



ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE 2021-2022

The Joint Commission on the Opportunity Gap (JCOG) was established by County Executive Steuart Pittman and Superintendent George Arlotto in May 2021. The purpose of the commission is to prioritize and monitor progress toward meeting recommendations made in the [Joint Initiative to Eliminate the Opportunity Gap report](#), which was published in November 2020.

[Executive Order 47](#) outlines the purpose and specific goals of the JCOG.

As an advisory body, the JCOG will define and track metrics, provide additional recommendations related to policy and practice to reduce the opportunity gap, conduct public forums, serve as a resource for the County Executive (CE), County Council, Superintendent, and Board of Education, submit budget proposals in support of specific initiatives, and present progress at bi-annual intervals.

OVERVIEW

This report covers activities of the Joint Commission on the Opportunity Gap from August 2021 to September 2022.

Twelve Joint Commission on the Opportunity Gap members, six appointed by County Executive Steuart Pittman and six by Superintendent George Arlotto, were announced on August 31, 2021. Concurrently, County Executive Pittman set a goal to improve the county youths' readiness to enter kindergarten by 2026 and bridge the educational gap.

The Commission met for the first time on October 13, 2021, and the primary task was to select three additional members. This is an unconventional method of board appointments, but was designed to ensure that no pertinent stakeholders were missing from the table. A nominating committee, chaired by Reverend Mihee Kim-Kort, made recommendations that were approved by the full commission on December 8, 2021. A full list of members is included later in the report.

Since then, the commission has held 13 meetings. It created three committees to mirror the three remaining priority recommendations in the November 2020 report and published a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document to respond to public inquiries about its purpose and structure.

Chair Peggy Cruz provided formal updates to the [Board of Education in February 2022](#) and the [County Executive in May 2022](#) and, on behalf of the Commission, submitted a [letter to the Board of Education](#) describing the attributes and experiences that members thought were important in the next superintendent.

In 2022-2023, each committee will create an action plan and identify relevant metrics to move forward on several recommendations listed below. The Commission also intends to support specific requests for funding in the FY24 budget.

COMMITTEES

Data / Transparency (Chair: Indu Bodala)

The committee recognized the need to evaluate available data and distribute information equitably. They plan to identify the most comprehensive data to measure improvement, illustrate the data in a more digestible format, and distribute it in multiple formats and languages.

Equity (Chair: Conor Curran)

The committee plans to use Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) resources and framework to guide their work. They plan to review current policies and make recommendations related to systemic issues and potentially create a survey for families to help determine how best to engage them.

Social Determinants of Education (Chair: John Watts)

The committee plans to focus on how to target children in the gap. This can occur through partnerships with healthcare providers in the community, associations with older siblings who are already enrolled in AACPS, and currently active parental groups. The goal for 2022-2023 is to create an educational awareness campaign explaining what kids (and guardians) should be doing in order to be ready for kindergarten. The biggest challenge is how to identify children prior to enrollment in AACPS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission presented several recommendations in its May report to the County Executive.

In summary, the Commission supports equitable access to information about kindergarten readiness, targeted programs and services to underserved communities, increased parental involvement, using data to identify needs and monitor progress, and investing both the financial and staffing resources required to do the work. Specific strategies include:

- Creating and distributing information and resources regarding educational milestones and programs through the health department to licensed daycare centers, hospital maternity units and birthing centers, pediatrician offices, and other clinical sites.
- Posting billboards throughout the county, including public transit, noting kindergarten readiness requirements.
- Partnering with public libraries to incorporate kindergarten readiness information in their current toddler programs and classes.
- Ensuring all information is accessible, culturally-relevant, and inclusive of all families.
- Partnering with the Title I and Community Schools and Judy Centers to survey parents about languages spoken, and the accessibility and usefulness of the website.
- Creating a position in the county whose sole purpose is to implement programs that increase educational equity for children ages 0-5.
- Expanding 3 and 4-year-old pre-kindergarten programs and access to other academic opportunities, leveraging resources and requirements of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.
- Offering primary care services for uninsured families or zoned services to increase equity by city and zip code.
- Collecting and making that data accessible in order to measure effectiveness of the variables that boost performance on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) and future academic performance.

GUEST SPEAKERS

The Joint Commission on the Opportunity Gap thanks the following guest speakers for sharing their time and expertise with the members.

- County Executive Stuart Pittman
- Pete Hill, AACo Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Alli Holstrom, Partnership for Children, Youth and Families
- Judy Walker, MSDE Early Learning Branch Chief
- Dr. Maisha Gillins, Office of Equity and Accelerated Student Achievement
- Dr. Shannon Pugh, Director of Community and School Programming
- Dr. Mark Bedell, Superintendent of AACPS (effective July 1, 2022)

MEETINGS

The meetings are held virtually on the second Wednesday of the month from 4-6 PM. Meetings were held on the following dates:

- August 31, 2022
- October 13, 2021
- November 10, 2021
- December 8, 2021
- January 12, 2022
- February 9, 2022
- March 9, 2022
- April 13, 2022
- May 11, 2022
- May 18, 2022 (special)
- June 8, 2022
- July 13, 2022
- September 14, 2022

After several discussions about meeting times and whether to begin meeting in person after COVID, the group has determined that virtual meetings are most effective at this point.

MEMBER LIST

Appointed *[by CE, Superintendent (AACPS), or JCOG]*

Charlene Bell (JCOG)	Stephanie Jones (AACPS)	Karen Murphy (CE)
Indu Bodala (AACPS)	Thornell Jones (CE)	Pastor Pat Packett (JCOG)
Peggy Cruz, Chair (CE)	Monica Lindsey (CE)	Richard Rogers (AACPS)
Conor Curran (CE)	Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort (CE)	Patricia Saynuk (AACPS)
Dr. Julie Halick (AACPS)	Tatiana Klein (CE)	John Watts (JCOG)

Ex-Officio

Capt. Ryan Frashure, AAPD	Pete Hill, EDI	Cassandra Moore, AACC
Dr. Tonii Gedin, DOH	Catherine Hollerbach, AACPL	Tameka Smith, CE's Office
Dr. Maisha Gillins, AACPS	Monique Jackson, AACPS	

Staff

Dr. Pam Brown, Partnership	Dr. Jennifer Purcell, CE's Office
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All JCOG documents are available at aacounty.org/jcog
or by contacting Jennifer Purcell at expurc99@aacounty.org.

*Prepared by: JCOG Annual Report Committee
I. Bodala, P. Cruz, C. Curran, P. Saynuk
with staff support from Dr. Jennifer Purcell*