



CHAIRMAN'S TASK FORCE ON EQUITY & OPPORTUNITY

SUMMARY OF WORK & PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Presentation to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
February 23, 2021



BACKGROUND



As our county responds to COVID-19 and begins the journey to recovery, we have seen the convergence of a public health crisis and an economic crisis. And with incidents nationally and locally involving law enforcement, we are further confronted by the realities of systemic racism and injustice. For the future success of our county, it is critically important for us to fully employ our resources and ingenuity to address the inequities embedded in our community that stifle opportunity for the residents and businesses that call Fairfax County home.

Overview of the Chairman's Task Force on Equity & Opportunity

Purpose

The Chairman's Task Force on Equity and Opportunity was convened to leverage the insights, experiences, professional networks, and industry and institutional understanding that exists within our community to better understand the drivers of inequity in Fairfax County and to develop recommendations for accelerating the county's progress towards becoming One Fairfax.

Structure

The Task Force was comprised of 42 members representing community leaders and subject matter experts and was organized into four committees:

- *Cradle to Career Success*
- *Community Health and Wellness*
- *Community Safety and Justice*
- *Equitable Communities*

The Work

The insights and recommendations developed by the Task Force are identified as critical to advancing racial and social equity in Fairfax County. Implementation of the accepted recommendations will be aligned with the Countywide Strategic Plan and other adopted countywide plans.

Key Questions Guiding Our Work

- What are the systems that have made certain places and populations vulnerable?
 - How is racism manifesting itself?
 - What stands in the way of progress?
- What voices must be lifted to better understand and address these issues?
- What actions can be taken to reshape Fairfax County into a place where all can thrive? What might accelerate or facilitate progress?

Local Context

- As a county in a Dillon Rule state, Fairfax County has limited powers in areas such as raising revenue, and it cannot take certain actions without appropriate action from the state, which limits revenue diversification options among other things¹
- The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approves the overall FCPS budget allocation but does not directly control the use of those funds
- COVID-19 has amplified the interdependence between the schools and the county, as both systems have dealt with the challenges associated with distance learning and the disproportionately negative impact on certain people and places who were already experiencing severe inequity prior to the pandemic
- Due to COVID-19, our tax base is constrained, so our county's budget is constrained
- Our current situation requires us to be creative in our approaches and direct resources where they will effectively address our most pressing problems

1. Source: [About Fairfax County | Topics](#)

Chairman's Charge to the Task Force

- Identify equity challenges facing Fairfax County
- Conduct a root cause analysis and identify key issues
- Brainstorm recommendations
- Incorporate feedback from the community input process
- Develop and present recommendations and insights to the Chairman and Board of Supervisors

Key Themes from Community Input: An Equitable Fairfax County Will...

<p>Cradle to Career Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand opportunities • Ensure fair treatment of all students • Increase diversity of teachers • Ensure all schools are well-resourced – not just schools in specific communities (no failing schools) • Change how we measure academic success (i.e., test scores) • Prepare and connect students to well paying jobs upon graduation 	<p>Community Health and Wellness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate health disparities • Focus on multiple dimensions of health (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, and economic) • Expand access to mental health services
<p>Community Safety and Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure people feel safe in their community • Allow people to move freely without fear of interactions with police • Engage the community in holding police accountable 	<p>Equitable Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure people feel their voices are heard • Prioritize diverse leadership on the Board of Supervisors; boards, authorities, and commissions; and in County positions • Invest in fair and equitable distribution of resources and knowledge • Acknowledge a history of racism and its current impacts

Criteria for Selecting Recommendations

- **Racial Equity:** Does it advance a racial equity agenda?
- **Leverage:** Does it leverage current strengths and assets, or will it require additional resources?
- **Impact:** Will it positively impact the lives of people of color? If so, how and to what degree?
- **Ownership + Specificity:** Who do we want to do what – the county, a partner, co-led by county and partner(s)? What ability does the county carry to influence action?
- **Feasibility:** What level of effort is required to do it? How complicated will it be to implement this recommendation?

CRADLE TO CAREER SUCCESS

All people in Fairfax County, from cradle to career and beyond, are taking advantage of inclusive, responsive, high quality, and accessible learning opportunities that enable them to grow, prosper, and thrive, to become self-sufficient and engaged county residents.

Cradle to Career Success Challenges

1. Quality early childhood experiences and learning opportunities are critical to lifelong success and wellness, but there are racial and ethnic disparities in access to quality programs, services, and supports.
2. The opportunity for academic success is enhanced by student and family engagement and connectedness to school, but there are racial and ethnic disparities related to access to and opportunity for such engagement and connectedness.
3. Participation in academic enrichment programming (e.g., advanced academics, career and technical education, internships) can help prepare students for their careers, but there are racial and ethnic disparities in participation in such programming.

Cradle to Career Success

Key Issues to Address

- There is **limited supply of quality early care and education programs**, which results in many Black, Hispanic, and low-income families being unable to afford care or opting for lower quality care.
- There **is no comprehensive career planning approach for FCPS students**, which results in Black and Hispanic students being disproportionately under-prepared for meaningful employment.
- **FCPS recruitment and hiring policies do not adequately result in diverse faculty employment**, which results in a workforce that does not match the diversity of the student body.
- **Advanced academic programming is not equitably accessible to all FCPS students**, resulting in underrepresentation among Black and Hispanic students.

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND JUSTICE

All persons in Fairfax County are entitled to expect that their law enforcement and other public safety departments provide service consistent with the roles defined for them through community involvement and input, and that they should do so in a manner that (i) is fully transparent and accountable to the public, (ii) ensures through implicit bias and cultural competency training that all persons are treated equally and that racial, cultural or other profiling does not occur, and (iii) prevents the excessive and unnecessary use of force.

Community Safety and Justice Challenges

1. There is a lack of clear standards by which law enforcement are held accountable.
2. Disproportionate negative interactions that impact community relationships and civil liberties encourage the use of excessive force against communities of color.

Community Safety and Justice

Key Issues to Address

- **Emboldened “law and order” rhetoric** overly influences police policy.
- **Politicians aren’t willing to make the same sacrifices that oppressed constituents of color have endured** for years. They say all the right things but still engage in the same condescending, selective social change work in which white establishments of power like the police partake.
- **Although there are now officers of color, the law enforcement system was created to protect the interests and power of White people.** Established positions of power and strength are one-sided and this is well-known to people of color.
- **Racial profiling has led countless people of color to live in fear,** casting entire communities as suspect simply because of what they look like and where they come from.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS

*Fairfax County is a place where all people can attain their
highest level of health and wellbeing.*

Community Health and Wellness Challenges

1. COVID-19 has given greater visibility to health and wellness disparities that already existed within the Fairfax Community.
2. Existing policies and practices in Fairfax County (inside and outside of government) contribute to health and wellness inequities.
3. Changes in social determinants of health could improve the health and wellness of vulnerable communities.

Community Health and Wellness

Key Issues to Address

- **The interests of BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) are not prioritized by agencies;** instead, the needs and norms of agencies, (“the way it has always been”) are often prioritized.
- **Decisions about the county are often related to wealth,** and therefore frequently ignore the needs of BIPOC communities.
- **The built environment in BIPOC communities and low-income communities often adversely affects health outcomes.**
- **A comprehensive and coordinated network of public and private resources** is needed to optimize the health and wellness of low-income communities.
- **BIPOC individuals lack representation** in every step of the health care system.

EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES

Fairfax County is a place where all people live in communities of opportunity with the ability to engage fully in decisions that affect their lives and neighborhoods.

Equitable Communities

Challenges

1. People of color and lived expertise do not have power to influence decision making.
2. Lack of investment or re-investment in historically marginalized communities; investments do not directly benefit communities of color that live there.
3. Lack of an infrastructure for residents to build economic security results in an inability for socioeconomic mobility.

Equitable Communities

Key Issues to Address

- There are no incentives, policies, or intentionality in **seeking diversity in public engagement and decision making**.
- There is a **segregation of assets by geography**.
- There is a **lack of available land and infrastructure**.
- There is a **racial wealth gap**.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Formation of the Task Force's Recommendations

- Using research, data, community input, and lived and professional experiences, committees considered the impacts of inequities in Fairfax County broadly, and with a focus on how these inequities have been exacerbated through COVID-19 and illuminated within the current racialized environment.
- Committees identified challenges and conducted root cause analyses to identify key issues, which led to recommendations and insights.
- Committees categorized recommendations as short-term or long-term and county- or partner-led and indicated if county resources were required. Recommendations were also compared across committees to determine areas of conflict or alignment.
- The following list of 20 recommendations represents the combined efforts of the four committees.

Task Force Recommendations

- Ensure all families with children under age 5 have access to affordable, quality early childhood programs available through the public and private sectors (centers, family childcare homes and FCPS). *(long term, county led)*
- Ensure all early childhood education (ECE) providers have access to professional development and skill building opportunities, in order to ensure the highest quality ECE services for every child, regardless of setting or program type. *(long term, county led)*
- Expand Career and Technical Education offerings through FCPS and community-based providers to be more accessible and to align with projected areas of job demand. *(long term; partner led, with county resources)*

Task Force Recommendations

- Engage educators, business, government, and nonprofits, and involving youth and young adults, to align their resources and initiatives to create an education-to-career system that better connects Fairfax's youth ages 16-24 who are not in school or working (opportunity youth) to in-demand careers. *(long term, partner led with county resources)*
- Ensure residents are aware of academic and career enrichment opportunities, early enough and in ways that encourage Blacks and Hispanics to take advantage of them. *(short term, county and partner led)*

Task Force Recommendations

- Create meaningful opportunities for the community to be involved in defining the role of law enforcement and other public safety personnel. (*short term and long term, county led with partner input*)
- Implement policies to enable public safety personnel to live in and come from the communities they serve. (*long term, county led with partner input*)
- Implement trainings such as implicit bias, cultural competency, and community engagement in the public safety academies and annually for first responder personnel. (*short term and long term, county led with partner input*)
- Develop and institutionalize accountability mechanisms that monitor and evaluate occurrences of racial profiling and excessive use of force by law enforcement and other first responders. (*short term and long term; county led with partner input, and partner-led with county resources*)

Task Force Recommendations

- Bring together executive leadership from multiple sectors to create a model for collective, holistic community healthcare delivery to include the county, hospitals, primary care, and other community health providers, Federally Qualified Health Centers, oral and behavioral health providers, public and private health insurers, employers, schools, and community and faith-based organizations. *(long term, partner led with county resources)*
- Aggressively pursue strategies to increase the amount of affordable housing and address the affordability of housing for low-income residents (e.g., social determinants tax, zoning changes to require low-income housing, lobbying the General Assembly to pass a Medicaid waiver to authorize housing supplements, etc.) as a social determinant of health. *(short and long term, both county and partner led with county resources)*
- Promote the use of social impact funds or other investment opportunities to attract capital investment in the built environment of BIPOC and low-income communities to improve and expand housing stock and other neighborhood amenities and require plans to avoid displacement as neighborhoods change. *(long term, county led)*

Task Force Recommendations

- Require agency operations – systems, processes, and programs – align with the needs and priorities of clients following the principles of human centered (client centered/culturally competent) design. (*long term, county led*)
- Evaluate Fairfax County systems, including the proffer system and the contracting and procurement systems, to promote equitable and transparent asset, investment, and resource distribution county-wide. (*long term, county led*)
- Help close the racial wealth gap by building ecosystems that facilitate locally owned investment and economic opportunities for BIPOC. (*long term; county led, and partner led*)
- Develop, pilot, and institute Fairfax County equity-based decision-making tools for planning, projects, decision making and resource allocation. (*short term; county led, and partner led with county resources*)

Task Force Recommendations

- Develop and operationalize policies and procedures – to include stated goals and quantitative targets – to equitably recruit, hire, mentor, and promote women and people of color, recognizing that representation is different in various systems, professions, and job classes. (*long term, county led*)
- Establish a Community Advisory Board, with representation by BIPOC and low-income individuals, to monitor the degree to which each county agency has prioritized the needs of BIPOC and lower income communities. (*short term, county led*)
- Demonstrate intentionality in ensuring diverse representation and inclusiveness in power and decision-making opportunities. (*long term, county led*)
- Ensure our local leaders, public and private, have the knowledge and capacity to understand the drivers of racial inequity and their contribution to structural racism, and use their power to build more equitable communities. (*short term and long term, county and partner led*)

INSIGHTS



Insights from the Task Force

Through our work and discussions, the committees compiled this list of insights and share them in addition to the recommendations to deepen the county's and community's ability to understand and act upon the challenges and opportunities associated with the inequities present in Fairfax County.

- Similar root causes across multiple challenge areas
 - Access to opportunity hinges on the ability to earn a living wage
 - Who has power or gets to make and influence decisions in Fairfax County is related to wealth
 - People of color need to have more representation in civic life, including in elected and appointed offices
- Disparities by race exist across income levels.
- Change in policy and change in culture are critical.
- It is important for white people to become supportive accomplices and stop being allies with a savior complex.
- Our health and social services systems were built on a deficiency model, not a wellness model.
- **Systems aren't broken. They get the results they were designed to get. Therefore, systems which perpetuate oppression must be deconstructed and replaced with systems that are equitable.**

Insights from the Task Force

Things that stand in the way of progress

- Leadership/staff transitions as well as siloed approaches across departments and issues stifle progress
- Communities lack awareness of resources and opportunities
- Lack of consistent, dedicated funding to support equity priorities
- NIMBY attitudes – Those who have benefitted from existing systems actively work against change
- Beliefs that explain racial disparities as wholly dependent on personal behavior and choice put the responsibility for fixing centuries of racial inequities on the shoulders of people of color
- Without equitable development strategies embedded in the comprehensive planning processes, you can't address structural inequity in the built environment

Things that can facilitate progress

- Communicating with people in ways they are used to communicating (e.g., language, technology)
- Always taking stock of who is being left out and whose voice is not at the table, especially in Boards, Authorities, Commissions, Task Forces and other Board-appointed bodies
- Centering the voices of people of color and low-income people and valuing their lived experiences
- Recognizing the role local government plays in shaping communities' economic development and growth agenda
 - Investing in transformational projects and infrastructure in historically marginalized communities to build opportunity and foster socioeconomic mobility
 - Incentivizing developers to foster positive impacts of new development on marginalized communities

NEXT STEPS

- The work of the Task Force was intended to center the voice of the community in prioritizing and promoting the changes necessary to advance racial equity in Fairfax County.

- The Task Force has completed its initial charge, but the work continues...
 - Staff will engage members of the Task Force and relevant stakeholders to develop plans for how the accepted recommendations can be operationalized
 - Recommendations and plans to operationalize will be presented to the Board of Supervisors by June 2021 for consideration and prioritization
 - The community will be provided an opportunity to provide input on the recommendations
 - Updates will be provided to the Board of Supervisors, county leadership and staff, and the community