Your Community, *Your* Schools:

A CALL FOR PARTNERSHIP IN AURORA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The African Leadership Group

(720)-466-5335

info@USALG.org

10700 E. Evans Ave.
Aurora, CO 80014

twitter: @OfficialUSALG

facebook: @officialusalg

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Introduction

Our students spend over 1,000 hours every year in school. It is the place that is responsible for their learning, where students discover and delve into ways to understand their world and experience, where they make friends and find mentors. How schools are supporting our students is important to making sure they are prepared for success after they graduate. Too often what happens in our schools, and how schools are serving all students in the building, remains a mystery to families. This is particularly problematic in a district where, as this report explores, outcomes for students have lagged behind.

Our students deserve an excellent education. When families and communities are brought into their children's education as true partners and advocates, it can be transformational. But we can only be true partners when we have full information about how our students are doing. As a group that works with families in Aurora Public Schools (APS), the African Leadership Group demands that APS be more open with families and that every school hosts a meeting so that we can understand how our students are doing.

Why this matters:

This report helps provide some foundational information about the students in Aurora Public Schools (APS), and how APS schools compare to other nearby school districts in Colorado. The information provided here is just the first step to help families understand their school district better.

As you read this report constantly ask yourself:
Do I see my student(s) in this report? If you do, we hope you have gained valuable information about how your district is serving students like yours. If not, we hope that you can go to your school or district and demand for information on students like yours.

> "I think the district needs to have more programs and support for immigrant students and their families; because most of these families struggle with balancing multiple jobs and that's a big problem."
> - Selamawit Shiferaw, Mother of 7th and 9th graders in APS

For every question we can answer, there are many questions that remain about how our schools are serving our students. We will present what we know, but encourage you to go to your schools to ask for answers to the questions that we can't yet answer!

The African Leadership Group is a non-profit organization established in 2006, with the mission to help the African diaspora integrate and prosper by connecting cultures. The African Leadership Group advocates for the entire African immigrant community-across national origin, tribes, and language-to ensure continuous improvement to immigrants' quality of life through Social Impact, Educational Impact and Economic Impact.

As an organization, our goal in regards to education is to advocate for improved school systems & high-quality options, accountability, data transparency, student achievement and greater pathways to higher education.

Who is in our schools?

This section looks at student populations by race and ethnicity; how many students are qualifying for free or reduced price lunch to get a sense of family resources and additional needs students may have if they're living in poverty; students receiving special education services and emerging multilingual students (which looks at students who are not native english speakers). We examine how these student populations have changed over time and in different parts of the city.

Why this matters:

These different "indicators," or characteristics by which we break down the student population, are important because they can shed light on the experience of students. Every school community is unique, bringing different experiences, cultures, assets, and need. Understanding who is in our schools helps us understand how schools are supporting those students.

Additionally understanding different student backgrounds across the district is important when we look at how different groups of students are supported. We know there are big disparities in outcomes for students with different backgrounds, and knowing who attends what schools, and where is an important step in addressing and changing that narrative. Educational opportunity should not be defined by student background or by address.

For this reason we break down our analysis by Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast regions of Aurora (see map below). Some regions experience greater rates of poverty and have more diverse populations. This means that it's particularly important for schools in these regions to pay attention to student performance for all different students to make sure that large groups of students aren't being left behind.

Descriptions of the district may not reflect your school. However, by and large, APS is divided into four regions: Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, and Southwest, each of which serves different populations of students.

Students of color and low-income students tend to be in the Northwest, while more affluent, white students attend schools in the Southeast. When the location of where you live determines your opportunities and outcomes, as we know is the case, we have a big problem. We know that student achievement follows neighborhood lines.[1] But this doesn't have to be the case.

Questions to ask your schools about this data:
Do you know how your school compares to your region? Who's in your school? Do the teachers in your school look like the students in your school? Does the leadership in the district represent the student population?

(See map to determine in which region your neighborhood falls.)

1 Badger, E., & Bui, Q. (2018, October 01). Detailed Maps Show How Neighborhoods Shape Children for Life. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/01/upshot/maps-neighborhoods-shape-child-poverty.html

Aurora Public Schools: 2017-2018 SPF Rating by School
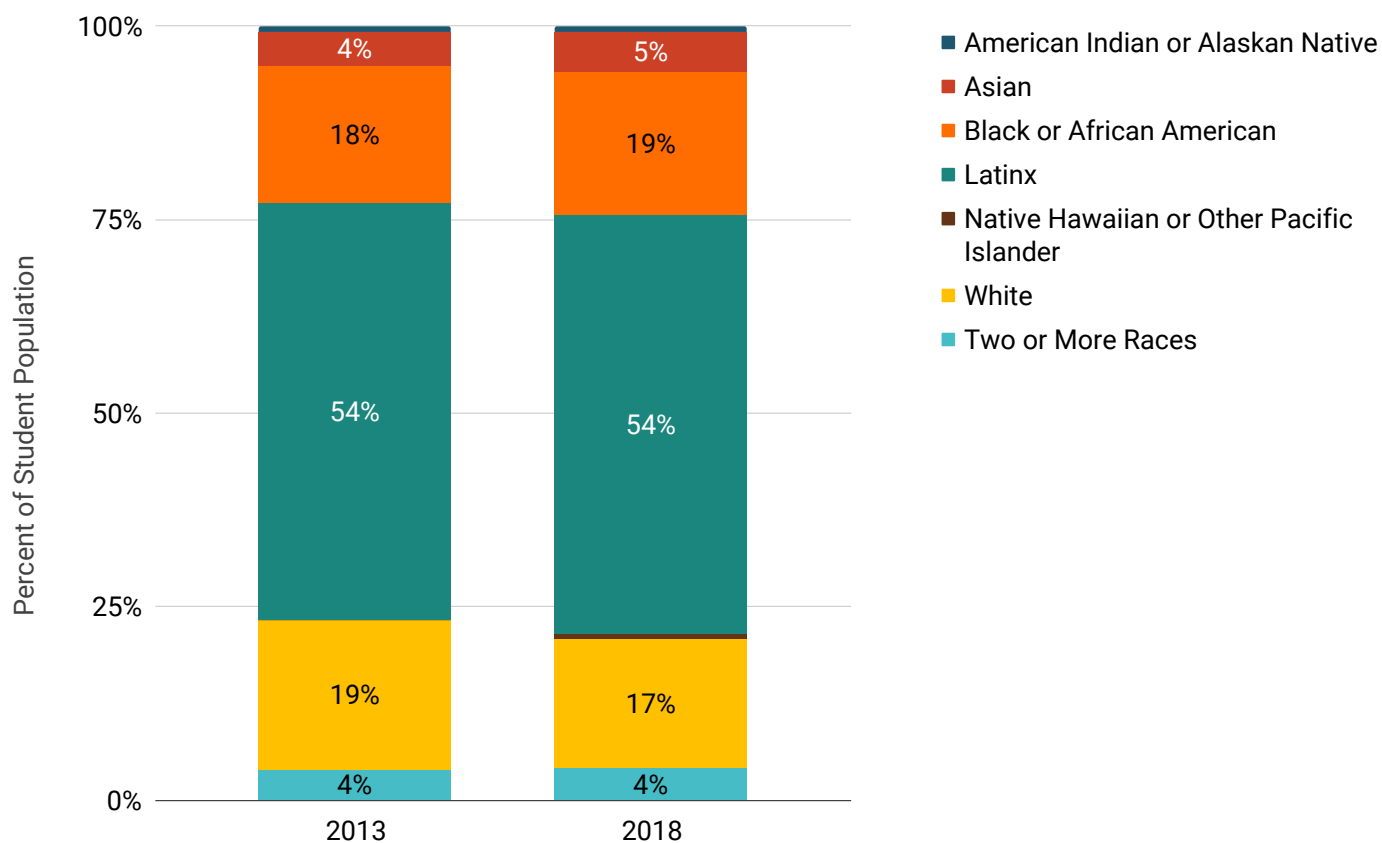
2017-2018 SPF Rating

- 🟢 Performance
- 🟡 Improvement
- 🟠 Priority Improvement
- 🔴 Turnaround
- ⚪ Insufficient State Data
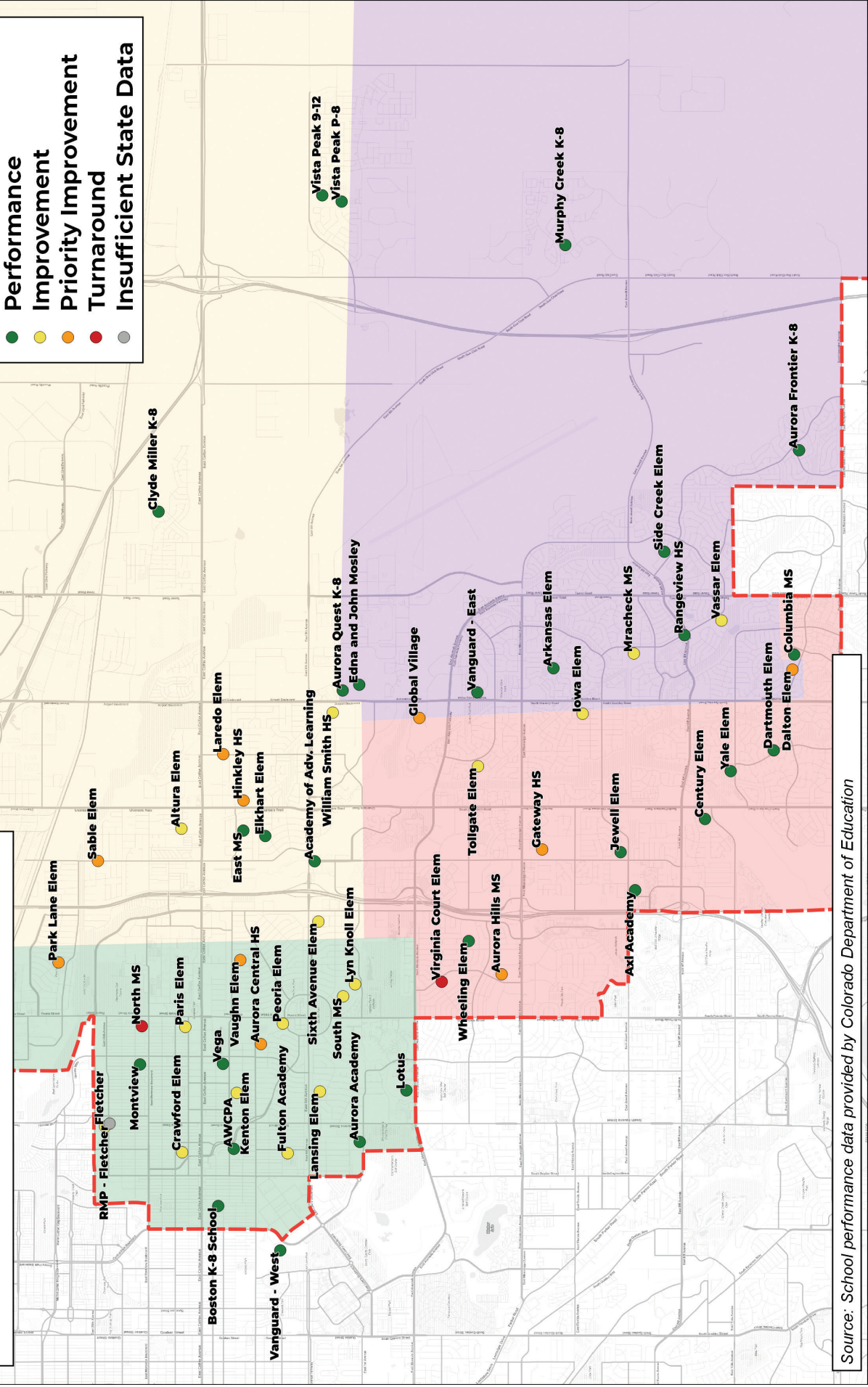
Source: School performance data provided by Colorado Department of Education

Aurora District-Wide Preschool through 12th Grade Population by Race/Ethnicity 2013-2018

Percent of Student Population

Legend:
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latinx
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races

2013: 4%, 18%, 54%, 19%, 4%
2018: 5%, 19%, 54%, 17%, 4%

Aurora Public Schools Regional Population K-12, by Race/Ethnicity (2018)

Percent of Student Population

Regions

Legend:
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latinx
- White
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races

Northeast: 4%, 16%, 59%, 15%, 4%
Northwest: 7%, 18%, 64%, 7%, 2%
Southeast: 6%, 22%, 39%, 26%, 6%
Southwest: 4%, 22%, 50%, 17%, 5%
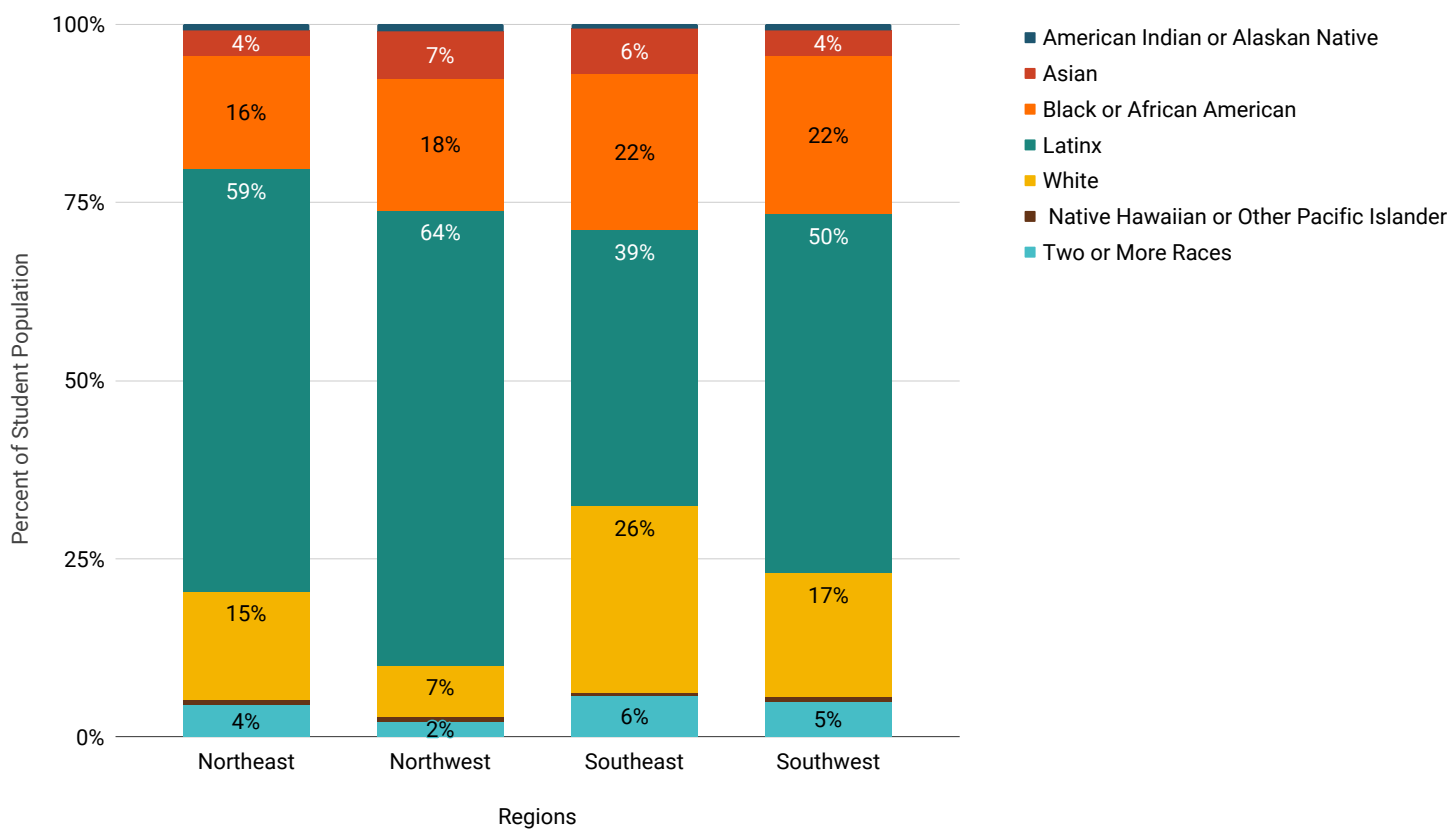
How are students learning in elementary & middle school?

Not every group of students is having the same outcome, even within the same school. For that reason, we have separated academic achievement and, growth, and identified the top schools for each group. This section explores students' academic outcomes, and looks at how different groups of students are being served across the district.

Why This Matters:

It is increasingly well-known that students' academic gains early in life play a huge role in success later on. In particular, reading at early ages impacts students' continued ability to learn.[2] Recognizing the importance of learning at this stage, we start with a close look at academic achievement, and gaps, in elementary and middle school.

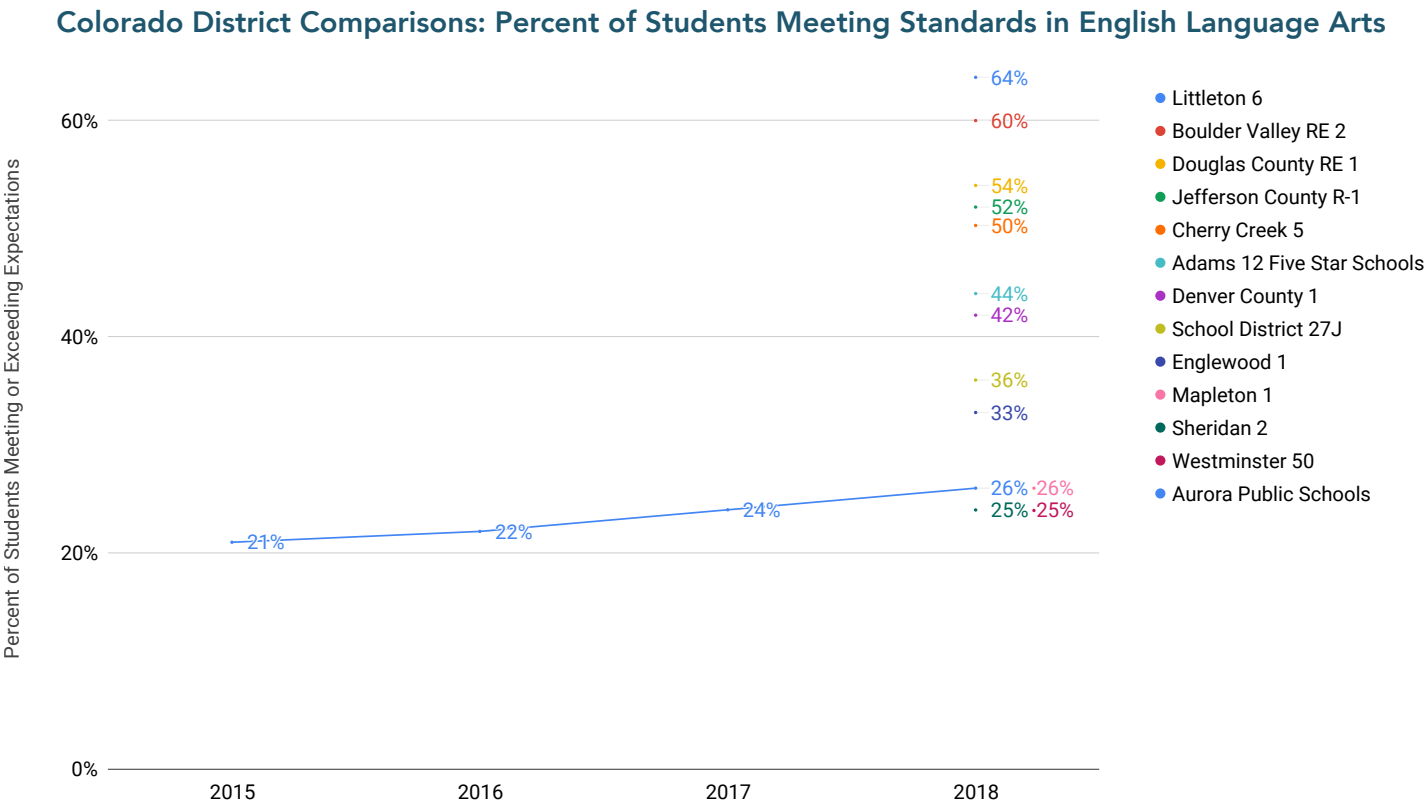# Navigating School Choice with The African Leadership Group

Many immigrant families like the ones we work with at The African Leadership Group, know very little about their choices when it comes to education and navigating the school system. This is particularly important in Colorado where there is "open enrollment" meaning students can go to school in any district where there is space. However, choice is also not equally used by all families because choice comes with some costs for families.

As an organization, we strive to present families with information that can educate and empower them to be highly effective advocates for their children's education; however, sometimes schools fail to provide the quality of education families want for their children so they are often left dissatisfied and look for other options/districts. Every week, we are fortunate to have weekly contact with over 50 students and their parents during our Youth Empowerment Group convening on Fridays. One of the benefits of working with these families is being able to hear their stories and at the same time hear about some of the challenges they face in search for quality schools.

While families are able to enroll their students in a public school other than their assigned "neighborhood school" during Open Enrollment, they also expressed some frustrations and barriers. One in particular is transparency and not having access to information that directly impacts their families. As a district it is imperative that Aurora have quality schools that will provide a quality education for students and families

2 Fiester, L. (2010). *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Questions to ask your schools about this data: Why is Aurora's performance low compared to other nearby districts? What are the plans to improve achievement for students?

Colorado District Comparisons: Percent of Students Meeting Standards in English Language Arts


Legend:
- Littleton 6
- Boulder Valley RE 2
- Douglas County RE 1
- Jefferson County R-1
- Cherry Creek 5
- Adams 12 Five Star Schools
- Denver County 1
- School District 27J
- Englewood 1
- Mapleton 1
- Sheridan 2
- Westminster 50
- Aurora Public Schools

2018 values: 64%, 60%, 54%, 52%, 50%, 44%, 42%, 36%, 33%, 26%, 26%, 25%, 25%

Aurora Public Schools: 2015: 21%, 2016: 22%, 2017: 24%, 2018: 26%

Questions to ask your schools about this data: How has your school improved performance over time compared to the district's average improvement?

Aurora Public Schools Percent of Students Meeting/Exceeding Expectations Over Time

Legend:
- Elementary School English Language Arts
- Middle School English Language Arts
- Elementary School Math

Elementary School English Language Arts: 2015: 19%, 2016: 20%, 2017: 24%, 2018: 26%
Middle School English Language Arts: 2015: 22%, 2016: 23%, 2017: 25%, 2018: 25%
Elementary School Math: 2015: 13%, 2016: 15%, 2017: 17%, 2018: 18%
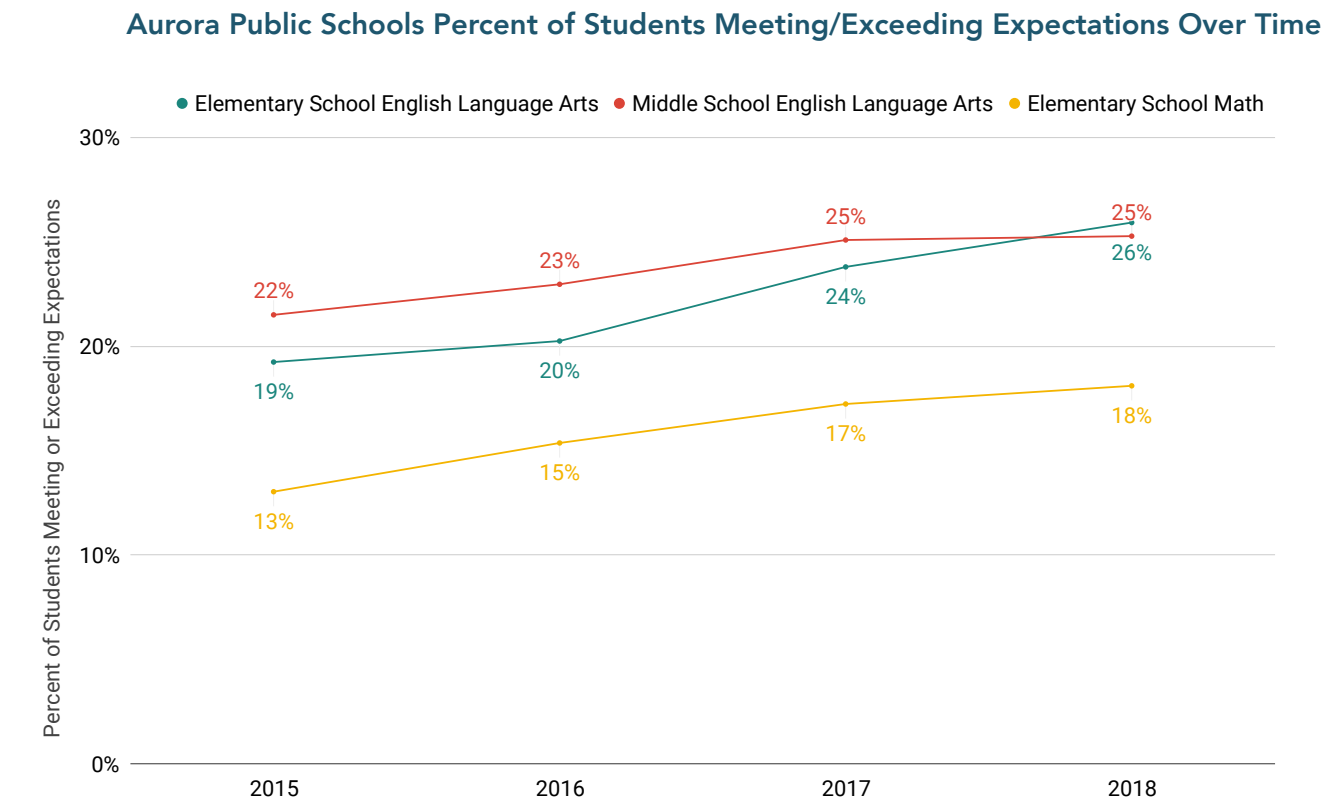
Questions to ask your schools about this data: How do racial achievement gaps look in your school? Are they smaller or bigger? If smaller, what is your school doing that is different from other schools in APS to reduce racially-driven achievement gaps? If they're bigger does your school have a plan to learn from others and best practices to reduce these gaps?

Aurora Public Schools Percent of Students Meeting Standards in Math by Subgroups
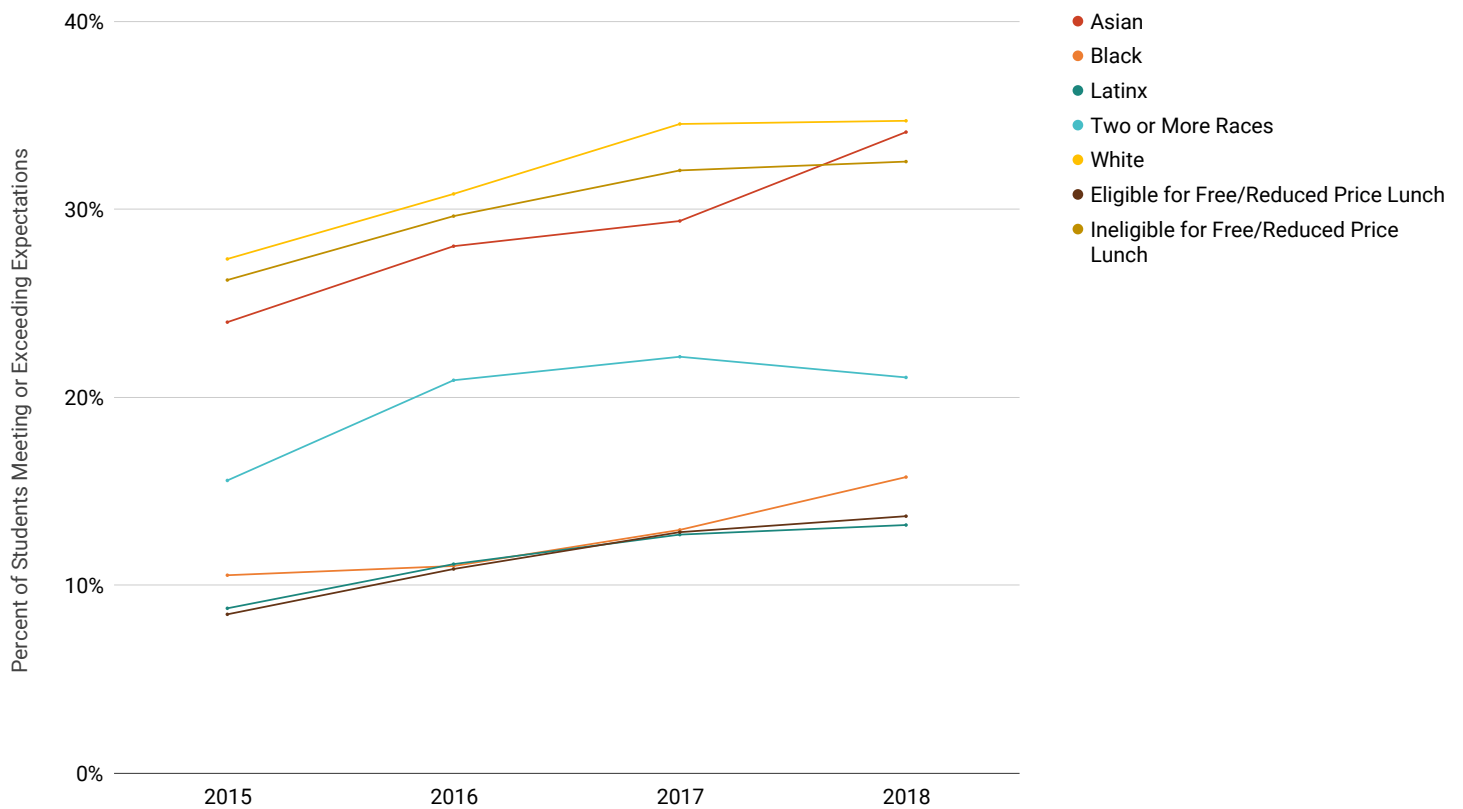
Student performance in Aurora is lower compared to other districts in Colorado. APS has slowly, yet steadily, been improving performance over time, yet not all schools or groups of students within schools have increased performance equally. We can see that all groups had increases in achievement over time, yet white students experienced the most rapid increase in proficiency. This has led to a striking difference in academic outcomes for students of different racial and ethnic identities, and for students from families with different economic backgrounds.

"They could do things to improve their overall rankings. I looked into the ranking and the other districts ranked higher in terms of grades."

- Sintu Abate, mother of two, 4th and 6th graders

9

Are students making academic progress each year?

Why this Matters:

Not all students come in to school at the same level. Often student achievement is in part measuring students' success prior to coming into the classroom. Growth tries to capture the impact that school is having on student learning by measuring progress of one student compared to their "academic peers" who are other students who had the same test score the previous year. The measure is known as a student growth percentile. The Median Growth Percentile (MGP) is the middle growth percentile of all the students within the district, and shows, on average, if students are making more or less progress than students with similar academic achievement, regardless of where they were academically at the beginning of the year.

Questions to ask your schools about this data: **How does your student's student growth percentile (SGP) compare to your school's? How about compared to other students in the district like yours? Are the teachers in your school looking at growth data to inform their teaching practices? What's your school's plan to make sure that growth is equal across all groups of students?**

Aurora Public Schools Growth For Subgroups In English Language Arts (2018)

Median Growth Percentile

- ● Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch
- ● Ineligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch
- ▲ Asian
- ▲ Black
- ▲ Latinx
- ▲ Two or More Races
- ▲ White

Finding different communities in the data: Differentiating first and second generation African students vs African-American students

Why this matters:

Data is most powerful when it accurately represents the population. As decisions are made based on data, by families and policymakers alike, accuracy in representation is critical. Community experiences may be very different, but both fall under the the same broad categories in data, leading to misinformation about the reality.

We also know that the categories that are used to identify groups of students themselves are imperfect. Few of us identify ourselves within one category. Intersectionality impacts learning, as it impacts teacher biases, teacher quality, and student experiences and outcomes. However, current data reporting and data collection imperfectly capture these nuanced experiences.

Trying to differentiate between students of African immigrants (both 1st and 2nd generation) versus African American students is important. The data treats the groups as identical categorizing these students as Black, when in fact, each of these groups, while sharing some similarities, have very different experiences and face different challenges. Students of immigrants from Africa have disparities in educational attainment compared to their African-American peers.

One way that we attempt to differentiate between the two groups is by looking at English language learners (ELs) by ethnicity, under the assumption that most ELs who identify as "Black" on standardized tests are recent African immigrants. This will not capture all recently immigrated African-American students. However, what was very interesting was comparing the performance of English learners and non-English learners, by ethnicity. This showed that African-American students are the only race or ethnicity where English learners, presumably most of whom are African migrants, are performing better than non-English learners. This underscores how important it is to really see who is in each group and understand what is leading to the differences in educational outcomes.

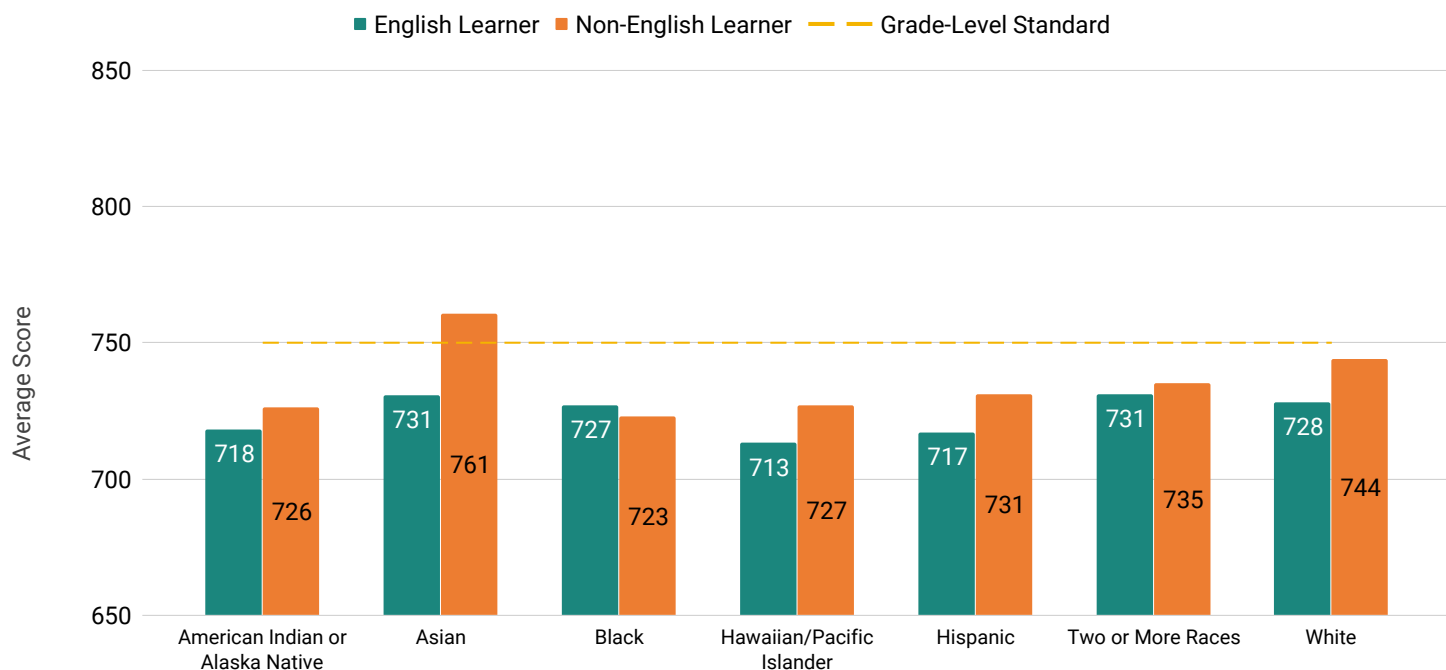**In this section here is what we mean by these different terms:**

African-American: Black students whose families have been living in the United States for several generations.

Black students: Refers to all students who have identified as Black in data. This captures both African-American and First and Second Generation African students.

First and Second Generation African students: Refers to students born elsewhere and immigrated to the United States or students born in the United States, with at least one immigrant (first-generation) parent.

Questions to ask your schools about this data: Is there a difference between 1st and 2nd generation African students and African-American students? If so, why? Do teachers have the training to work with different students? And lastly, what kind of English language learning courses are offered at your school? How does this relate to the demographics of your school?

English Language Arts Performance for English learners versus non-English learners by Race/Ethnicity in Aurora Public Schools (2018)

Legend: ■ English Learner ■ Non-English Learner — — Grade-Level Standard

Average Score

Race/Ethnicity	English Learner	Non-English Learner
American Indian or Alaska Native	718	726
Asian	731	761
Black	727	723
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	713	727
Hispanic	717	731
Two or More Races	731	735
White	728	744

How are your students doing in high school and beyond?

Why this matters:

For many, a fundamental goal of an education remains college readiness. In any case, a public school system should be responsible for ensuring that any graduate is prepared for life after high school, whether that means college or career. This section tries to see how well high schools are preparing students for whatever that is, and whether they are doing so equitably so as to reduce cycles of poverty.

SAT scores for the district have not significantly changed over time and remain well below the state average. While the state graduation rate has remained roughly the same over the past five years, the district had a rapid increase in graduation rates. While the importance of graduating from high school cannot be understated, this rapid increase, paired with stagnant student achievement as measured by SAT scores and growth percentiles, calls into question how prepared high school graduates are for post-secondary life.

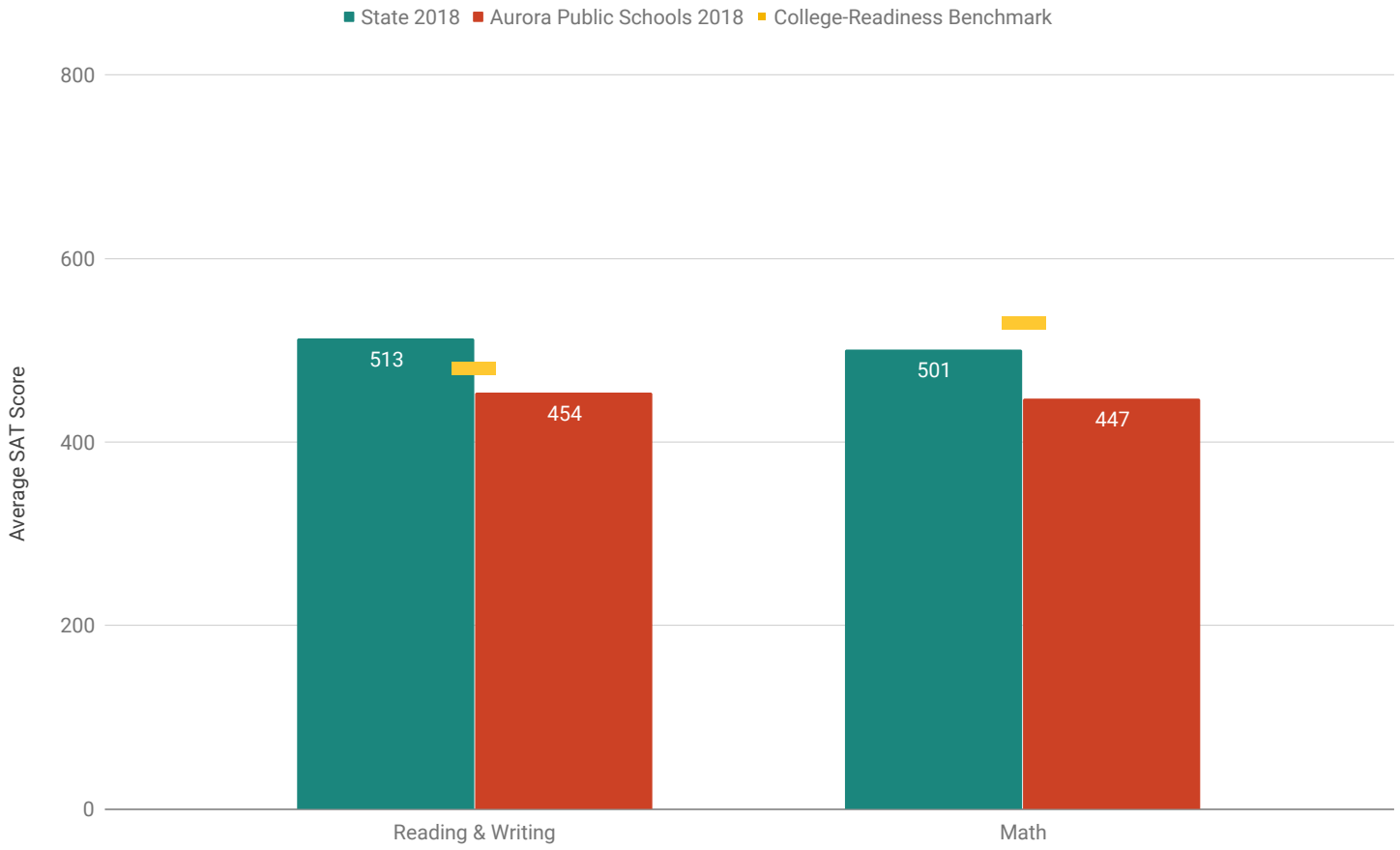"When my daughter was getting ready to go to high school, we struggled to find a good school in Aurora."

- Selamawit Shiferaw, Mother of a 7th and 9th grader in APS

Questions to ask your schools about this data: How well is your school supporting students to be ready for college and career? How are the graduation rates at your school? What about SAT scores? Does your school have information about matriculation rates and retention? What about remediation rates?
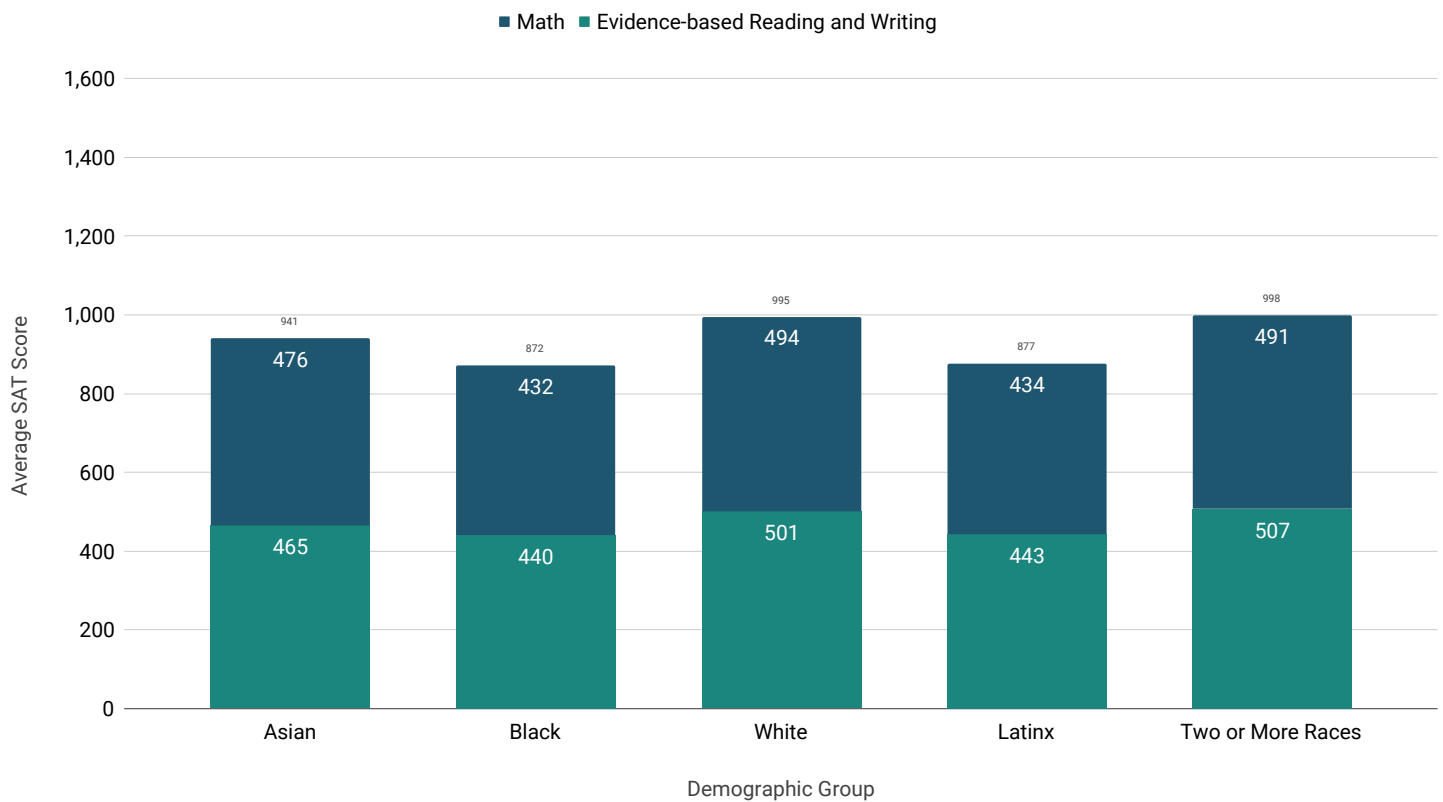
Aurora Public Schools Graduation Rates by Race and Ethnicity (2012-2017, Compared to State Average)

■ 2012 APS Grad Rate ■ 2017 APS Grad Rate — — 2017 State Graduation Rate for All Students

SAT Performance in Aurora Public Schools compared to the State

■ State 2018 ■ Aurora Public Schools 2018 ■ College-Readiness Benchmark

Reading & Writing: State 2018: 513, Aurora Public Schools 2018: 454

Math: State 2018: 501, Aurora Public Schools 2018: 447

SAT Scores by Race/Ethnicity in Aurora Public Schools (2018)

■ Math ■ Evidence-based Reading and Writing

Demographic Group	Math	Evidence-based Reading and Writing	Total
Asian	476	465	941
Black	432	440	872
White	494	501	995
Latinx	434	443	877
Two or More Races	491	507	998

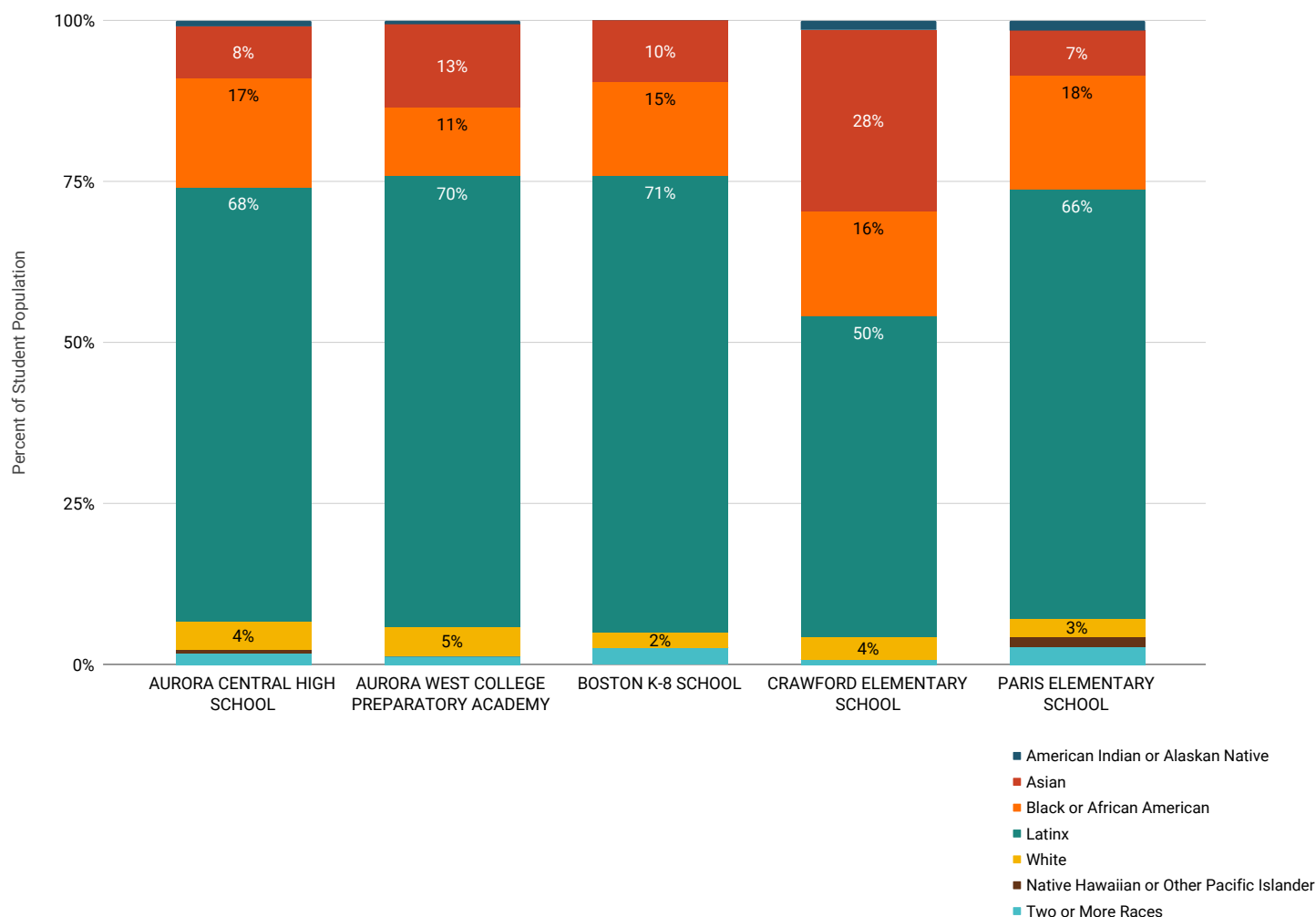# How has APS supported struggling schools? Zooming in on the Action Zone

Why this Matters:

Aurora has invested heavily in five schools which it refers to as the "Action Zone." The schools in this zone are one example of the investments Aurora has put into turning around low-performing schools. These five schools are: Boston K-8, Crawford Elementary, Paris Elementary, Aurora West College Prep, and Aurora Central High School. These schools, in the northwest, have a high proportion of students that qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, as well as English language learners, and Latinx students. Performance in these schools is low, and progress has been slow. This begs the question of how Aurora can better support schools that are struggling.
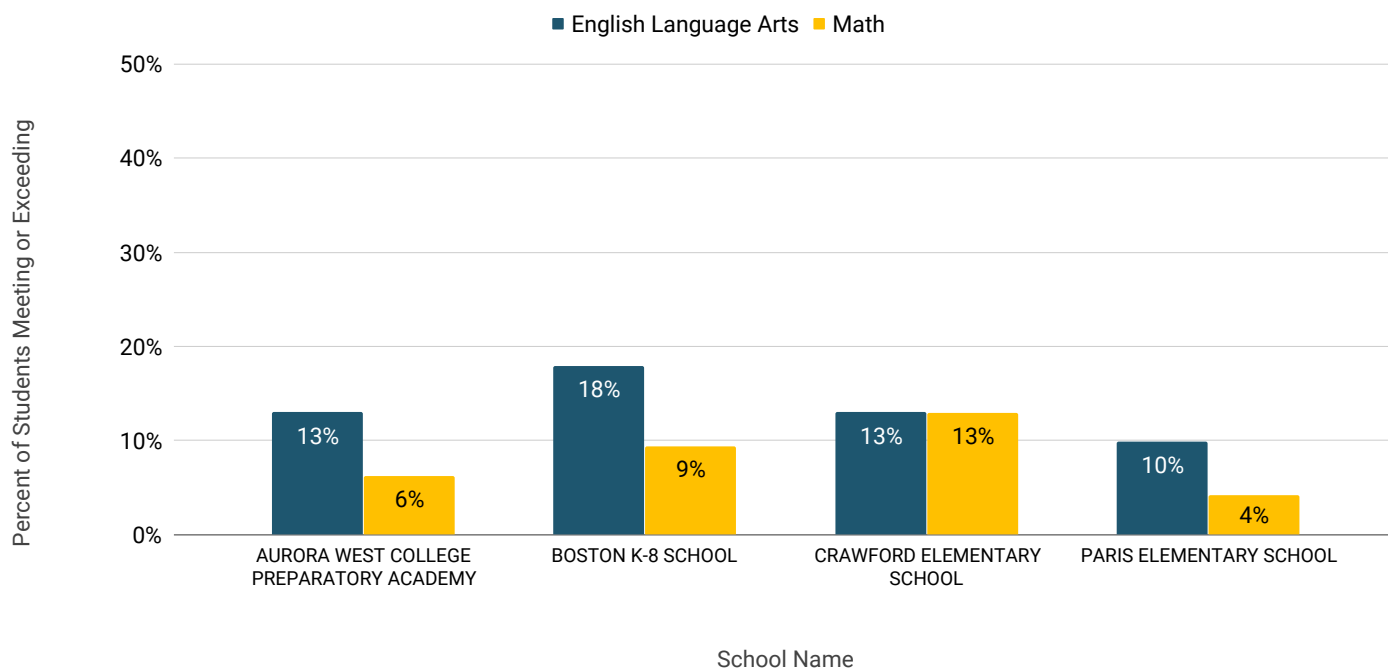
Questions to ask about this data: How has performance in these schools changed since they were designated as part of the "Action Zone?" What programs are being put into place to try and turn around performance? What are the district's plans to monitor these schools and make sure that turnaround is successful? Will this strategy for improvement be used in other schools?

Action Zone Schools in Aurora Public Schools: K-12 Population by Race/Ethnicity 2018

Percent of Student Population

Legend:
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latinx
- White
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races

AURORA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL: Asian 8%, Black or African American 17%, Latinx 68%, White 4%

AURORA WEST COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY: Asian 13%, Black or African American 11%, Latinx 70%, White 5%

BOSTON K-8 SCHOOL: Asian 10%, Black or African American 15%, Latinx 71%, White 2%

CRAWFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Asian 28%, Black or African American 16%, Latinx 50%, White 4%

PARIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Asian 7%, Black or African American 18%, Latinx 66%, White 3%

Action Zone: Percent of Students in Aurora Public Schools Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in English Language Arts and Math

Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding

Legend: ■ English Language Arts ■ Math

AURORA WEST COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY: English Language Arts 13%, Math 6%

BOSTON K-8 SCHOOL: English Language Arts 18%, Math 9%

CRAWFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: English Language Arts 13%, Math 13%

PARIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: English Language Arts 10%, Math 4%

School Name

Beyond Report Cards: Your Schools, Your Information

Schools are responsible to you - the families and communities they serve. Demand more information about families like yours.

What can *you* do?

1. **Get involved with The African Leadership Group** and its efforts to advocate for improved school systems. The African Leadership Group does this by:
    *   Equipping students with the knowledge, tools and experiences to be well informed and vocal advocates for quality educational opportunities.
    *   Educating, training and inspiring parents to be highly effective advocates for their children's education as well as that of the larger community.

2. Get more involved with your school and **ask them to host an academic partnership meeting** so they can answer your questions.

3. **Attend school board and district meetings** and make your voice heard.

4. Join your school's **Collaborative School Committee**. All schools are required to have these groups of families, staff and community members that help the school have high quality programming.

5. Run for school board and **represent your community**!

What can Aurora Public Schools do?

Host academic partnership meetings with families.

We know it is critical for schools to be able to answer your questions. Research and experience show that academic partnership between communities and their school helps support both teachers and students. Research has shown that there are many factors that contribute in educating the whole child. One of the most important factors includes having a symbiotic relationship between families and the school. It's key that our educators know how invested our families are in our students' and schools' success.

The African Leadership Group will be happy to facilitate this meeting to ensure that students' needs are met. On behalf of all the families in our community, this is an open invitation to partner with the district (APS) and other community groups to help close the achievement gaps and disparities in educational attainment.

School Data Checklist:

Be an academic partner and advocate for your student's learning. Go to your schools and demand for the information you don't have in a community data meeting. Here's a checklist to help make sure all your questions get answered.

Do you have an understanding of your school community?

- ❏ What does the student body look like in your school?
- ❏ Do you have greater or fewer students of color, low-income students, or emerging multilingual students in your school compared to the district?
- ❏ Are teachers and administrators representative of students in your school?

How are students doing academically?

- ❏ How are students in your school performing compared to the district?
- ❏ Is your school doing a better job at serving any group of students compared to the district?
- ❏ How do racial achievement gaps look in your school, are they smaller or bigger?
- ❏ Are the teachers in your school looking at growth data to inform their teaching practices?
- ❏ Are African-American students doing better than First or Second African Generation students at your school? If so, why?
- ❏ Do teachers have the training to work with different students?
- ❏ How does this relate to the demographics of your school?

Is your school preparing students to be ready for college and career?

- ❏ What are the graduation rates at your school? What about SAT scores?
- ❏ Does your school have information about matriculation rates and retention? What about remediation rates?

How is your school and the district helping schools improve?

- ❏ Why is Aurora's performance lower compared to other nearby districts?
- ❏ What are the plans to improve achievement for students?
- ❏ If you are in an "Action Zone" school, how has performance in these schools changed since they were designated as part of the "Action Zone?"
- ❏ What programs are being put into place to try and turn around performance?
- ❏ What are the district's plans to monitor these schools and make sure that turnaround is successful?