

CMS sees steps toward racial equity in advanced high school courses, but no quick fixes

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A report discussed Tuesday shows Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools making progress toward getting Black and Hispanic high school students to succeed in advance classes. But that progress came at least partly from redefining the data.

The school board and former Superintendent Earnest Winston spent months working **with consultant A.J. Crabill** to zero in on grim numbers describing the district's biggest academic challenges. In January [they looked at a report](#) showing Black and Hispanic students were far less likely than white and Asian counterparts to take and pass college-level classes in high school.

[Tuesday's report](#) showed all racial groups had made gains, but the largest increases were for Black, Hispanic and multiracial seniors.

"This is what we'd like to see in our other measures: all subgroups improving (and) those who are farthest from target making more growth," Chief Accountability Officer Frank Barnes said.

The board is also tracking data on third-grade reading scores for Black and Hispanic students and Math I scores for all students.

The December report was based on Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge Program and community college classes.

Tuesday's report added students who are taking advanced career-tech courses to the tally.

Barnes said Wednesday that CMS also revised the way it counts the "dual enrollment" community college classes. "Our prior identification of dual enrollment courses was unduly narrow (related to course code usage)," he said.

Now a little more than 50% of Black and Hispanic seniors are expected to graduate with at least one advanced course credit in June, up from the low 40s in December. The goal is 75% by 2024, a level that white and Asian students have already topped.

No pause for leadership switch

Board Chair Elyse Dashew acknowledged one big change: The board fired Winston last week, and Interim Superintendent Hugh Hattabaugh has stepped in.

"Things are different tonight," Dashew said. "We have a new superintendent. And yet it is so important that we continue the work, not shift the work. We're not missing a beat."

Crabill, a [Texas-based consultant](#) with the Council of the Great City Schools, had frequently urged the board to demand clear strategies for improvement from Winston and hold him accountable if he didn't provide them. On Tuesday he checked in by remote connection and agreed the work must continue while Hattabaugh gets acclimated. He said CMS has "depth on the bench" for other top staff to keep the focus on the board's goals.

Barnes said CMS offered after-school and weekend tutoring for students who are at risk of failing advanced classes, but many students who were identified didn't show up. He said it's fairly rare for students to enroll and fail; the bigger challenge is that students of color are less likely to sign up for advanced classes.

Barnes said CMS ensures that all high schools offer the classes and will keep pressing for enrollment. The plan, he said, "is to be able to identify adults in a school who are trusted adults ... and we leverage those trusted adults to push students into those courses."

Have to start early

The board's goals are focused on changes that will occur in the next two years. Hattabaugh, a retired administrator who worked in CMS from 2007 to 2012, said the real work of pushing all students to excel at high-level work needs to start in middle school.

"You have to prepare them there, taking rigorous courses so that they're ready to move to AP and be successful," he said. "You just can't throw children in there and expect them to do well."