals (2) highlight the successes of the BTG initiative to date (3) identify areas for refinement or improvement and (4) establish a set of evidenced-based recommendations for improving the plan moving forward.

The findings are part of a multi-year evaluation of the BTG Plan that is ongoing in support of the goal managers and annual improvements to the plan. The primary data sources in 2017-18 consisted of a series of interviews with school and district-based leadership (including interviews with each of the BTG Plan's six goal managers), substantive document reviews, surveys with multiple stakeholders, and site visits to 24 schools across the district. The site visits included interviews with the school principal and other school leaders related to their perceptions of the BTG Plan and related successes and challenges at their schools. A survey was also issued to every teacher and staff member at each of the schools. These data sources were intended to provide detailed information about BTG implementation at the school level. The secondary data sources were intended to provide student-level information pertaining to demographics, academic performance, participation in advanced studies, ESE identification, participation in interventions, and discipline.



### **Summary of Achievement Gaps**

The district continues to track data outcomes related to the six achievement gaps addressed in the BTG Plan, with the aspirational goal of eliminating those gaps over 10 years. To this end, the district has set annual benchmarks for each goal area, though it should be noted that the gaps are not likely to decrease equally each year. The district may find that some gaps will decrease quickly while others may remain stable (or widen) until the plan's actions are carried out with fidelity, monitored, refined, and re-deployed.

At the end of 2017-18 school year, the district narrowed the gaps in five of the six goals areas, with graduation rate not yet finalized but internal metrics showing continued improvement (See Table 1).



**Table 1. District Achievement Gaps / Data Trends**

BTG Goal Areas / Achievement Gaps		Race	Baseline Year 2016	2017	2018	GAP Change
1	<b>Graduation Rate</b> % of students graduating / 4 years	Black	65.5	69.3	73.3*	
		Non Black	83.4	85.8	87.2*	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>13.9*</b>	<b>2.6*</b>
2	<b>FSA ELA-READING</b> % of students scoring Level 3+	Black	24.2	25.7	24.6	
		Non Black	56.4	57.7	57.4	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>
	<b>FSA MATH</b> % of students scoring Level 3+	Black	27.9	29.0	29.2	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
3	<b>Advanced Coursework</b> % of students enrolled in gifted	Black	3.8	4.0	5.0	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>
	<b>Advanced Coursework</b> % of students enrolled advanced courses	Black	12.1	11.9	13.7	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>
4	<b>Student Discipline / OSS</b> Risk Ratio / Out-of-School Suspensions	Black	4.33	4.07	3.61	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>0.46</b>
	<b>Student Discipline / Referrals</b> Risk Ratio / Referrals	Black	2.38	2.64	2.43	
<b>GAP</b>		<b>1.38</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>0.21</b>	
5	<b>ESE Identification</b> Risk Ratio / ESE	Black	1.45	1.45	1.46	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>.45</b>	<b>.45</b>	<b>.46</b>	<b>0.01</b>
	<b>ESE Identification</b> Risk Ratio / EBD	Black	4.20	3.94	3.84	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>2.94</b>	<b>2.84</b>	<b>0.10</b>
6	<b>Minority Hiring</b> % of instructional positions	Black	8.3	8.8	9.2	
		<b>GAP</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<p><b>Note:</b> Key definitions and data rules for each goal are outlined in detail in the BTG Plan and are found in the Appendix of this evaluation.                      *Graduation rates for 2017-18 are not final and have not been released by the state. The totals provided here are internal estimates only and are provided for BTG planning purposes. They should be viewed only as close approximations of final totals. Final graduation rates are expected to be released by the state in December 2018.</p>						

- Goal 1: Graduation Rate:** The district had not received its final 2017-18 graduation rate totals from the state as of the publication of this report, though internal metrics show that the graduation rate for black students will increase again this year (estimated at 73.3%\*). The expected increase in the black graduation rate will outpace the non-black rate for the third consecutive year, leading to a narrowing of the gap from 16.5 percentage points in 2016-17 to an estimated 13.9 percentage points in 2017-18. The district continues to see strong increases in its black graduation rate, which improved by 4.7 percentage points over the previous three years and 12.9 percentage points over the past five years (from 56.4% in 2012-13 to 69.3% in 2016-17).
- Goal 2: Academic Achievement:** The district did not see performance improvement for black students in English-Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics on the state’s Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and the gaps remain stable. The gaps in 2017-18 were nearly identical to the prior year, with a 33 percentage point gap remaining among black and non-black students in ELA and math. The scores for black students earning



satisfactory scores (Level 3 or above) on the FSA ELA and Math assessments ranged from 24% to 30% depending on the grade level, which remains below the performance of their non-black peers.

- **Goal 3: Advanced Coursework:** The district saw continued narrowing of enrollment gaps in gifted and in advanced and accelerated courses. Black enrollment in gifted reached 5% of the total student enrollment in that program for the first time, decreasing the gap by a full percentage point in 2017-18. The gaps for Goal 3 are defined as black enrollment in gifted and advanced courses in comparison to the district's black student population of 18%. The district's black enrollment in advanced and accelerated courses in 2017-18 increased to 13.7%, an improvement of nearly two percentage points from the previous year. The courses included in this measure are all advanced and high school courses offered in middle school, and all Honors, Dual Enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP), AICE and IB courses offered in high school.
- **Goal 4: Student Discipline:** The district saw an improvement in 2017-18 in the gap between black and non-black students receiving referrals and out-of-school suspensions. As such, the risk ratio for black students for referrals dropped from 2.64 to 2.43 and the risk ratio for out-of-school suspensions dropped from 4.07 to 3.61. Risk ratio is measured based upon the "ratio" of referrals and suspensions given to black students compared to their non-black peers. The district has seen a 35.8% decrease in the number of black students suspended over the past five years (from 4,089 students in 2013-14 to 2,625 in 2017-18), though the total number of suspensions increased slightly last year. Though the risk ratio for black students declined, the district saw some increases in suspensions across elementary schools and that must be monitored closely moving forward.
- **Goal 5: ESE Identification:** The district saw a decline in the percentage of black students assigned to the ESE designation of Emotional / Behavioral Disability (EBD) in 2017-18, signifying a drop in the risk ratio for the third consecutive year. The risk ratio for the 2017-18 school year for EBD was 3.84 compared to 3.94 the year before. The district tracks this measure based upon a "ratio" of students assigned to ESE and EBD compared to their non-black peers. The overall risk ratio for black students across all ESE designations remained nearly identical for the third consecutive year, totaling 1.46 in 2017-18. The reduction in EBD designations for black students this year is attributed primarily to fewer students with this designation transferring into the district.
- **Goal 6: Minority Hiring:** The district increased its percentage of black teachers to 9.2% in 2017-18, an increase for the third consecutive year and a narrowing of the gap from 2016-17. The gap for Goal 6 is defined as the percentage of black teachers in comparison to the district's black student population of 18%. The district employed 671 black teachers in 2017-18, which increased its percentage of black teachers to more than 9% for the first time.





## BTG Implementation / Year One

The Bridging the Gap Plan for 2017-18 established 116 actions steps with most of the key strategies outlined under four key focus areas. Those were:

- Academic Rigor / Standards-Based Instruction
- Early Warning Systems / Effective Monitoring Systems
- Extended Learning Programs / Interventions
- Family and Community Engagement

The Bridging the Gap initiative is a large-scale effort to improve persistent inequitable educational outcomes for black students in Pinellas County Schools. The plan was formally approved by the School Board in May of 2017 and executed for the first time during the 2017-18 school year. The challenges of addressing differences in educational outcomes for black students have required broad revisions to district practice to impact gap closure. In addition, substantive system changes to measure and monitor the gaps, manage the strategies as written, and communicate BTG efforts to all schools and local communities has been essential.

The district's plan has been recognized nationally and statewide for its ambitious targets, timelines, and public transparency, though much of the work in undertaking systems change across a large school district is just underway. It remains clear from the outset that annual planning alone exclusive of deep, structural strategies centered on alignment, accountability, and sustainability will not be enough to influence the systemic changes necessary to confront equity issues. Theory of change approaches demonstrate that advancing complex systems requires capacity and transformation at all levels. If equity efforts are to become systemic, actions must be incorporated at district, school, and classroom levels that are standard practice in the absence of external pressures.

The district has maintained its commitment to the stated goals and outcomes and continues to report its progress to the community through this annual report and via quarterly data updates published to its website. The



district's Bridging the Gap (BTG) Plan will continue to be revised annually in meeting its stated purpose of employing "bold initiatives to affect substantive changes in the way we engage, enrich and empower our teachers, children and families to meet high expectations for all learners."

The action steps outlined in the BTG Plan promote school leadership and development, require continued examination of data to drive decision-making, support district-wide adoption of evidence-based practices, and identify a need for systemic change in institutional culture. As such, it became evident early in the implementation efforts of 2017-18 that meeting the plan's aggressive goals would require greater alignment among the common initiatives, tighter clarity as to common definitions and outcomes, and districtwide mechanisms to coordinate actions and resources to achieve scalability and sustainability in time.

To ensure alignment and clarity of the goals and desired outcomes, the district spent much of the first year of implementation communicating the plan to stakeholders, developing consistent methods and measures, and fine-tuning action steps. The district also established new systems that show promise in advancing the strategies moving forward. The installation of new systems at the outset of the plan led to some variation of the BTG actions within schools. More consistency will be needed over time in putting into practice the actions as outlined in the plan.

One example of the district's efforts to refine its structures is as follows:

- **Professional development on culturally relevant instruction needed further elaboration to address the dual necessities of training related to bias and mindset as well as the practical application of developing culturally engaging lessons in all classrooms.** This resulted in the establishment of a district Equity Task Force that was charged with identifying and aligning district equity training materials and timelines for training all teachers in the coming years.

As challenges to large-scale implementation of the plan across many schools and classrooms became evident, district leadership convened to discuss barriers and formalize plans supportive of sustained change in making it possible for schools to be more effective in meeting the expectations of the BTG initiative. A great deal of progress was evident during the second semester of 2017-18 as the district's training regime around equity was finalized, new data systems were installed, and meeting schedules were developed for reporting progress on action items.

In seeking greater alignment of actions for stakeholders, the district examined its current systems to determine if they could be refined instead of introducing new ones. For instance, the district already utilizes Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Through collaborative dialogue, district leadership began integrating equity efforts into the existing systems and determining what resources and supports were critical for districtwide adoption.

The successes in implementing the plan during the first year were found in the School Board's consistent support of the plan, the district's orchestrated introduction of the plan, beginning with a common video and





presentation materials that were shared with all teachers when they returned to school, as well as monthly follow-up meetings with principals to keep the plan's actions and outcomes front-and-center. The biggest challenges to date were due to the scale and scope of the plan. Districtwide policy and practice changes required coordination of district leadership and alignment of various goals, which continues to be a significant task.

A key component to systems growth in the past year was the collaboration and communication of different district divisions, as well as an increase in awareness of the achievement gaps and the intent of the plan to reduce such gaps through dedicated actions. The collaborative endeavors in Year One position the district well to undertake further systemic change efforts in Year Two and beyond.



#### BTG Key Actions / Focus Areas

- **Academic Rigor / Standards-Based Instruction**
- **Early Warning Systems / Effective Monitoring Systems**
- **Extended Learning Programs / Interventions**
- **Family and Community Engagement**

#### Academic Rigor / Standards-Based Instruction

The district continues to implement the Marzano framework for standards-based instruction with a focus on increasing rigor across all classrooms and supporting teacher growth and evaluation in a common fashion. Additionally, to meet the professional development demands of the BTG Plan and to provide clarity for teachers and staff, the district



defined three specific and overlapping equity training protocols with the goal of exposing all staff to each of the trainings over time.

- **Equity Champions** / Developing an Equity Mindset / Exploring Biases and Beliefs
- **Culturally Relevant Teaching** / Developing Curriculum, Lessons that Engage Minority Learners
- **Restorative Practices** / Developing a Positive School Culture and Supportive Processes through PBIS-RP

The Equity Champions training was developed by PCS under the direction of a new lead equity trainer with materials aligned to national equity frameworks and to the equity-coaching program from the Laster Center at the University of Florida. For its training on culturally relevant teaching, the district reviewed and selected a curriculum from the AVID organization (Advancement via Individual Determination) titled *Culturally Relevant Teaching, a Schoolwide Approach*. The training is not new to the district, but has never been required of all instructional staff. The AVID training for all staff began in earnest in the summer of 2018.

Currently, the district has four certified AVID trainers and contracted with the organization to provide training throughout the summer and the upcoming school year. The district has a long history with AVID through the efforts of the Office of Advanced Studies and training in AVID's *Culturally Relevant Teaching* has been provided previously to those teaching advanced courses. By adopting the AVID training curriculum districtwide, the district expects to incorporate culturally relevant instruction at a larger scale. Since the adoption of the curriculum in the spring, 441 teachers have been trained and trainings will continue through the 2018-19 school year. A long-range plan to train all teachers is underway.

District leadership considers the Equity Champions and Culturally Relevant Teaching trainings closely aligned because they tackle academic achievement gaps from two sides, confronting long-standing biases that contribute to low expectations and employing instructional strategies to deliver lessons in relatable and relevant ways. The Equity Champions professional development was provided last year via principal and assistant principal meetings, at some school sites, and through optional professional development days for teachers. Approximately 300 PCS staff at all levels of instruction and administration participated in the Equity Champions training in 2017-18. Micro-credentialing was also obtainable, with 180 PCS staff members micro-credentialed to date. Further, the district's initial training on Restorative Practices was rolled out to school leadership teams in 2017-18 and was carried out under Goal 4 of the BTG plan. All district schools have had a team trained in Restorative Practices and at least one certified trainer is assigned to each school.

Though training of all teachers is in the initial stages, the district did begin monitoring culturally relevant practices in its classrooms during school visits using a revised Instructional Support Model (ISM) observation tool. Training was provided to the Teaching and Learning division to guide the alignment of equity components within the observation tool. Nearly 5,000 classrooms were observed with 2% showing culturally relevant instruction occurring,





27% showing evidence of culturally relevant instruction in the developing stages, and an additional 46% of classroom scoring as emergent (ie. positive relationships, etc). This will provide baseline data as training expands districtwide. As such, the district should continue to ensure that both curriculum materials and observation tools are aligned to the district's expectations around culturally relevant instruction and improved student achievement.

### Early Warning Systems / Effective Monitoring Systems

A systematic approach for identifying students at-risk of not meeting academic benchmarks is required as part of the BTG Plan and must be accessible by teachers and school leaders to provide the appropriate support for all learners (and minority learners in particular). The district already provides real-time access to student data across multiple platforms, including data reporting services within the FOCUS student information system. Robust reports have also been developed to provide comprehensive data by racial subgroup via report subscriptions, periodic data snapshots sent to schools, and district dashboards.

As an example, both teachers and administrators have access to Early Warning System data (test scores, grades, attendance) within the district educator platform (Performance Matters). This system updates nightly and provides a mechanism to review assessment data and other student metrics with varying levels of granularity and flag students in need of intervention and supports. A number of schools reported using these data sources to identify school-wide and grade-level trends and track students who were struggling. Though this system was in place prior to 2017-18, additional data points were added last year in response to the BTG Plan.

While relevant data are accessible, the district is still developing more effective monitoring systems to utilize these data systems beyond simple identification of children in need. The purpose of an effective early warning system is twofold, identifying at-risk students via early identification and incorporating response to intervention strategies once students have been identified as struggling. The outcome of an effective early warning system should be the provision of systematic supports for students using a multi-tiered approach (MTSS). While this is certainly the intent of early warning systems in the district, the structures to utilize a systems approach in monitoring student progress in interventions and necessitating some level of fidelity or accountability are still under development for many of the BTG action steps.

To date, monitoring systems are used largely to identify at-risk students and track enrollment. As the actions within the BTG Plan mature, a deeper inspection of student learning deficits and their responses to the interventions provided will be critical to ensure a strong continuum of support. Within the context that data will inform educational decision-making, it is important to have a standard intervention protocol in place and the means to assess students' responses to the interventions. The district can continue to strengthen its systematic approach to identifying at-risk students through an examination of the effectiveness of interventions and by tracking the impact of enrollment trends



closer. Moreover, the early warning systems could be further strengthened by incorporating additional social, behavioral, and engagement indicators in addition to academic factors.

It should be noted that the district employs an exemplar data tracking system in its use of the *Graduation Cohort Report*. This report provides a real-time account of every high school student and his or her “on track” or “off track” status related to state graduation requirements. These reports are individualized for each high school and update nightly as new grades, test scores, and credits are earned. This report definitively identifies at-risk students according to graduation requirements that have not been met. Although other reports and data systems exist in the district, this report is used in the systematic manner that could serve as a model for new initiatives underway via the BTG Plan.

The Graduation reports are shared among school-based leadership teams, reviewed by district leadership, and discussed regularly during site visits offering some measure of accountability. Additionally, a district team reviews the progress of each school and district leadership (including Area Superintendents) attends those meetings. The data are used to identify district interventions (credit recovery programs, for example) that are working or not, prescribe new supports, and rally school and district staff to more ambitious targets each year. This report is now being incorporated into district dashboards, including the new Personalized Learning Platform described within the BTG Plan.

### Extended Learning Programs / Interventions

The BTG Plan outlines the importance of connecting the data on at-risk children to effective before school, after-school, and summer learning programs (Summer Bridge). The district offered extended learning programs (ELP) in every district school in the 2017-18 school year. The district has greatly increased its financial commitment to such programs over the past five years and that amount now exceeds \$8 million. This investment pays for the teachers and materials needed for tutoring, re-teaching, credit recovery, enrichment, and Summer Bridge offerings that go beyond the school day.

The district developed a data system in 2017-18 that allowed schools to track enrollment in these programs by racial subgroup. The district also increased the number of enrichment programs offered, established an online open-access virtual learning program (the Personalized Learning Pathway) for students to access outside of school, and implemented a single sign-on product (Clever) to track how much time students spent utilizing digital resources (i.e., STEMScopes, Think Through Math, Connect for Success, Math Nation, Reading Plus, and Khan Academy). Many of these new systems were not fully operational until the second half of the school year and were a direct result of system demands created by the BTG Plan. As a result, the data related to enrollment in ELP programs and the numbers of students accessing the new online platform represent only the second semester of the school year. The district’s intentional focus on enrolling minority students in extended learning programs and Summer Bridge is leading to higher



enrollments among black students, a key action step in the BTG Plan. See table below and additional data presented under the findings for Goal 2.

**Table 1. Enrollment Among Students in Tested Grades / Extended Learning Programs / Summer Bridge**

Grade	Total # of Students Enrolled in ELP / 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	% Enrollment of Black Students in ELP / 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	Total # of Students Enrolled in Summer Bridge / 2018	% Enrollment of Black Students in Summer Bridge / 2018
ES (3-5)	6,565	17.8% (n=1,169)	4,776	32.3% (n=1,543)
MS (6-8)	5,799	17.5% (n=1,015)	2,113	33.5% (n=708)
HS (9-10)	848	24.9% (n=211)	2,460	28.4% (n=699)

**Note:** This table reflects enrollments among students in the grade levels tested by the state via the FSA ELA and Math tests. As such, students in grades K-2 and 11-12 are not represented in the table.

The BTG action steps specific to ELP and targeted interventions indicate that these resources will improve student performance and close achievement gaps. The focus over the last school year with regard to extended learning programs and interventions has been around identifying at-risk students and tracking enrollment and usage and not as yet on the impact of the interventions on closing gaps. That data analysis will come in time. The district’s initial focus was on installing robust offerings at every school and increasing enrollment, especially among minority students. The district continues to call on the community to support its extended learning and Summer Bridge programs by enrolling students and taking advantage of the supports offered.

While establishing structures to track enrollment and usage is important and consistent with expected Year One implementation steps, a continuous improvement approach must be applied to determine efficacy of the intervention efforts moving forward. The same level of collaboration and discussion that led to a more aligned professional development plan around equity and establishing robust training materials (the district’s new restorative practices toolkit as an example) should occur with regard to maximizing results from extended learning programs. To serve high-need student populations, the district should determine how to best monitor program components to ensure alignment with and reinforcement of core academic standards. The district might improve ELP efforts by strengthening partnerships with community organizations and after-school program providers to align these opportunities with district strategic goals like those outlined in the BTG Plan.



## Family and Community Engagement

The BTG Plan calls on the district to partner with families in communicating student data, offering resources to improve academic achievement, and empowering parents to impact learning through stronger communication with teachers and deeper understanding of school measures, graduation requirements, and college and career opportunities. The district continued its long-standing relationship with Dr. Karen Mapp from Harvard University in light of her expertise in helping schools build more trusting and substantive relationships with families.

The district's Office of Strategic Partnerships & Family and Community Relations partnered with Dr. Mapp to provide professional development in each of the district's identified high-minority schools related to parent engagement strategies for school staff. The district hosted parent workshop events at 15 schools in 2017-18, though only 78 black families attended. The district also offered Parent University sessions once each semester, and also re-shaped the idea of larger-scale events to a shorter series of programs called Parent Academies. A total of 56 black families participated in the Parent University held at Gibbs High School and 8 black families participated in the Countryside High School event. The district also continued its Parent University Saturday workshop events that were designed to link activities to each student's learning goals. A total of 268 families from Transformation Zone schools participated in those events.

In response to the requirements of the BTG Plan to garner additional family input, a short phone survey was administered by the district's Minority Achievement Officer at the end of the 2017-18 school year to a sampling of minority families (5,000 black families across 24 school sites districtwide) regarding school communication and family agency. A total of 967 families responded representing a 23% response rate, which is standard for such surveys. Results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Telephone Survey by the district's Minority Achievement Officer**

Questions / 967 Minority Families Responded	Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Disagree
The teachers at my child's school are effective at communicating with me regarding my child's progress in class via phone calls, emails, in person, or through Parent Portal.	365 (38%)	338 (35%)	262 (27%)
I have a good understanding of my child's academic strengths and weaknesses as a result of feedback I have received from my child's school and teachers.	320 (33%)	356 (37%)	272 (28%)



The district has improved family engagement efforts, though some of the work has centered on traditional engagement methods such as parent workshops at schools and attendance is sometimes low. The district continues to follow a national research-based model in aligning its work to Dr. Mapp and that model shows great promise. In moving that work forward, the district continues to expand parent access to teachers and counselors at different times during the week and through various methods (online, phone, and in-person). The district has also increased family access to online student information and supports, including the creation of a new, online resource platform described above and again under the findings for Goal 2. More schools were also conducting home visits in 2017-18 as a way to engage with families on a more personal level.

The office of Strategic Partnerships & Family and Community Relations continues to explore options to measure parent / family feedback regarding engagement efforts, though a pilot attempt to survey parents in 2017-18 garnered only 11 responses. The district should continue its exploration of parent surveys to measure the efficacy of family engagement efforts, but consider alternative methods to reach more families. The district should also consider the use of community resources to foster school/family partnerships. Community organizations could provide additional resources to increase the number of events offered and expand learning opportunities for parents to better understand academic standards and student strengths and weaknesses.

The district plans should continue to align equity efforts to the research from Harvard University in finding effective ways to empower family/student advocacy and stay attuned to system barriers that may be impacting attendance at workshops and disengagement by some students and families. To this end, a greater focus on measuring the engagement of minority families based upon their perceptions of the school district, their sense of belonging, and their confidence that their children are being heard and valued should be considered.

### Year One Implementation Strengths

- The district has developed a comprehensive strategic plan specific to narrowing achievement gaps in the form of the Bridging the Gap initiative. The plan outlines goals and actions for raising black student achievement and provides annual targets for growth. The plan was adopted after comprehensive, collaborative dialogue among school and community stakeholders.
- The district has finalized and adopted an equity-training continuum and research-based training materials, and has developed a multi-year timeline for training all teachers and staff.
- The district has embraced an ambitious training protocol around Restorative Practices and has successfully reached all school leadership teams at an introductory / awareness level.
- The district has collected, analyzed, and disseminated student data by racial subgroup to drive decision making concerning student performance. Schools have reviewed their gaps and set school improvement goals specific to increasing black performance.
- The district has invested in additional personnel specific to the actions outlined in the BTG Plan, including the hiring of a Minority Achievement Officer, minority hiring specialists, equity trainers, and data managers to develop systems that are more robust.



- The district has established formative, normed assessments to establish benchmarks at the beginning of the school year, target interventions specific to each child, and assess student growth throughout the year.
- The district provided extended and expanded learning opportunities for students who were not on track to meet grade level expectations through its before-school, after-school, and Summer Bridge programs. The district also developed a new, online resource site (the Personalized Learning Pathway) that students can access outside of school that is specific to each child's strengths and weaknesses.
- The district has required each school to have a trained equity team on site to review achievement gap data, plan and follow through on professional development, and promote equitable processes and outcomes.
- The district has provided increased online access for students and families to educational records, increased opportunities for parent training, and added additional programming related to college-career readiness for minority learners.
- The district continues to request feedback on its BTG Plan, has reviewed other national models for reform, and has partnered with leading academic think-tanks related to equity strategies and measures. The plan continues to be revised and improved as a result.

### Year One Implementation Challenges

- The district continues to build the processes, structures, and systems needed for appropriate progress monitoring and accountability mechanisms related to the majority of the BTG action steps. These are essential elements for the district's plan to reach scalability and sustainability.
- The district has trained a small number of teachers across a very large school district in the critical components of equity mindset, culturally relevant teaching, and restorative practices. Academic achievement results are unlikely to increase until instructional practice improves to meet the needs of minority learners.
- The district continues to promote Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports, though neither is yet implemented with full fidelity. The district should be intentional in using new, fidelity instruments and school monitoring visits to make sure all schools are rolling out these actions in a manner that has the greatest impact.
- The district has seen growth among its most challenging schools but must continue to closely monitor these schools to ensure that momentum continues. If not, academic achievement gaps will be difficult to impact.
- The district must review its tiered continuum of support services to address the academic needs of at-risk students. A high-fidelity system of supports is not yet uniformly applied across all schools and, in turn, schools are experimenting with solutions that are sometimes effective and sometimes not.
- The district has invested heavily in teacher retention efforts (incentive pay, retention pay, etc.) but still retains fewer teachers in its most challenging schools. The district must continue to address strategies sufficient to onboard, grow, support, and retain new teachers and minority teachers districtwide.
- The district has not yet accelerated the ability and performance in ELA (reading and writing) of black learners in the elementary grades and that has led to gaps for black students entering middle school, impacting both middle school and high school readiness rates.

### Priority Recommendations

- The district must shift to the next phase of implementation within its BTG Plan, moving from developing and installing new initiatives to methods that ensure those actions are carried out uniformly and effectively across all schools. This will require the district to track data and actions more rigidly at the school level so it can act with great urgency if actions are not being successful or are not being carried out as designed.





- The district must closely monitor shifts in teaching practice around culturally relevant teaching and restorative practices to ensure that district training is making an impact on the engagement and academic outcomes of minority learners.
- The district must align more closely its Extended Learning Program offerings to the core curriculum offered during the school day and to the unique academic deficiencies of each child. This must include a review of Extended Learning Programs to ensure they are making an impact on academic outcomes and strong consideration by the district as to what academic treatment is best recommended.
- The district should enhance its monitoring and training (or re-training) of Positive Behavioral Support and Intervention (PBIS) and install fidelity measures that go beyond self-reporting.
- The district should review its curriculum, training, and instructional practices in English-Language Arts and Reading, especially across grades K-3, to ensure that more students are exiting elementary school at or near grade level.
- The district must effectively communicate with and garner feedback from both new and veteran minority teachers to ensure they are properly onboarded, trained, and supported in improving the district's retention rates.
- The district should continue to deepen its community ties and partnerships in building stronger year-round learning programs (Summer Bridge, ELP) and other strategic means to increase FSA proficiency.



## Summary Findings by BTG Goal Area

**Goal 1** Eliminate the gap between graduation rates for black and non-black students.

Goal 1: Annual Outcome Measures		Baseline 2015-16	2016-17		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target
Graduation Rate: # and % of black students who graduated on time with a standard, high school diploma / 4-year senior cohort.	Black	(932) <b>65.5%</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>69.3%</b>	<b>73.3*</b>			<b>75.0</b>
			<b>Target</b>	67.3%	69.1%	70.9%	72.7%	
	Non-Black	85.8%	<b>Actual</b>	<b>85.8%</b>	<b>TBD</b>			<b>10.7</b>
	<b>GAP</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>TBD</b>			

\*Graduation rates for 2017-18 are not final and have not been released by the state. The totals provided here are internal estimates only and are provided for BTG planning purposes. They should be viewed only as close approximations of final totals. Final graduation rates are expected to be released by the state in December 2018.

The graduation rate for the 2017-18 school year was not yet available as of the time of this report, but the district's internal estimates show the graduation rate for black students will increase again this year (estimated at 73.3%\*) and the gap continuing to close. If those totals are confirmed, the district is on pace to have its highest black graduation rate in its history. This is consistent with the previous five-year trend data (2013-2017) that show a 12.9 percentage point increase in black student graduation rate. Graduation rates have improved for all student subgroups across the district, though racial gaps remain and black students graduate at a lesser rate than their non-black peers at both the district and state levels. The Pinellas County Schools graduation rate in 2016-17 for black students was 69.3% compared to an 85.8% rate for non-black students, representing a 16.5 percentage point difference in graduation rates for black students and their non-black peers. That gap is expected to close again in 2017-18 to an estimated 13.9 percentage points. The PCS black student graduation rate continues to fall below the state black student graduation rate (74.8%), though the state's rate for 2017-18 is not yet available. Across five years, the pace of change for black student graduation rates has steadily increased at a higher rate than the district's overall rates and for the non-black rates.

### Goal 1 / Some Key Findings

- The district does track graduation metrics closely (student-by-student) through the use of its *Graduation Cohort Report* and monitors student progress through its subsequent follow-up systems. Student growth in meeting academic standards is also monitored through the district's use of quarterly cycle assessments. Performance on



district cycle assessments serves as part of the district's early warning system to identify at-risk students and should determine the level of support necessary to assist students in meeting academic benchmarks.

- Three and five-year data trends across the majority of the district's traditional high schools reveal consistently high black student graduation rates. Fifteen schools or 94% of the traditional high schools show graduation rates higher than the state for black students. This means much of the district's growth in graduation rates moving forward will demand closer attention to interventions within the district's dropout prevention and alternative school sites.
- Stakeholder feedback regarding increased graduation rates points to three factors influencing the improvement of high school graduation rates: The use of early warning data reports to identify students not on-track to graduate, the availability of credit recovery programs for students to recover failed core courses, and the use of alternative assessments to measure proficiency. District leadership has developed a standardized accountability measure to track students not on track to graduate according to several metrics and has been recognized in the state for its effective, close-monitoring systems.

#### Goal 1 / Priority Recommendations

- ❖ Install a formal structure that provides standardized documentation of the implementation of interventions for at-risk students not on track to graduate. Ensure that a mechanism is in place to monitor if action steps are executed. The district should develop a reporting system that includes intervention plans, goals, timelines, and progress monitoring of action steps aligned to individual student needs as a means to determine efficacy and fidelity and to hold school leadership and instructional staff accountable. A detailed progress-monitoring tool within the current educator platform has been piloted and could account for both outcomes and engagement efforts.
- ❖ Institute a greater degree of shared responsibilities for Goal 1 between the Offices of High School Education and dropout prevention (titled Educational Alternative Services in PCS) to serve the students not in our traditional high schools and to refocus prevention efforts at all schools to be more equity focused. Data driven prevention and intervention supports should be prioritized at key transition points. The district may need to expand partnerships with community agencies to provide the necessary resources to address all students' levels of need.
- ❖ Develop some action steps for increasing graduation rates that are engagement-based in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades instead of solely focusing on remediation/recovery components. Differentiated interventions are important and shouldn't be exclusively based on academics.





**Goal 2** Eliminate the gap between the proficiency rates in reading (ELA) and math on state and national assessments for black and non-black students.

Goal 2: Annual Outcome Measures		Baseline 2015/16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target
# and % of black students districtwide scoring Level 3 or above on state FSA ELA-Reading.	Black	(2,494) <b>24.2%</b>	(2,654) <b>25.7%</b>	(2,533) <b>24.6%</b>			<b>40</b>
		Target	27.4	30.6%	33.8%	37.0%	
	Non-Black	<b>56.4%</b>	Actual <b>57.7%</b>	<b>57.4%</b>			
	<b>GAP</b>	<b>32.2</b>	Actual <b>32.0</b>	<b>32.8</b>			<b>19.2</b>
# and % of black students districtwide scoring Level 3 or above on FSA Math.	Black	(2,143) <b>27.9%</b>	(2,305) <b>29.0%</b>	(2,319) <b>29.2%</b>			<b>45</b>
		Target	31.1%	34.3%	37.5%	40.7%	
	Non-Black	<b>60.9%</b>	Actual <b>62.0%</b>	<b>62.2%</b>			
	<b>GAP</b>	<b>33.0</b>	Actual <b>33.0</b>	<b>33.0</b>			<b>20.2</b>

The 2017-18 proficiency rates on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) for students across the state were 54.3% for ELA and 56.7% for math, while the rates for students in Pinellas County Schools were 51.5% in ELA and 55.6% in math, trending just below the state. When the data are disaggregated by level (elementary, middle, high), the district elementary school students exceeded state levels of proficiency in ELA and Math, middle school students scored behind the state, and high school students slightly exceeded state proficiencies. In contrast, black student achievement in the district did not meet or exceed state level proficiency at any grade level and in some cases was significantly lagging.

When FSA data are disaggregated by race, a consistent achievement gap between black and non-black students remains. The 2017-18 overall ELA proficiency rate for black students in the district was 24.6% compared to 57.4% for non-black students, a gap of more than 30 percentage points. Overall proficiency rates in math demonstrate a similar achievement gap with 29.2% of black students achieving a Level 3 and above compared to 62.2% of non-black students. Three-year trend data reveal negligible changes in proficiency rates across all student groups, with the gaps remaining unchanged.

**Goal 2 / Some Key Findings**



- Some telling conclusions are found when results are analyzed by school. When considering schools with at least 30 black students completing FSA assessments (84 district schools in total), some elementary schools saw impressive increases in proficiency levels and 27 schools decreased the achievement gap. There were similar trends in Math.
- These data also support the priority recommendation provided previously that school-by-school level monitoring and accountability measures around BTG actions and outcomes must be folded into the district's plans. One key conclusion is that the schools that have narrowed achievement gaps have not yet influenced the district's overall gap reduction. Principals of all schools who saw increases in black proficiency of 5% or more were contacted to provide some substantiation of the BTG actions as their basis for improvement and to inform changes to the plan.
- While some schools made improvements in student performance, the BTG Plan seeks to reduce the achievement gap by focusing on systems level change to support data-driven instruction, provide school leadership and instructional staff with real-time data to monitor student progress, and to provide resources aimed at improving teacher and student success. The district does provide access to and training for the collection and review of disaggregated data by student subgroups for meaningful analysis of academic participation and achievement.
- School sites monitor real-time data by the use of the district's educator platform early warning feature that identifies at-risk students on a number of mostly academic factors, formative district assessments, and teacher recommendations. At-risk students are then monitored and supported with targeted interventions. The district has provided a revised effective intervention strategies menu and designed a more streamlined method to maintain student data to track participation in extended learning programs (ELP).
- Though not implemented until the second semester, the district began to monitor students via enrollment in ELP and those data will be critical moving forward. The district should focus future efforts on monitoring the efficacy of its core instruction, as well as extended learning interventions in improving student outcomes. Black student enrollment in ELP as accounted for in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester represented 18.9% of total students enrolled, mirroring the district black student population, but falling short on serving a substantial number of at-risk students who did not participate. The district should continue its call for the community to take advantage of the supports provided.
- To broaden the reach of resources beyond the school campus, the district created an online, open-access extended learning program as outlined in the BTG Plan. The online resource site (called the Personalized Learning Pathway) was operational in the second semester of the school year and piloted among high school students. The system was accessed by 565 black students (14% of all student users).



- Another mechanism developed by the district to monitor and support at-risk black students was the adoption of personalized learning tools to monitor student interventions and share those among teachers. The district has expanded or developed individualized progress monitoring plans (PMP) across all levels with monitoring utilization within the district’s educator platform. In previous years, this option was only available at the elementary school level. All middle school and high school principals and assistant principals were trained in 2017-18 on the new tool, which will be employed in 2018-19 as a tighter monitoring system. Black students identified via early warning indicators will require establishment of a PMP and have access to a number of interventions including: mentorship, tutoring, data chats after assessments, and peer mentors in the classroom.
- While the ultimate goal of the BTG initiative is improved student performance, the absence of the appropriate structures and systems to support these efforts will undermine academic outcomes. Furthermore, systemic change will require deep, instructional shifts that rely on buy-in from school staff, which also takes time. The district must ensure that it has a strong foundation to build capacity, monitor fidelity, and foster continuous improvement. While expediency is crucial for students in need, existing research shows that makeshift or temporary solutions will not result in permanent change.

## Goal 2 Priority Recommendations

### District

- ❖ Establish differentiated support structures to ensure that all schools can meet the demands of the BTG Plan. This includes more effectively monitoring the progress of the solutions for improving academic achievement for black students. This action item should address scalability barriers for high minority schools and chronically low-performing schools. This task may seem daunting, but should not be considered as an additional action item; rather how the actions described in the existing plan can be modified to provide the right supports at the instructional/school level regardless of population size. Practice alignment among district divisions, appropriate resource allocation, and an aggressive commitment to school turnaround can serve to accomplish this.
- ❖ Develop a monitoring and accountability system for intervention/ELP strategies beyond just enrollment / participation. Students who have not achieved academic standards must have their academic progress accelerated to close the achievement gap, as enrollment in intervention programming or ELP that is not monitored for effectiveness may lead to increases in enrollment but little improvement in learning.
- ❖ Develop a system to not only document staff participation in professional development opportunities, but also as a means to track utilization of equity strategies including self-report and observation data. Ensure full calibration of classroom observers as to what instructional changes are needed to support minority learners. Developing appropriate monitoring tools for teacher utilization provides the district with the means to leverage professional development with capacity building. Utilization rates will serve as an indicator of both effective professional development and how that training affects student achievement at scale.







**Goal 3** Eliminate the gap in advanced and accelerated participation and performance rates for black and non-black students.

Goal 3: Annual Outcome Measure		Baseline 2015/16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target
Grades 6-12 / # and % of total black students in grades 6-12 enrolled in any middle or high school advanced or accelerated course.	Black	(3,792) 12.1%	Actual	(3,775) 11.9%	(4,691) 13.7%		17.0
			Target	13%	14%	15%	
	GAP	5.9	Actual	6.1	4.3		1.0
	<i>Gap is compared to black student enrollment of 18%.</i>						

Pinellas County Schools had an 18.8% black student enrollment in 2017-18, while representing 5% of gifted students K-8, 13.3% of middle school students enrolled in advanced coursework, and 8.3% of middle school students enrolled in accelerated coursework (defined as high school courses offered in middle school). Among high school courses, black students comprised 14.9% of students enrolled in honors courses, while 9.6% of those students enrolled in accelerated coursework (defined as Dual Enrollment, Advanced Placement, IB or AICE courses). These numbers represent a steady increase across the past three school years in enrollment and a decrease in the gaps between black and non-black students. The percent change for black student enrollment in gifted and advanced/accelerated coursework from 2016-17 to 2017-18 signified a greater increase than the previous year indicating that action steps within the BTG Plan may be having some positive influence.

Looking across all district schools, black student enrollment in advanced coursework more closely represents black student enrollment at each respective school site with 37.5% of high schools (n=6) representative of their black student population (within one percentage point); 56.3% of high schools (n=9) within five percentage points; and only one high school (6.25%) demonstrating significant disproportionality. Middle school representation in advance and accelerated coursework mirrors high school representation. Universal screening for gifted education for all students by the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade was implemented districtwide as described in the BTG Plan. A total of 1,718 black students were screened, representing 100% of black students in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Sixty-nine black students scored above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on the screening and were referred for further evaluation, representing 8% of all students referred for further evaluation because of universal screening. A total of 390 black students in grades K-8 received gifted services in the 2017-18 school year bringing the total black student population receiving gifted services to 5% (a 39% increase in the number of black students receiving gifted services from the previous school year).



The district also adopted a “Plan B” method of identification that considers gifted and talented potential via alternative identification methods utilizing a matrix that includes multiple criteria. This method identified 536 students for gifted eligibility, 79 of whom were black learners. “Plan B” identification was not originally identified as an action step in the BTG Plan because it is not designed specifically for black learners. However, the number of black students identified via this alternative (14.7% of Plan B eligibilities) illustrates the value of alternative methods to identify additional learners for advanced studies and the need to investigate additional alternate means to address underrepresentation and maximize student potential.

### Goal 3 / Some Key Findings

- Feedback from stakeholders references great strides in developing progress monitoring tools and tracking mechanisms to chart efforts to increase enrollment in advanced studies, but also speak to challenges among school-based staff in adopting and following processes aimed at increasing advanced studies enrollment for black students. In short, enrollment expectations put forth by the district are not always followed as many hands are involved. Respondents mentioned capacity issues and staff turnover as obstacles. In the district effort’s to create improved systems, a project charter was developed and launched in the 2017-18 school year directed specifically at creating stronger transitions between grade levels. Stakeholders believe that the level of accountability provided by the district’s Strategic Project Oversight Committee in conjunction with the comprehensive deliverables will drive school-based buy-in in time.
- Any scheduling discrepancies regarding black learners in advanced courses might be attributed to mindset issues and beliefs around readiness skills for all children. This contributes to an opportunity gap in the district. To combat the biases influencing access opportunities, alignment of professional development equity efforts with systems facilitation to maximize student enrollment and success is crucial. The BTG Plan originally outlined a PD plan for teachers of advanced courses to take part in *AVID’s Culturally Relevant Teaching* offerings. This training was provided to 172 teachers of accelerated coursework during summer 2017. Specific to improvement actions for Goal 3, training was provided for all school counselor teams in the use of data from the SAT Suite of Assessments to support student selection of accelerated course options.
- The district’s dedicated investment in on-campus, open-access testing for all students in taking the PSAT, SAT, and ACT is commendable. The PSAT results in high school are key metrics in identifying students who show potential for success in accelerated courses. Still, each school must follow the processes as outlined in meeting the goals of the BTG Plan. Though a district process for course registration/scheduling exists, the close monitoring of actions at the school level is required to



overcome disparate outcomes. Additionally, parents must take advantage of this fully-funded opportunities in schools

### Goal 3 Priority Recommendations

- ❖ Ensure that a uniform, open-access scheduling system is followed districtwide that requires enrollment of eligible black students into advanced courses. This model could address stakeholder concerns regarding disparate systems of identification and placement at different school sites and should eliminate tracking and gatekeeper barriers to participation opportunities. Recruitment practices, reliance on test scores, teacher referral, and guidance counselor placements (or lack thereof) still contribute somewhat to the underrepresentation of black students in advanced studies. Additionally, the district would be wise to track AVID enrollment more tightly to ensure that students of color who would benefit from this course are enrolled accordingly.
- ❖ Provide continued, targeted professional development specifically for guidance counselors and APCs to foster buy-in for equity initiatives. Trainings should be aimed at examining beliefs about student expectations and aligning counseling practices with district strategic goals, as well as to build capacity for school-level leadership to promote consistent, intentional, and equitable practices.



**Goal 4** Reduce the total number of disciplinary infractions (referrals) and suspensions for black students and decrease the disparity in referrals and suspensions for black students to reach a level that is representative of the black student population.

Goal 4: Annual Outcome Measures	Baseline 2015/16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target	
Discipline Disparity Rate / Risk Ratio (referrals) / black students	<b>2.38</b>	Actual	<b>2.64</b>	<b>2.43</b>			<b>1.90</b>
		Target	2.30	2.20	2.10	2.00	
Discipline Disparity Rate / Risk Ratio (OSS) / black students	<b>4.33</b>	Actual	<b>4.07</b>	<b>3.61</b>			<b>2.70</b>
		Target	4.00	3.70	3.40	3.00	



Related Outcomes Measures	Baseline 2015/16		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target
# and % of black students with an office disciplinary referral	(7,009) 46.1% of all referrals	Actual	(6,919) 47.6%	(6,867) 45.7%			
# and % of black students with an out-of-school suspension (OSS)	(2,918) 52.9% of all OSS	Actual	(2,374) 51.7	(2,625) 51.3%			

As part of the Bridging the Gap efforts, the district has emphasized that out-of-school suspensions should be used only as a last resort and should be applied equitably across student populations. Additionally, professional development opportunities provided by the district have focused on culturally responsive mindsets, culturally relevant instruction, and restorative practices as means of building capacity for equity within the existing PBIS system and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support framework. As part of the district strategic plan direction of Equity and Excellence for All, schools have been asked to review their PBIS plans, analyze discipline at the school level, and transform their discipline approach to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, disproportionality. The work of communicating these expectations, review such plans, and training school leaders has been led by the district’s Area Superintendents and MTSS Specialists for each area. In the 2017-18 school year, the district began the pre-implementation phase for Restorative Practices. The district has shown a clear commitment to integrating restorative practices into the existing Positive Behavior Intervention Supports framework advocated by the district to promote and strengthen positive school culture, build community, enhance pro-social relationships within schools, and repair relationships when harm has occurred.

In the 2017-18 school year, the number of disciplinary referrals decreased for all students and black students while the number of out-of-school suspensions increased slightly for both. All data points were still lower than were found during the BTG’s baseline year of 2015-16 and the district had another drop in its risk ratio for black students, which is quite promising. The risk ratio for black students for referrals dropped from 2.64 in 2016-17 to 2.43 in 2017-18 and the risk ratio for out-of-school suspensions dropped from 4.07 to 3.61. The district tracks referrals and suspensions based upon a “ratio” of referrals and suspensions given to black students compared to their non-black peers. The district has seen a 35.8% decrease in the number of black students suspended over the past five years (from 4,089 students in 2013-14 to 2,625 in 2017-18), though the past three years have seen a leveling of this trend. The increases this year were concerning in elementary schools and must be monitored closely moving forward.

#### Goal 4 / Some Key Findings

- Of the black students enrolled at PCS during the 2017-18 school year (rolling enrollment, not a survey count) (approx. 19% of the student body), 35.2% had at least one referral and 13.5% had at least one



out-of-school suspension. As such, black students were 2.43 times more likely to have at least one referral than all other students, and were 3.61 times more likely to have an OSS. Of students with at least one referral, 37.6% of them were black while 47.2% of students with at least one OSS were black.

- As an example of the importance of tracking the BTG outcomes by each school, just one elementary school accounted for 15% of the total elementary school referrals in 2017-18 and 10% of black elementary school students in the district. Eight elementary schools represented 54% of black student referrals and 30% of overall referrals for elementary students. Five of the eight schools are high minority schools and include four of the schools in the Transformation Zone; two of the eight schools had black student populations of less than 17% yet account for 79% and 39% of student referrals respectively.
- Stakeholder feedback from a number of schools with higher disciplinary actions communicate the need for school-wide training to not only build capacity for staff to better meet the unique needs of students experiencing poverty and trauma, but also to build the social capital of families to better navigate the school system and collaborate with staff. Stakeholder feedback from the Bridging the Gap Survey indicate that the use of school-wide data to drive decision-making around discipline is not a regular practice (45% of respondents indicated disagreement or unfamiliarity with this). Responses to prompts asking for examples of culturally relevant and restorative practices to build community in classrooms and applications of restorative practices for challenging behavior revealed an overall awareness of these equity practices, but a lack of consistent application. As 2017-18 was a pre-implementation year around restorative practices, some of these findings were not surprising.
- Results of the BTG staff and school leadership survey, the equity audit interviews with school-based leadership, and interviews with district leadership indicate that the practice and acceptance of culturally relevant and restorative approaches to community building, positive behavior intervention supports, and disciplinary action is not consistent among teachers or across schools. Instructional staff who report the utilization of restorative approaches exercised it primarily for behavior issues and less so as a proactive tool to build relationships and cultivate community classrooms.
- Several district schools recorded decreased disciplinary referrals and out-of-school suspensions for the 2017-18 school year, including reductions in discipline categories with recognized disproportionate application (class/campus disruption, defiance/insubordination). Additionally, some Transformation Zone schools saw decreases as well. Further exploration with schools logging fewer referrals would be beneficial to provide insight as to successful implementation of disciplinary interventions, which could be brought to scale across the district as best practices.

#### Goal 4 Priority Recommendations



- ❖ Build sufficient district capacity to implement discipline reform that is paramount in reaching Bridging the Gap goals. The district’s plan to scale up professional development for Restorative Practices in the 2018-19 school year, including requiring an International Institute for Restorative Practices licensed trainer at each school, is promising. To assist with these efforts the district should institute *data-informed* plans by prioritizing supports at schools with the most serious discipline problems while moving all schools toward equitable discipline practices.
- ❖ Expand the district’s partnership with the University of South Florida and the Florida PBIS project to support continuous improvement. Employ the assistance of an external partner with managing data collection and progress monitoring of PBIS fidelity could better determine disproportionate impacts and facilitate the elaboration of strategic plans beyond Tier 1 supports.
- ❖ Involve the district MTSS specialists and school-based PBIS contact in the district’s ISM walkthrough processes when possible. Agree on an appropriate observation tool that can be completed and discussed during the school visitation debrief. Both the PBIS walkthrough tool and TFI walkthrough tool should be considered.
- ❖ Incorporate the language and actions of PBIS and Restorative Practices into the district’s Code of Student Conduct.
- ❖ Consider a change in practice that might involve utilizing SEL-based extended learning programs for K-3 students with chronic behavior issues, possibly in lieu of out-of-school suspensions when appropriate.



**Goal 5** Reduce the disparity of black students being found eligible for Exceptional Student Education (ESE).

Goal 5: Annual Outcome Measures	Baseline (2015/16)		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target
Risk Ratio (ESE overall) / black	1.45	Actual	1.45	1.46			1.25
		Target	1.45	1.40	1.35	1.30	
Risk Ratio (EBD) / black	4.20	Actual	3.94	3.84			2.95
		Target	3.95	3.70	3.45	3.20	
<b>Related Outcomes Measures</b>							
# and % of black students identified for ESE services	(3,618) 25%	Actual	(3,371) 25%	(3,947) 23%			
# and % of black students identified for Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) identification / Total	(427) 49%	Actual	(335) 49%	(363) 48%			





The district's department of Exceptional Student Education expanded the scope of its in planning for systemic improvement in reducing disproportionate representation of black students enrolled in ESE services. The department focused on two areas; the first was the development of specific guidelines aimed at reducing disparate identification of black students found eligible for an emotional/behavioral disability (EBD) with specific courses of action for reevaluation processes and considerations for of EBD. Additionally, the department has developed a plan to conduct extensive record reviews of students with current primary EBD or EBD plus other exceptionality designations to determine if reevaluation was warranted.

Data analysis revealed a large number of transfer students entering the district and receiving reciprocity for EBD services in the district. Given that overrepresentation or inappropriate identification is not an issue unique to Pinellas County Schools, the department sought to ensure that transfer students' eligibility placement was accurate and reciprocity of services was appropriate. Another focus area was expanding Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) to provide appropriate interventions prior to EBD referral. The district assigned an additional behavior specialist to provide early intervening services specifically at high minority schools for students not currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral supports to succeed in a general education environment. The ESE department also dedicated professional development sessions for school-based staff to understand the newly developed guidelines and procedures for EBD, to introduce expansion of effective response-to-intervention (RtI) strategies, and to discuss cultural components to be considered with positive behavior intervention plans and functional behavior assessments.

#### Goal 5 / Some Key Findings

- The risk ratio for ESE overall remained stable, though the ratio for EBD specifically decreased in the 2017-18 school year to 3.84 (see table above). Even with this reduction, the designation remains disproportionate from identifications for non-black students and remains above a 3.5 likelihood for identification. There were (27) new EBD eligibilities for black students in the 2017-18 school year, (13) were via transfer from another district; (14) were identified by the district. The drop in EBD eligibilities in 2017-18 was largely due to a smaller number of students with EBD transferring to the district (40% fewer transfer students than last year), and less-so by a reduction in EBD eligibilities identified by PCS (-6%).
- Starting in 2016-17 and continuing into 2017-18 the ESE department developed and implemented pre-referral, evaluation, and re-evaluation considerations for students identified as either at-risk or as EBD/OHI (behavior related). These action steps, while part of the BTG goal to reduce the disparity in EBD identification for black students, had the larger aim of creating a systemic model to support



prevention and early intervention through the MTSS framework. The district CEIS specialist provided supports for 35 students at 17 mainly high minority schools. Of the 35 students identified for pre-referral services, 7 students (20%) were found eligible for EBD. Coordinated Early Intervening Services were successful in providing comprehensive interventions that met the needs in a general education setting of 80% of participating students. In addition to the CEIS specialist, area district behavior specialists responded to school support requests for early intervening services for black students throughout the district.

## Goal 5 Priority Recommendations

- ❖ Establish targeted professional development to school-based leadership teams, student services teams, ESE staff, paraprofessionals, and other support staff to provide guidance for considering referrals for evaluations for EBD/OHI, RtI for students with academic and behavior needs, completing re-evaluations for EBD, and completing evaluations for students referred as EBD. Possible revision to guidance documents to identify any possible non-compliance.
- ❖ Revise database tracking and progress monitoring procedures to effectively collect and maintain data on equity efforts aimed at reducing disproportionality in exceptional student education.
- ❖ Establish pre-referral intervention teams at high minority schools and schools with multiple referrals in 2017-18 to improve the functionality of early intervention.
- ❖ To address disproportionality in EBD designations, the ESE department should create improved systems to identify patterns of noncompliance with FBA, PBIP, and IEP requirements in terms of whether the determinant factor for a continued EBD designation is behavior. This is in addition to creating practices, procedures, and policy around identification. This consideration should be taken into account when planning record reviews for existing primary EBD placements.





**Goal 6** Increase the number of black teachers and administrators to closely mirror the student enrollment by ethnicity

Goal 6: Annual Outcome Measures		Baseline 2015/16	2016- 17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020 Target
# and % of total instructional positions / black	Black	(622) <b>8.3%</b>	Actual (647) <b>8.8%</b>	(671) <b>9.2%</b>			<b>13.0</b>
			Target 9%	10%	11%	12%	
	<b>GAP</b>	<b>9.7</b>	Actual <b>9.2</b>	<b>8.8</b>			
		<i>Gap is compared to black student enrollment of 18%.</i>					

The district continues to gradually increase its hiring of black teachers and decrease the gap between black and non-black instructional staff. The district increased its percentage of instructional staff to 9.2% in the 2017-18 school year after many years at or around 8%. The gap is measured against the total enrollment of black students (18%) and was 8.8 percentage points below that number in 2017-18, a slight improvement over the previous year. The number of black teachers employed at the end of the school year was 671, an increase of 24 black teachers from the same time last year and 49 from two years ago. However, employment trend data reveal that the number of black teachers exiting the system from 2016-17 is almost equivalent to the number of teachers hired in 2017-18 signifying a possible retention concern.

As part of the BTG Plan, the district hired three additional staff members in the Human Resources Department to focus more attention on recruiting minority candidates. There is some evidence that the Talent Acquisition Team’s efforts contributed to increased personalized attention to minority candidates, including personal phone calls, check-ins, and practice interviews at the district office. Nonetheless, feedback from stakeholders communicate that some prospective candidates may have accepted positions in other districts while awaiting PCS processing to finalize. Moreover, district staff conducted a review of district processes and found growth areas within the department that included a lack of standardization of processes among staff. This internal review should help with processing moving forward. In response, the Human Resources department streamlined the processes for certification verification and fingerprinting scheduling in an effort to expedite hiring timelines after instituting a semiannual review of hiring procedures. The district also partnered with an outside agency, the Urban Schools Human Capital Academy, to collaborate on objectives related to improved systems.

**Goal 6 / Some Key Findings**

- The department developed more targeted recruitment materials as outlined in the BTG Plan, increased its marketing through social media and other digital platforms, and conducted focus groups with new teachers in attending to improved recruitment and retention practices. Additional efforts centered on



state recruitment events resulted in varying levels of success. Stakeholder feedback illustrated success at the Great Florida Teach-In and the Florida Fund for Minority Teachers with 29 advance binding agreements being offered. Conversely, recruitment efforts at historically black colleges and universities yielded insufficient returns, with district leadership identifying local internship programs and competitive recruitment agencies as cause.

- District leadership will need to continue efforts to implement and expand action steps designed to improve recruitment and retention of diverse hires. A missing link within the plan's action for Goal 6 is a lack of ongoing collaboration between district and school-based staff with regard to recruitment efforts in particular. While messaging around the Bridging the Gap plan has been disseminated widely among school-based leadership with reference to academic and discipline related goals, stakeholder feedback illustrates less of a push concerning efforts at diversifying the instructional staff with so many other initiatives in play.
- An analysis of the 86 black teachers exiting the district from the 2016-17 school year designates three majority reasons for teachers leaving the district: *loss of or improper certification* (17%), *moving from county or job area* (15%), and *personal or other* (14%). Retirees accounted for 13% of those terminations. Two additional indicators equally representing 9% of the exiting population were *quit, no notice* and *transfer within the district*. The district hired 109 black teachers in 2017-18 and twenty-two exited PCS employment over the course of the year, indicative of a 78% retention rate. Termination descriptors for the 2017-18 black teachers exiting PCS present two majority reasons: *Probationary dismissal* (31.8%) and *quit, no notice* (22.7%).
- As stated, the district's Human Resources Department did complete a semi-annual review of its processes as required by the BTG Plan. The following recommendations were made:
  - *Revise / streamline the hiring process to decrease the length of time it takes for a candidate to move from being recommended to determining a start date.*
  - *Ensure that hiring managers, or designee, utilize all available tools (i.e. Search Soft) to provide candidate feedback from Human Resources in order to assist in building a quality pool of candidates.*
  - *Communicate with candidates in a timely manner to improve their chances of securing an interview (ie. reminding them of what they are missing in their applications).*



## Goal 6 Priority Recommendations

- ❖ Assessments of progress toward diversifying the PCS workforce should include collecting perception data from staff, possibly through additional focus groups. Analysis and strategic use of feedback from veteran, new, and exiting teachers is important for identifying meaningful patterns regarding recruitment and retention and should influence responsive recruitment strategies and retention practices.
- ❖ Focus efforts on improving onboarding and mentoring programs to increase retention rates.
- ❖ Diversify recruitment efforts and networking
  - Consider partnering with the county or other large-scale county employers to create a recruiting network aimed at sharing resources to introduce prospective candidates to the county, to attract prospective candidates outside of Pinellas County, and as a means to offer spousal hires (similar to best practices in academia) within other employment areas.
  - Create partner networks with regional minority groups (Pinellas County Urban League, UNITE – An African-American Business and Social Exchange, African American Chamber of Commerce – Central Florida, etc.) to enhance the minority teacher pipeline and recruit prospective candidates within their member districts and at member events.

