

## SPOTLIGHT ON

# Fairfax County, Virginia

In 2010, Fairfax County began a concerted county-wide effort to address racial equity by creating the Disproportionality and Disparity Prevention and Elimination Team (DDPET). The DDPET is an interagency team focused on reducing the disproportionate presence of African American children and youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, eliminating the achievement gap, and reducing health disparities for these same population subgroups.



As in other jurisdictions, data have played a critical role in catalyzing efforts to mobilize County resources around achieving racial equity. In 2012, a recognition of racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system led to an Institutional Analysis, conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, to learn more about the experience of youth and their families in their encounters with government institutions. While African American and Hispanic youth comprise 10 percent and 17 percent of the County's youth population respectively, they represent 37 percent and 36 percent of detention center placements.

The Institutional Analysis was designed as a diagnostic process conducted by a trained team of researchers to reveal the gap between what a youth and their family needs to be safe, stable, and successful and what institutions are actually set up to do. The ethnographic methods of the analysis helped to uncover the ways in which standard processes of government, which treat people as "cases," contribute to problematic outcomes for youth and families. The study also revealed key pathways that the County could employ to improve these outcomes, such as changing to institutional procedures and protocols, expanding knowledge and skills, and enhancing partnerships.

In addition to catalyzing efforts to learn more about racial disparities and to identify strategies for achieving equity, data have also been helpful for starting conversations across departments within the County that do not usually work together. For example, while DDPET was largely focused on work within human services departments, its leaders realized that the racial equity issues facing Fairfax County reach far beyond human services. At the same time, another group in the County was developing a strategic plan to facilitate continued economic success in Fairfax County, and among their high level strategic goals was economic success through education and social equity.

DDPET began efforts to build a partnership with the economic development planners to create an Equity Growth Profile, based on data that help to highlight the targeted opportunities to make a difference on both equity and economic success. Human Services staff leading the DDPET found that the planners and developers used different language in their work, and data helped to start a conversation across departmental cultures. The data were helpful in building the case that there is a need for action.

Having started the conversation and the process of building a partnership to work together toward shared equity goals, the next step was to determine how to share data to track collective progress. Even within Human Services, different agencies use a wide variety of data systems to capture their

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work. In response to these challenges, Fairfax County staff involved in the Place Based Initiative, which focused on a neighborhood area, and began to use the Results Based Accountability Results Scorecard to integrate all data related to the neighborhood program to contribute to the shared goals of the initiative. Having experimented with this type of data tracking system, Fairfax County was a natural candidate to join the national-level pilot of the GARE's Racial Equity Scorecard.

These processes highlight the challenges in tracking and sharing data to make cross-jurisdiction comparisons. Sharing data with others is a growth experience, as agencies and jurisdictions are not accustomed to such a high level of transparency. DDPET leaders started from a small, neighborhood level, which they feel has helped them communicate strong messages, have shared strategies, and create sense of urgency. At the same time, DDPET leaders caution that while data are critical, one must be careful not to get mired in data analysis, looking for the "magic number" that would make the issue seem urgent. Like all tools, data must be used in a strategic way.

In Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), the 10th largest school district in the country, equity leaders benefit from being inside of one system with data that are easily shared and used in day-to-day work across the district, from the school level to the county level. For many years, FCPS has disaggregated data on student achievement, discipline, attendance and more by race. FCPS sets county level goals for reducing gaps in performance and is then able to identify which schools are struggling the most on those indicators and put additional resources into those schools, tracking their performance data closely.

FCPS is using student level, school level and district-level data to inform strategies to advance racial equity. School level data analysis is done to identify individual students, by name and by need, who may need additional attention. For example, the schools will examine first quarter grades in the 9th grade and create a list of students who are most at risk of not graduating. Through this multi-layered analysis of data, FCPS works to accumulate progress at the county level.

Fairfax County partnered with PolicyLink to develop an Equitable Growth Profile, based on the National Equity Atlas, including a composite measure to look at various contributors to racial disparity and project GDP outcomes if equity were achieved. Through this process, the County convened a "ground-truthing" group including different sectors, which is helping to bridge conversation across planners, zoners, the business community, and Human Services.

### **To Learn More**

[Disproportionate Minority Contact for African American and Hispanic Youth](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/healthhuman/disproportionality/the_story_behind_the_numbers_september_2012.pdf)

[http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/healthhuman/disproportionality/the\\_story\\_behind\\_the\\_numbers\\_september\\_2012.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/healthhuman/disproportionality/the_story_behind_the_numbers_september_2012.pdf)

[Fair Housing Analysis of Impediments Five-Year Fair Housing Planning](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ohrep/hrd/publications/analysis-of-impediments.pdf)

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