

Appendix C

Stakeholder Feedback

(C1)	Staff Survey	Pages 1 – 44
(C2)	Parent Survey	Pages 45 – 56
(C3)	Focus Groups	Pages 57 – 105
(C4)	Alumni Survey	Pages 106 – 114

MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT SURVEY ANALYSIS

Prepared for Arlington Public Schools



In the following report, Hanover Research analyzes responses to the Minority Achievement Survey administered to staff in the Arlington Public School District. The purpose of the survey was to establish awareness and efficacy of the programs and services offered by the Office of Minority Achievement and the Minority Achievement Coordinator.



www.hanoverresearch.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary and Key Findings	3
INTRODUCTION	3
KEY FINDINGS.....	5
Section I: Awareness	6
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	6
FIGURES	8
Section II: Mission and Collaboration.....	22
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	22
FIGURES	25
Section III: Background Information and Segmentations	45
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	45
FIGURES	45
Appendix: Minority Achievement Design	47

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In the following report, Hanover Research analyzes responses to the Minority Achievement Survey administered to staff in the Arlington Public School District (APS). The purpose of the survey was to establish awareness and efficacy of the programs and services offered by the Office of Minority Achievement (OMA) and the Minority Achievement Coordinator (MAC).

This report comprises three sections and includes two supplemental data files:

- **Section I: Awareness** analyzes respondents' awareness and perception of awareness of various aspects of minority achievement programs and services at their schools.
- **Section II: Mission and Collaboration** presents an analysis of survey responses to questions about the mission and collaboration efforts with the Office of Minority Achievement and the Minority Achievement Coordinator.
- **Section III: Background Information and Segmentations** presents respondents' background information, which is used to segment results in the preceding sections.
- **Data Supplement 1 – Crosstabs:** provides full tabulations of the survey results – both in the aggregate and by multiple segmentations.
- **Data Supplement 2 – Open-Ended Responses:** provides verbatim open-ended responses that can be sorted by segments and by themes.

Responses in the report are presented in the aggregate and segmented by pay scale/school level (P-Scale – All; T-Scale – Elementary/Middle School; T-Scale – High School), as summarized below in Figure ES.1. Some questions are further segmented by T-Scale type and familiarity with the MAC.¹ Footnotes on figures indicate the survey question number and corresponding objective. The Office of Minority Achievement's Program Evaluation Design, which includes the list of objectives, can be found in the Appendix.²

¹ Results are segmented by these groups where requested by APS.

² This document was provided to Hanover Research by APS.

Figure ES.1: Summary of Samples and Segmentations:

SEGMENTATIONS	SAMPLE SIZE	PERCENT OF SAMPLE
Total		
All	447	100%
Pay Scale*		
P-scale	28	6%
T-scale	411	94%
School Level		
Elementary School	26	6%
Middle School	207	46%
High School	214	48%
Pay Scale x School Level*		
T-Scale - Elementary/Middle School	215	49%
T-Scale - High School	196	44%
P-Scale - All	28	6%

*Sums to 439 rather than 447 as eight respondents left this question blank.

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, P-Scale respondents are much more familiar with, and have a much more positive view of the MAC and OMA services than T-Scale respondents. Many T-Scale respondents are unaware of the programs and services offered by the OMA and the MAC, and would like information about these programs and services to be more widely available. Additionally, in contrast with P-Scale respondents, many T-Scale respondents are unaware that one purpose of the MAC is to provide services to teachers, rather than just students.
- Slightly greater than one-half of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families at their schools. This figure was substantially higher for P-Scale respondents and respondents that were at least very familiar with the Minority achievement program, and slightly higher for T-Scale high school respondents. However, some note that due to widespread need, the position should be full-time, while others note that the MAC could be more supportive of teachers, rather than just students.
- While most respondents believe that the OMA and MAC provide valuable programs and services to students, several are concerned that these programs and services primarily target African American students, and to a lesser extent, Latino students. These respondents indicate that this makes students from other minority backgrounds feel unwelcome. Additionally, certain respondents indicate that the programs target high-achieving students, while ignoring average or below average students.

SECTION I: AWARENESS

This section presents an analysis of survey responses regarding the awareness of OMA and MAC programs and services.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Nearly 40 percent of all respondents are very or extremely familiar with the work of the MAC.** However P-Scale respondents are much more familiar with the MAC than T-Scale respondents. Generally, teachers are less familiar with the MAC's work than other T-Scale respondents, and elementary and middle school T-Scale respondents are the least familiar with this work (Figure 1.1, Figure 1.2, and Figure 1.3).
- Of the programs and services offered by the OMA, **respondents are most familiar with affinity or cohort groups and individual student advising.** They are also fairly familiar with college preparation-related services, such as the George Mason University Early Identification Program. Respondents are least familiar with programs and services for summer opportunities and preparing students to transition to new schools in APS (Figure 1.4, Figure 1.5a, and Figure 1.5b).
 - There is a **wide disparity in familiarity between P-Scale and T-Scale respondents** for all programs and services, with P-Scale respondents reporting much higher rates of familiarity than T-Scale respondents.
 - There are also some **differences between elementary/middle school T-Scale respondents and high school T-Scale respondents.**³ High school respondents are more aware of activities and programs for students (including field trips, summer opportunities, etc.), while elementary and middle school respondents are more aware of activities and programs for parents.
 - When given the opportunity to enumerate additional types of services offered by the MAC, **many respondents mentioned some form of individual counseling, and clubs and groups.** One mentioned that the MAC “offers a tremendous amount of emotional support. Her door is always open and she is a terrific advocate for these students.” Respondents also noted the perception that OMA targets only specific (generally African American and sometimes Latino) student groups on multiple occasions throughout the survey (Figure 1.6).

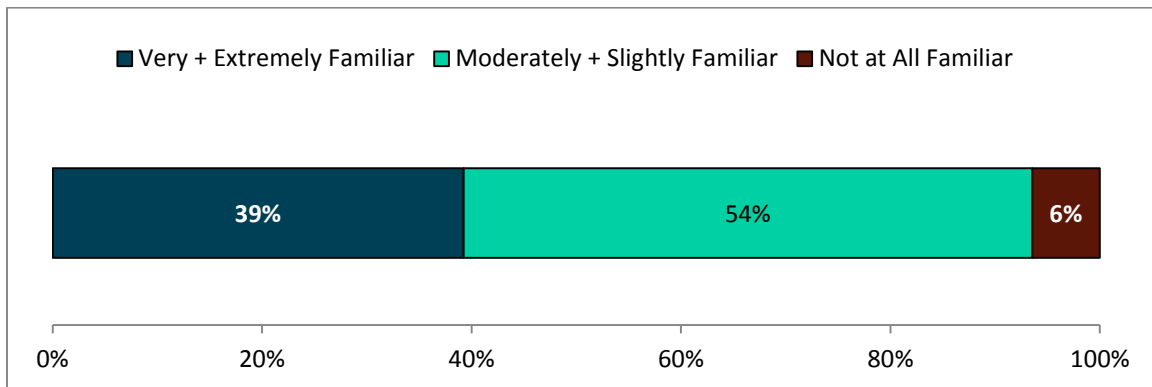
³ Per APS's request, some elementary and middle school responses were excluded for certain questions pertaining to college readiness, etc. See footnotes on Figure 1.4, Figure 1.5a, and Figure 1.5b.

- **Half of all respondents are aware that one of the MAC's roles is to meet with teachers to support students' academic success.** However, nearly one-third of all respondents indicate that they do not know what services the MAC offers to teachers (Figure 1.7 and Figure 1.8).
 - As with familiarity with the OMA, there is a major difference between P-Scale and T-Scale respondents. **P-Scale respondents are much more familiar than T-Scale respondents with the services offered to teachers by the MAC.**
 - Most respondents who listed “other” services offered to teachers mentioned **encouraging cultural competency and/or supporting student services and groups.** (Figure 1.9).
 - Respondents also mentioned the **unequal targeting of OMA programming in schools.** For example, one respondent noted that: “[The MAC] position is very invisible in the school and only serves specific minority groups of Latino/Hispanic and black/African American. There are no publicized programs targeted for East Asian, Middle Eastern or South Asian students.”
- **Half of respondents are unaware of the services that the MAC offers to parents at their school;** however this figure differs substantially across both pay scale and school level respondents. (Figure 1.10 and Figure 1.11).
 - While **61 percent of T-Scale high school and 46 percent of T-Scale elementary and middle school respondents do not know what services are offered to parents,** only 11 percent of P-Scale respondents report that they do not know.
 - In contrast, **nearly all (89 percent) of P-Scale respondents are aware that one of the MAC's services is to inform parents about programs and opportunities.**
 - Overall, **elementary and middle school T-Scale respondents are more aware of parental services than T-Scale high school respondents,** which supports the findings in Figure 1.5.
 - “Other” responses mostly indicated that the **MAC serves to facilitate communication with parents** (Figure 1.12).
- **Nearly two-thirds of all respondents learn about opportunities for minority students from the MAC** (Figure 1.13 and Figure 1.14).
 - **One hundred percent of P-Scale respondents learn about opportunities for minority students from the MAC,** followed by APS communication (61 percent). T-Scale respondents also learn about these opportunities most frequently from the MAC, though this figure is lower than P-Scale. Very few P-Scale respondents, and even fewer T-Scale respondents, learn about opportunities for minority students from the OMA website.
 - **“Other” responses primarily indicate that respondents learn about opportunities for minority students through announcements** (Figure 1.15).

- Overall, **most respondents believe that minority students and families are at least slightly aware of the opportunities available to them**, however more than one third do not know (38 percent) (Figure 1.16 and Figure 1.17).
 - **P-Scale respondents are especially convinced that minority students and families are aware of these opportunities**, with only four percent indicating that they are “not at all aware.” In contrast, T-Scale respondents in all school levels are much less sure about student and family awareness of these opportunities.

FIGURES

Figure 1.1: How familiar are you with the work of the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school?⁴



(n=443)

⁴ Question 4 – Objective 3a

Figure 1.2: How familiar are you with the work of the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school? (by Pay Scale and School Level)⁵

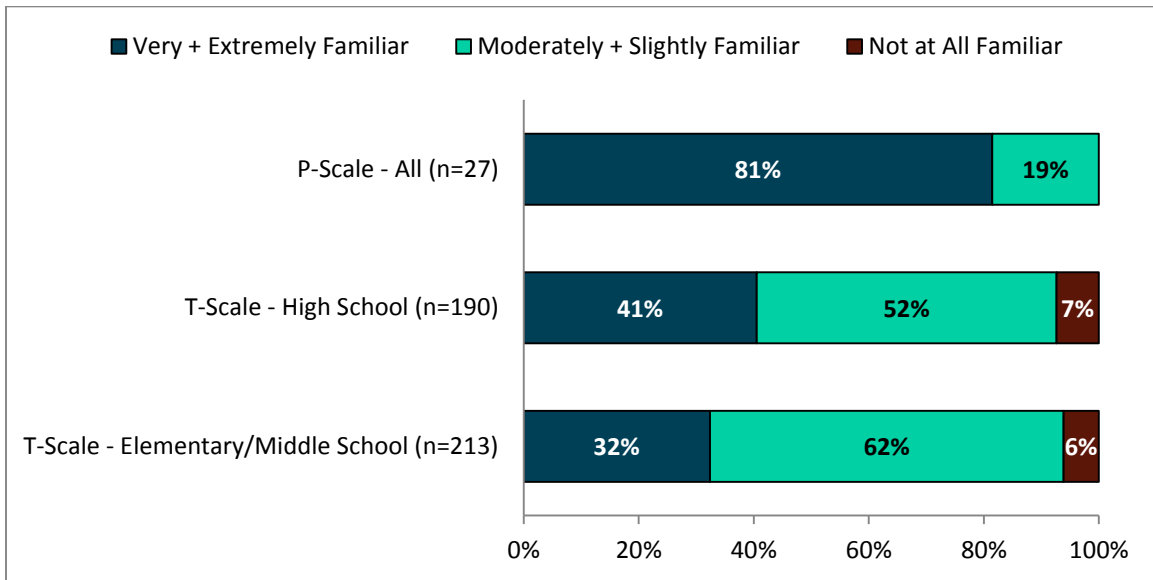
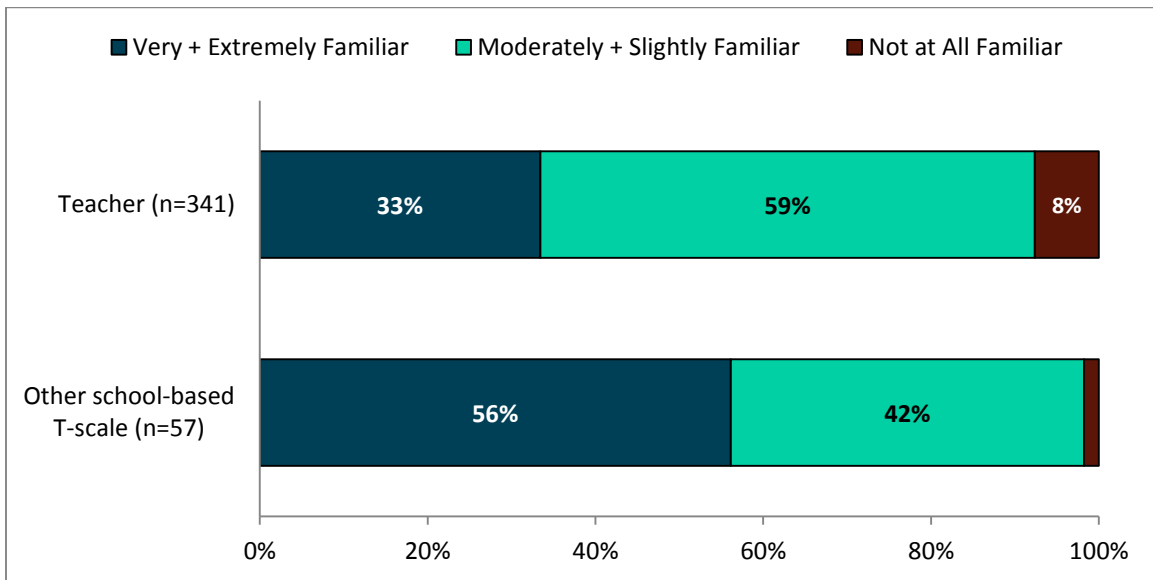


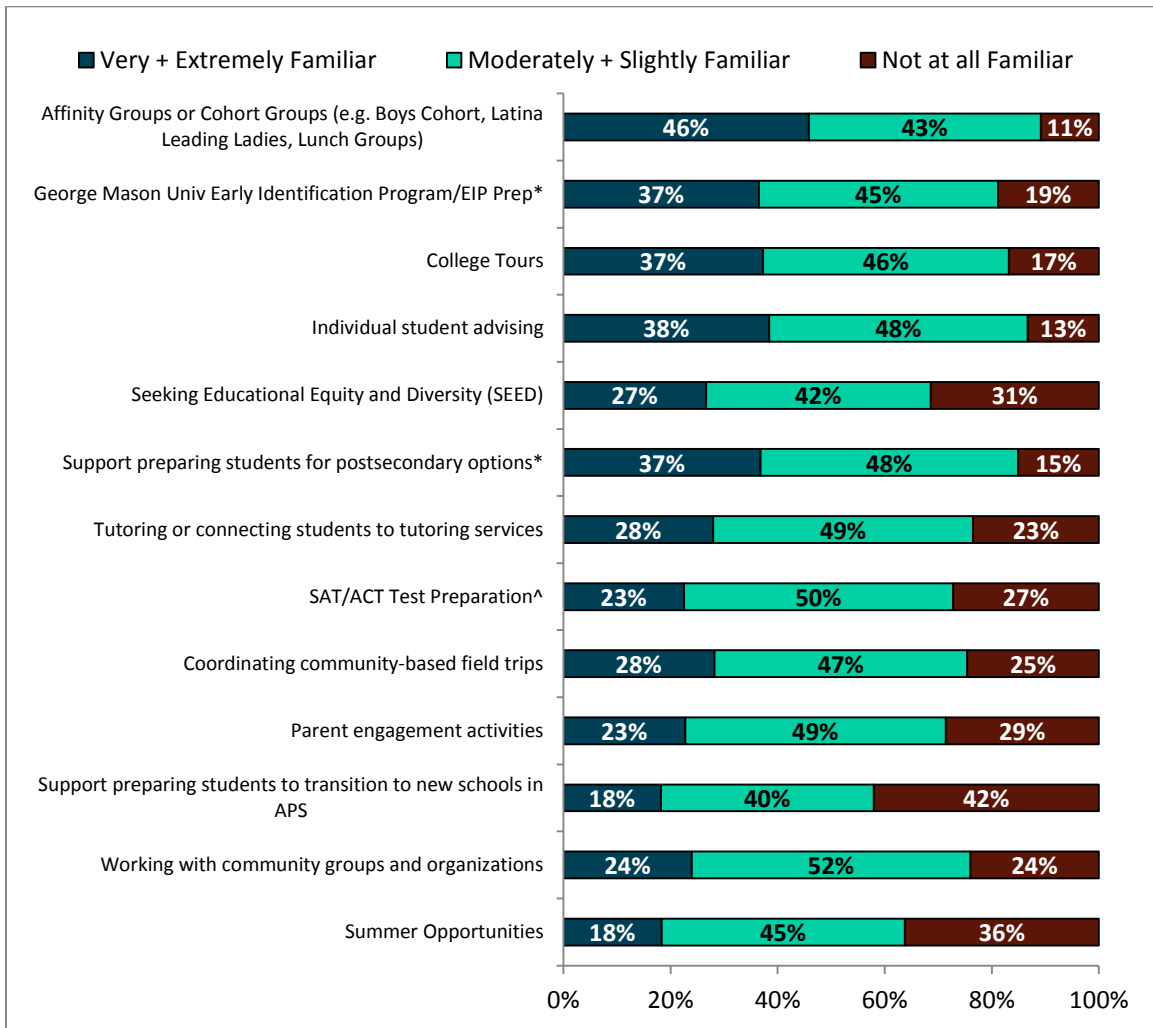
Figure 1.3: How familiar are you with the work of the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school? (by Teacher vs. "Other" T-Scale)⁶



⁵ Question 4 – Objective 3a

⁶ Question 4 – Objective 3a

Figure 1.4: How familiar are you with the following programs and services offered by the Office of Minority Achievement?⁷



(n=213-446)

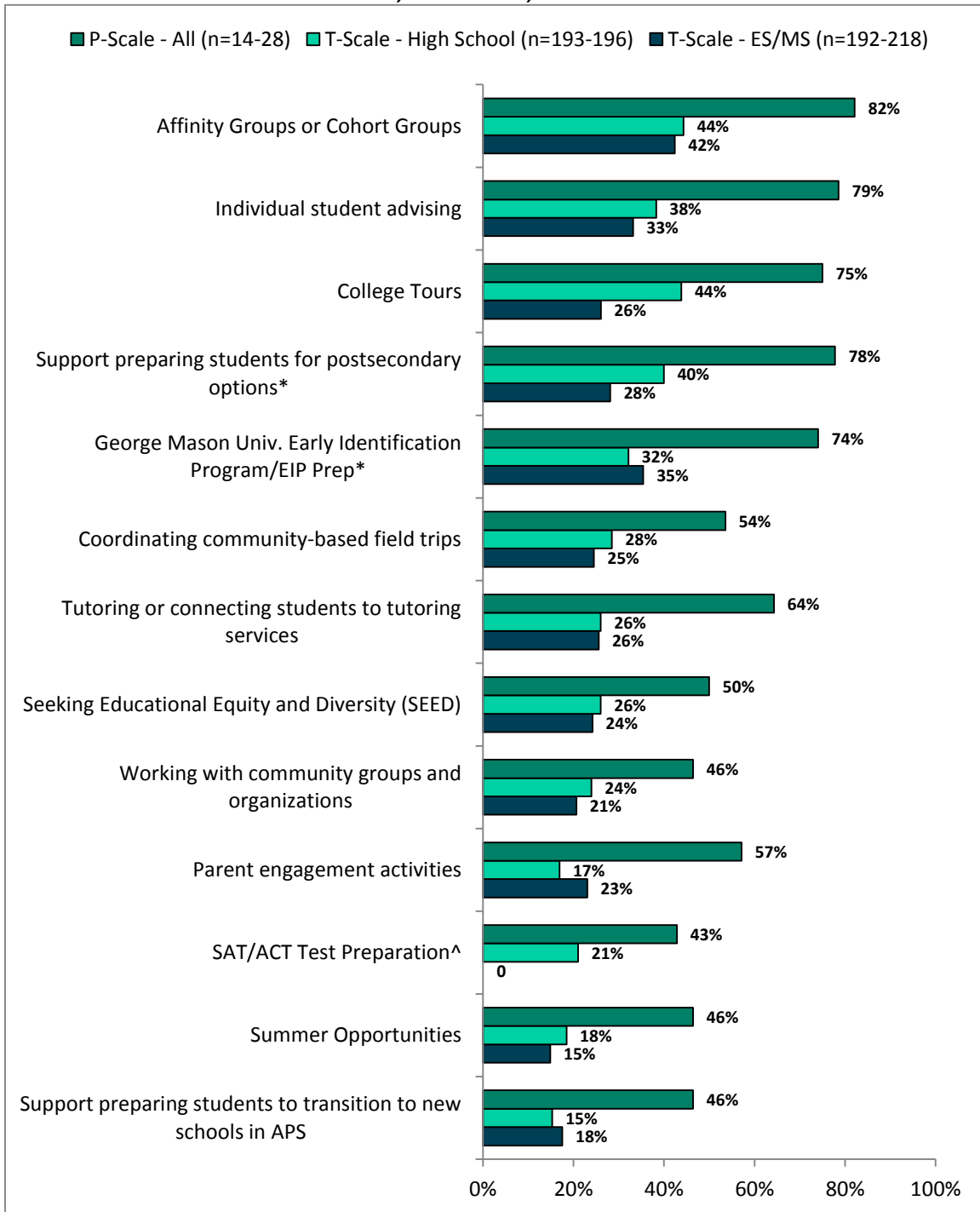
*Elementary responses excluded from question.

^Elementary and Middle School responses excluded from question.

⁷ Question 5 – Objective 3a

Figure 1.5a: How familiar are you with the following programs and services offered by the Office of Minority Achievement? (by Pay Scale and School Level)⁸

Very + Extremely Familiar



*Elementary responses excluded from question.

^Elementary and Middle School responses excluded from question.

⁸ Question 5 – Objective 3a

Figure 1.5b: How familiar are you with the following programs and services offered by the Office of Minority Achievement? (by Pay Scale and School Level)⁹

Program/Service	Group	Not at All Familiar	Slightly Familiar	Moderately Familiar	Very Familiar	Extremely Familiar
Affinity Groups or Cohort Groups (e.g. Boys Cohort, Latina Leading Ladies, Lunch Groups)	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	11%	7%	46%	36%
	T-Scale - HS (n=194)	12%	18%	26%	24%	21%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	12%	18%	28%	28%	14%
Individual student advising	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	14%	7%	50%	29%
	T-Scale - HS (n=196)	12%	19%	31%	25%	13%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	16%	23%	29%	22%	12%
College Tours	P-Scale - All (n=28)	4%	4%	18%	43%	32%
	T-Scale - HS (n=194)	11%	15%	30%	26%	18%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=215)	24%	26%	24%	19%	7%
Support preparing students for postsecondary options*	P-Scale - All (n=27)	4%	4%	15%	41%	37%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	11%	20%	29%	25%	15%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=192)	21%	28%	23%	21%	7%
George Mason University Early Identification Program (EIP)/EIP Prep*	P-Scale - All (n=27)	0%	4%	22%	37%	37%
	T-Scale - HS (n=196)	21%	20%	27%	18%	14%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=192)	19%	19%	26%	23%	13%
Coordinating community-based field trips	P-Scale - All (n=28)	11%	14%	21%	36%	18%
	T-Scale - HS (n=193)	24%	17%	30%	20%	9%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=216)	26%	19%	30%	18%	6%

⁹ Question 5 – Objective 3a

Appendix C1

Program/Service	Group	Not at All Familiar	Slightly Familiar	Moderately Familiar	Very Familiar	Extremely Familiar
Tutoring or connecting students to tutoring services	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	14%	21%	43%	21%
	T-Scale - HS (n=196)	24%	23%	27%	17%	9%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=215)	25%	25%	25%	18%	7%
Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED)	P-Scale - All (n=28)	18%	14%	18%	21%	29%
	T-Scale - HS (n=196)	30%	20%	24%	11%	15%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=215)	34%	23%	19%	14%	10%
Working with community groups and organizations	P-Scale - All (n=28)	7%	14%	32%	29%	18%
	T-Scale - HS (n=196)	26%	22%	28%	16%	8%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=218)	24%	24%	31%	16%	5%
Parent engagement activities	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	14%	29%	36%	21%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	35%	21%	27%	11%	6%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	26%	22%	29%	17%	6%
SAT/ACT Test Preparation^	P-Scale - All (n=14)	7%	7%	43%	21%	21%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	29%	28%	22%	13%	8%
Summer Opportunities	P-Scale - All (n=28)	14%	14%	25%	36%	11%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	34%	25%	23%	12%	6%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=215)	40%	23%	21%	10%	5%
Support preparing students to transition to new schools in APS	P-Scale - All (n=28)	4%	29%	21%	25%	21%
	T-Scale - HS (n=196)	47%	21%	16%	8%	8%
	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	41%	22%	19%	13%	5%

*Elementary responses excluded from question.

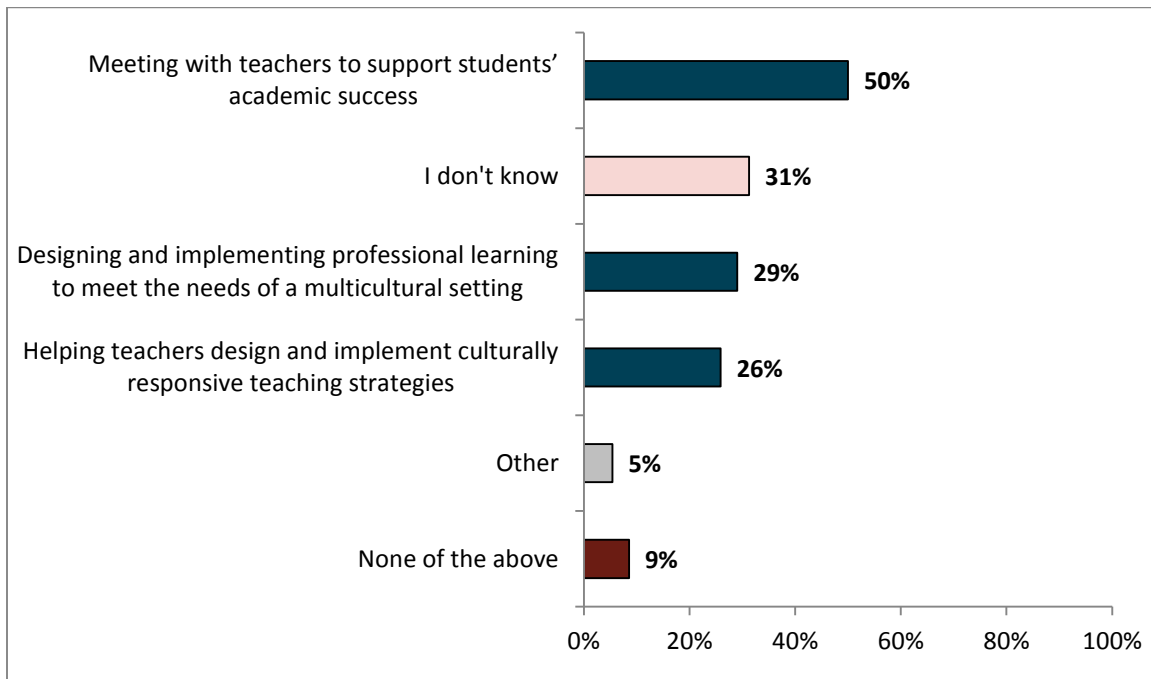
^Elementary and Middle School responses excluded from question.

Figure 1.6: What additional types of services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school offer to students? – Open-Response Question ¹⁰

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Counseling	116	46%
Clubs and groups	97	39%
College preparation	32	13%
Organizes trips/community activities	32	13%
Coordinates with parents/families	26	10%
Promotes awareness	22	9%
MSAN	17	7%
Other	10	4%
None/Unsure	62	25%
Total Valid Responses	251	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

Figure 1.7: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator offer to teachers at your school?¹¹



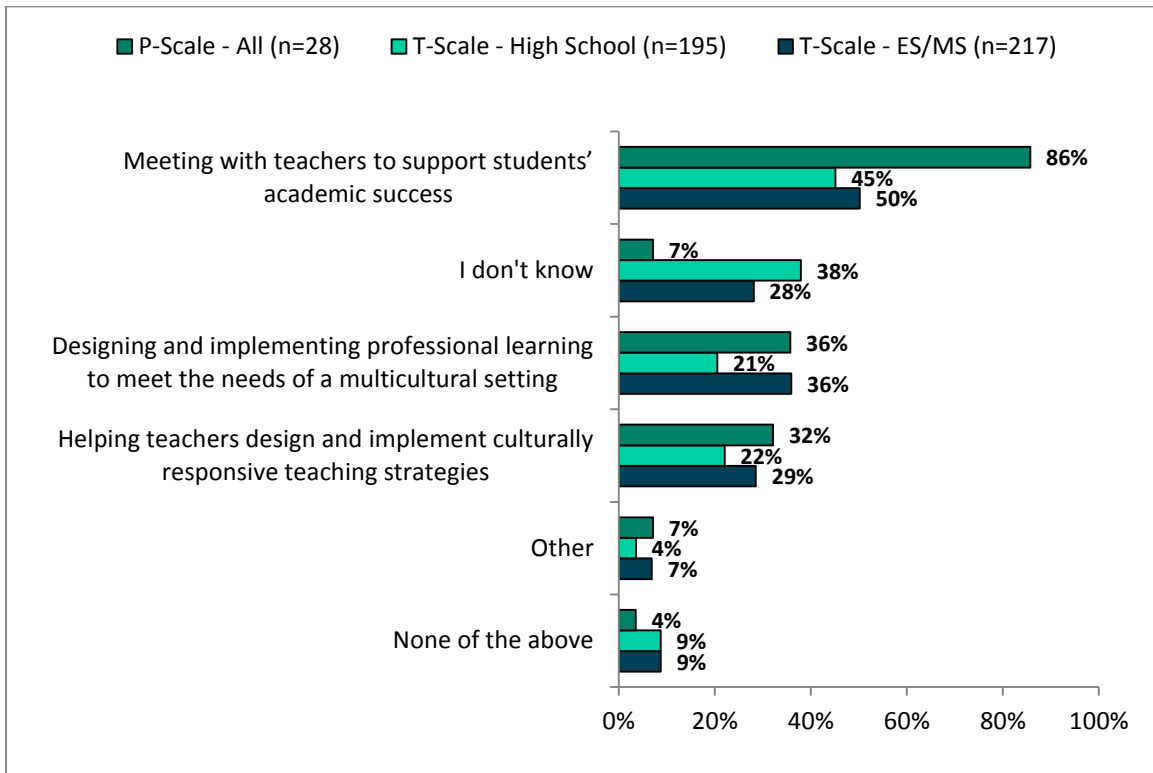
(n=444)

Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

¹⁰ Question 6 – Objective 3a, 4a

¹¹ Question 7 – Objective 3a, 3b, 4a

Figure 1.8: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator offer to teachers at your school? (by Pay Scale and School Level)¹²



Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

Figure 1.9: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator offer to teachers at your school? – “Other”¹³

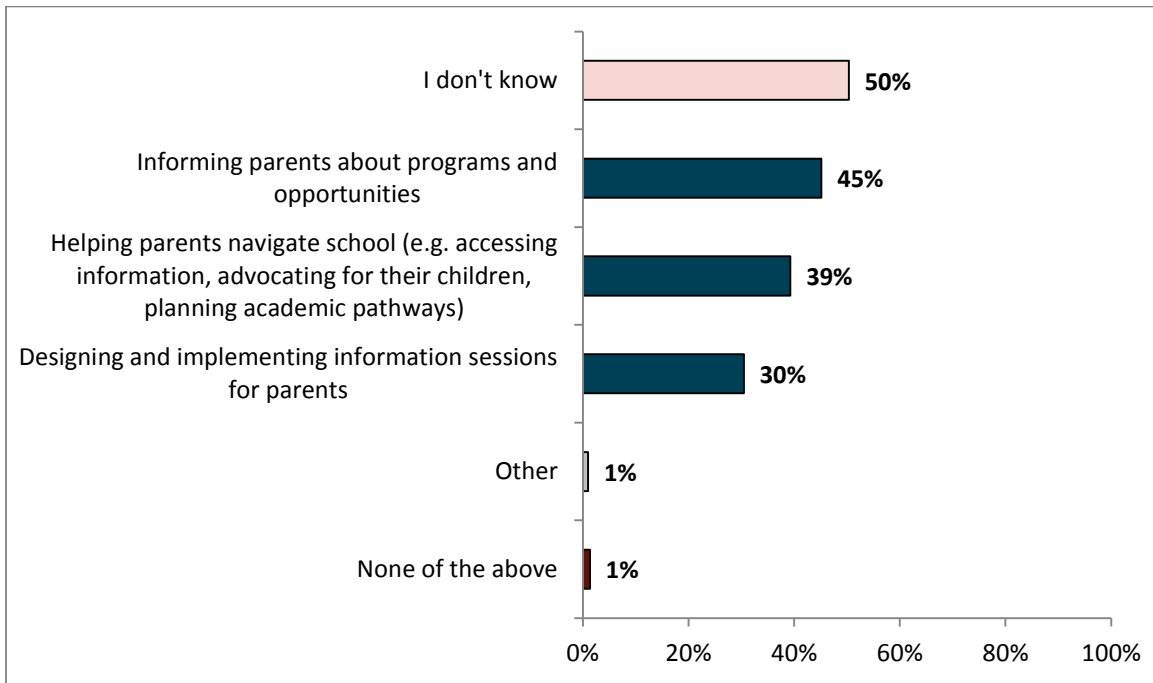
THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Encourages cultural competency	10	42%
Student services/groups	10	42%
Academic help	5	21%
Faculty assistance	4	17%
Conferences/activities	3	13%
Coordinates with parents/families	1	4%
Other	3	13%
None/Unsure	4	17%
Total Valid Responses	24	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

¹² Question 7 – Objective 3a, 3b, 4a

¹³ Question 7 – Objective 3a, 3b, 4a

Figure 1.10: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator offer to parents at your school?¹⁴

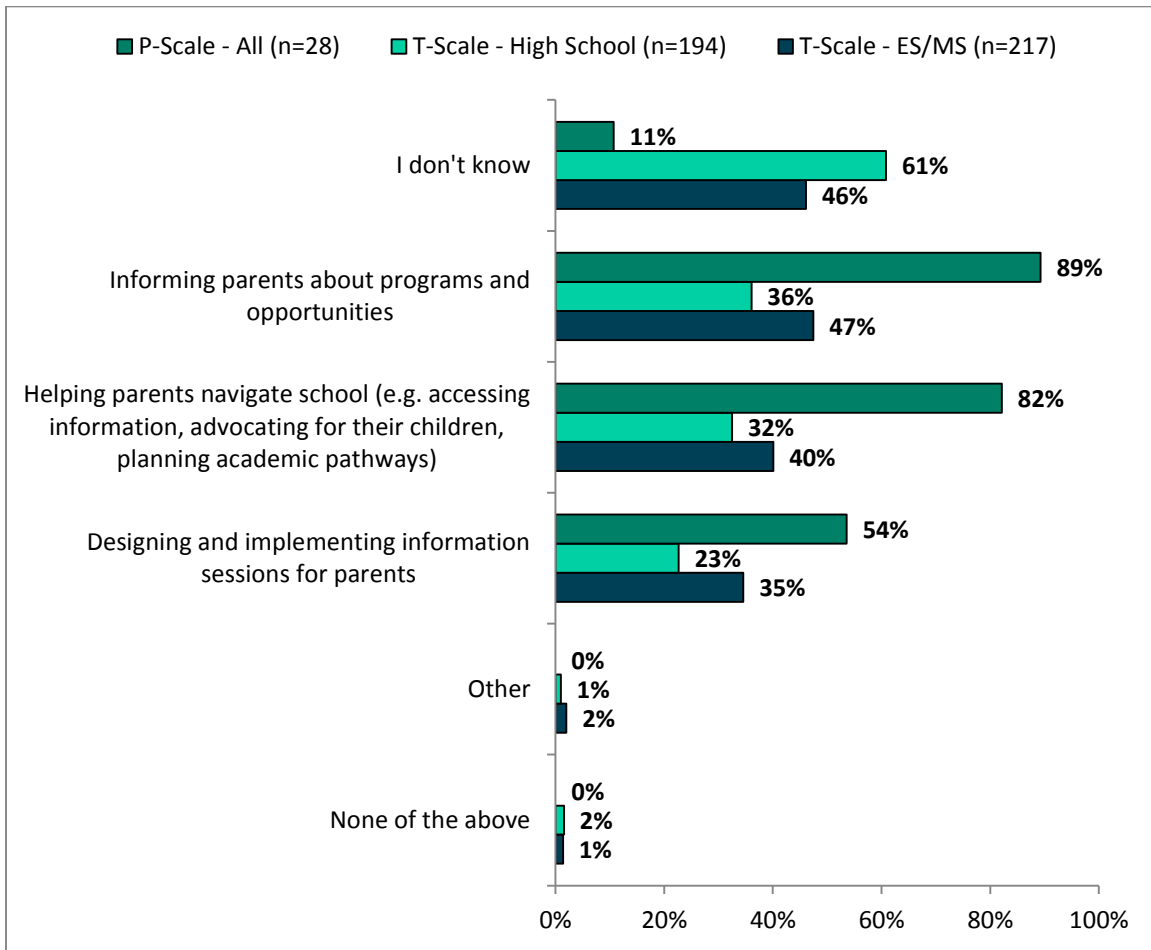


(n=443)

Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

¹⁴ Question 8 – Objective 3a, 3b, 4a

Figure 1.11: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator offer to parents at your school? (by Pay Scale and School Level)¹⁵



Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

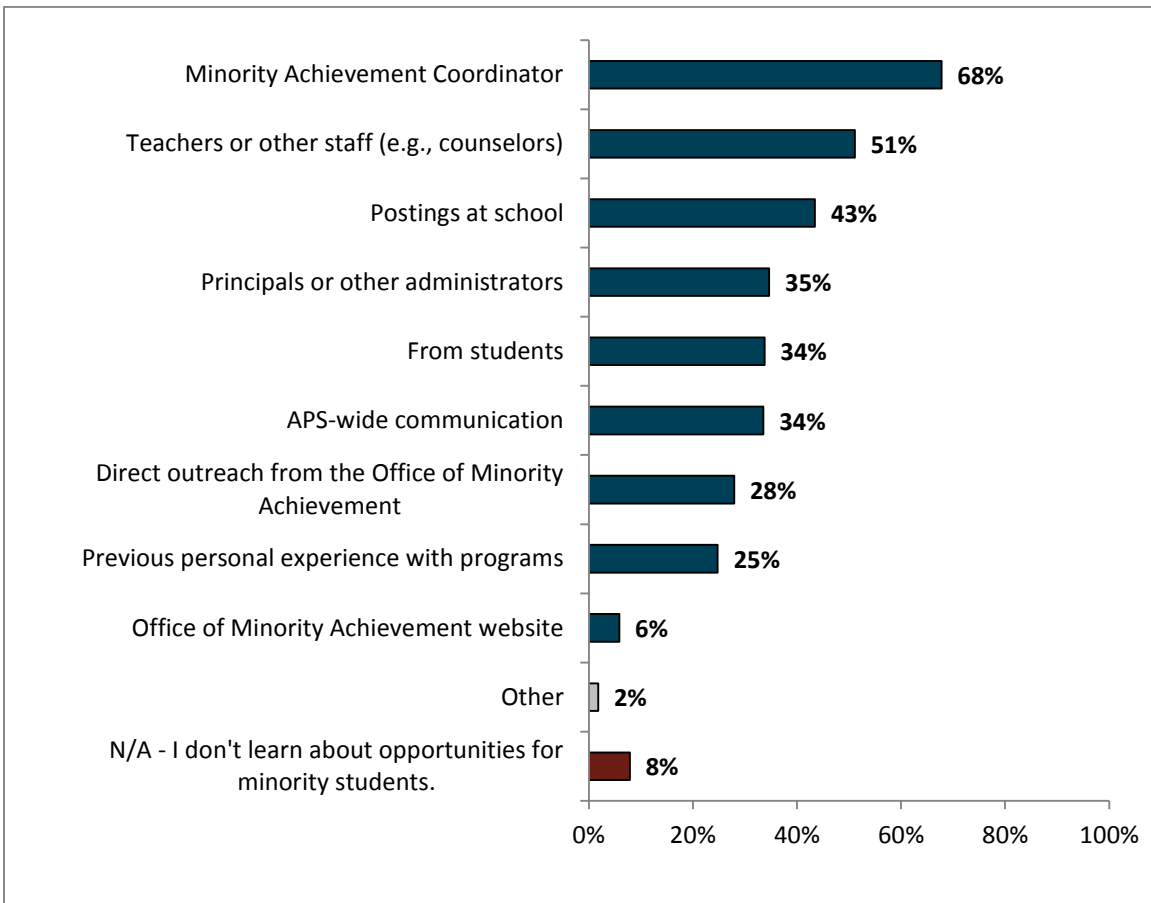
Figure 1.12: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator offer to parents at your school? – “Other”¹⁶

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Facilitates communication	4	67%
None/Unsure	2	33%
Total Valid Responses	6	100%

¹⁵ Question 8 – Objective 3a, 3b, 4a

¹⁶ Question 8 – Objective 3a, 3b, 4a

Figure 1.13: How do you learn about opportunities for minority students at your school?¹⁷

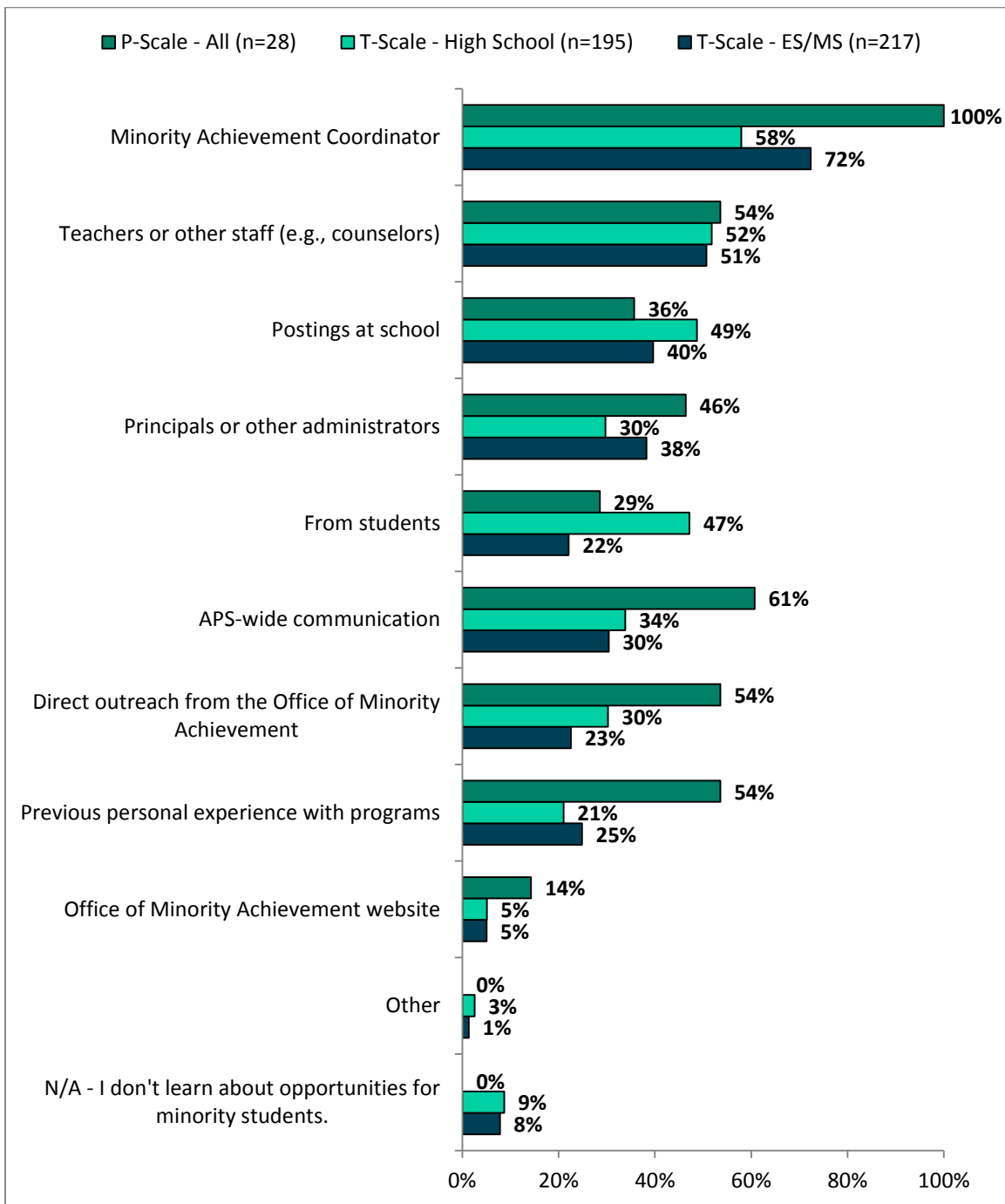


(n=444)

Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

¹⁷ Question 9 – Objective 2c

**Figure 1.14: How do you learn about opportunities for minority students at your school?
(by Pay Scale and School Level)¹⁸**



Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

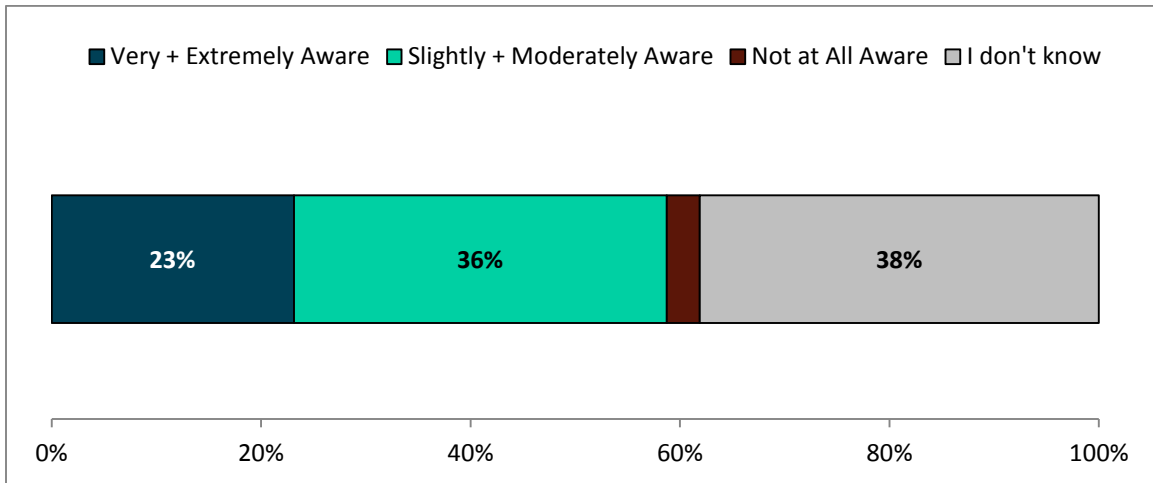
¹⁸ Question 9 – Objective 2c

Figure 1.15: How do you learn about opportunities for minority students at your school? – “Other”¹⁹

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Announcements	4	50%
Staff meetings/notes	2	25%
Posted materials	2	25%
Other staff members	1	13%
Total	8	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

Figure 1.16: How aware are minority students and their families of the resources and opportunities available for minority students?²⁰

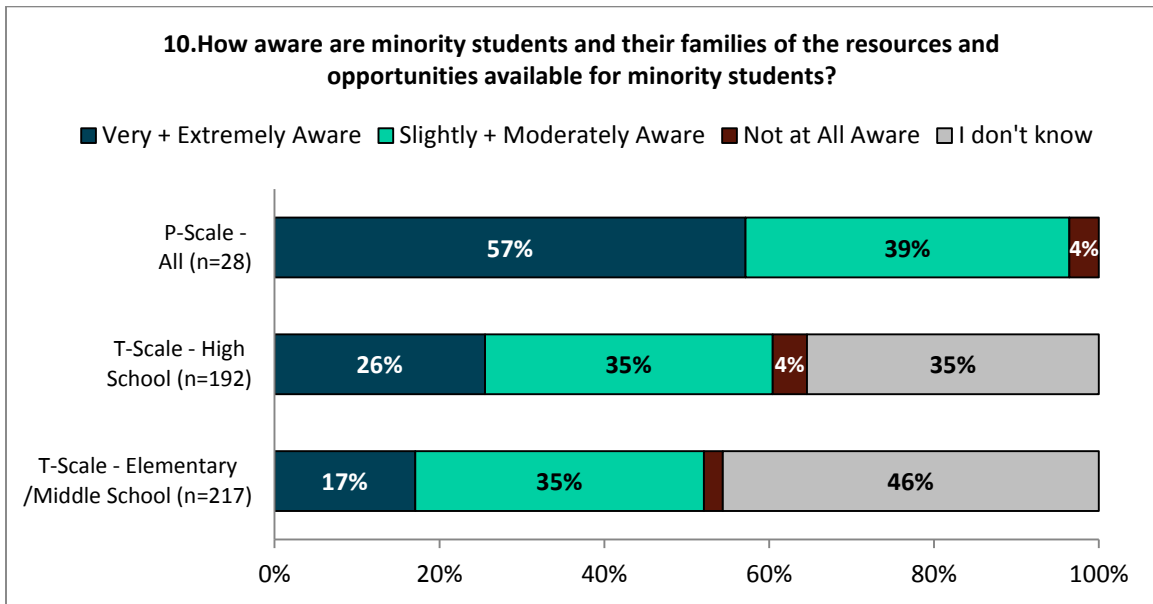


(n=441)

¹⁹ Question 9 – Objective 2c

²⁰ Question 10 – Objective 2d

Figure 1.17: How aware are minority students and their families of the resources and opportunities available for minority students? (by Pay Scale and School Level)²¹



²¹ Question 10 – Objective 2d.

SECTION II: MISSION AND COLLABORATION

This section presents the key findings and figures for survey responses pertaining to the mission and collaboration of the OMA and MAC.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **A majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that the MAC supports students in a variety of ways**, such as “encourag[ing] students to take challenging courses,” “expos[ing] students to the rigors and expectations of the next level of education.” (Figure 2.1, Figure 2.2, and Figure 2.3), however a substantial minority indicate that they are unsure.
 - **In contrast with most other questions, these responses are not notably different between P-Scale and T-Scale respondents** or by school level. However, there are differences when responses are segmented by familiarity with the work of the MAC. Respondents who are more familiar with the MAC generally agree with the statements about the ways in which the MAC supports students more strongly than those who are less familiar with the work, while a substantial majority of those not at all familiar selected “I don’t know.”
- When asked to describe a time when advocacy by the MAC contributed to a systemic change at their school, respondents most frequently described **committees, professional development, and parent/family outreach or communication** (Figure 2.4).
- While **most respondents feel confident in their interactions with families of minority students**, and that the school administration supports staff in their interactions with families of minority students, T-Scale respondents indicate feeling less supported by the MAC in these interactions than P-Scale respondents. Those who are less familiar with the work of the MAC are less likely to indicate feeling supported by the MAC, though they also select “I don’t know” at a much higher rate than respondents more familiar with the MAC’s work (Figure 2.5, Figure 2.6a, Figure 2.6b, and Figure 2.6c).
 - Respondents who indicate feeling supported by the MAC were asked to describe these types of support. **Most indicated that the MAC supports them in communication, primarily with families, and as an informal resource for advice and help** (Figure 2.7).
- When asked what additional support would be useful in interacting with minority students and families, **many mentioned that they would like to have more information on available opportunities for these students**, as well as additional help in communication. Many indicated that translation services would be especially helpful, including languages other than Spanish (Figure 2.8).

- **Approximately 54 percent of respondents indicate that they agree or strongly agree that the Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families at their schools.** However, 38 percent selected “I don’t know.” Agreement with this statement is higher for P-Scale respondents than other groups, as well as those who are more familiar with the MAC’s work. P-Scale respondents and those who were less familiar with the MAC’s work were more likely to select “I don’t know” (Figure 2.9, Figure 2.10a, Figure 2.10b, and Figure 2.10c).
- The 38 respondents (9%) who indicated that they do not feel that Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families were asked to explain their responses. **Some indicated that the OMA and MAC were generally not offering enough opportunities, and were not proactive enough in communicating which opportunities are available.** Others mentioned the same issue as other questions, where the focus is only on certain minorities, and still others mentioned that the programs only target above average students (Figure 2.11).
- **Respondents indicated that they collaborate most frequently with the MAC in discussing a student’s progress or building a student’s self-esteem,** while the least frequent types of collaboration are developing new strategies to work with minority students and planning a specific intervention or program (Figure 2.12). These responses differ substantially when looking at results segmented by pay scale/school level (Figure 2.13) and by disaggregated T-Scale employees (Figure 2.14).
 - **P-Scale respondents report engaging in all types of collaboration more frequently than either level of T-Scale respondents.** Only approximately one-tenth of P-Scale respondents indicate that they never engage in any of collaboration types, while 33 to 61 percent of T-Scale respondents indicate that these types of collaboration never occur.
 - Disaggregating by T-Scale (teachers vs. “other”) also shows some differences, though they are much smaller. **Overall, teachers report collaborating less frequently than “other” T-Scale respondents.**
- When asked about additional ways in which they collaborate with the MAC, **respondents primarily mentioned informal help and advice when needed about particular students or families.** Others noted collaboration in terms of events, groups, and extracurricular activities. Others indicated that they would like more collaboration, but that the MAC is only a part-time position, which does not leave enough time to help everyone (Figure 2.15).
- **Nearly half of all respondents report that they are unsure of how students are identified to participate in Minority Achievement programs and services.** Among those who do know, many indicate that students are referred by teachers, the MAC, or the school counselor. (Figure 2.16)
 - **As with other questions, P-Scale respondents are much more aware of how referrals are made.** Only seven percent of P-Scale respondents are unsure of

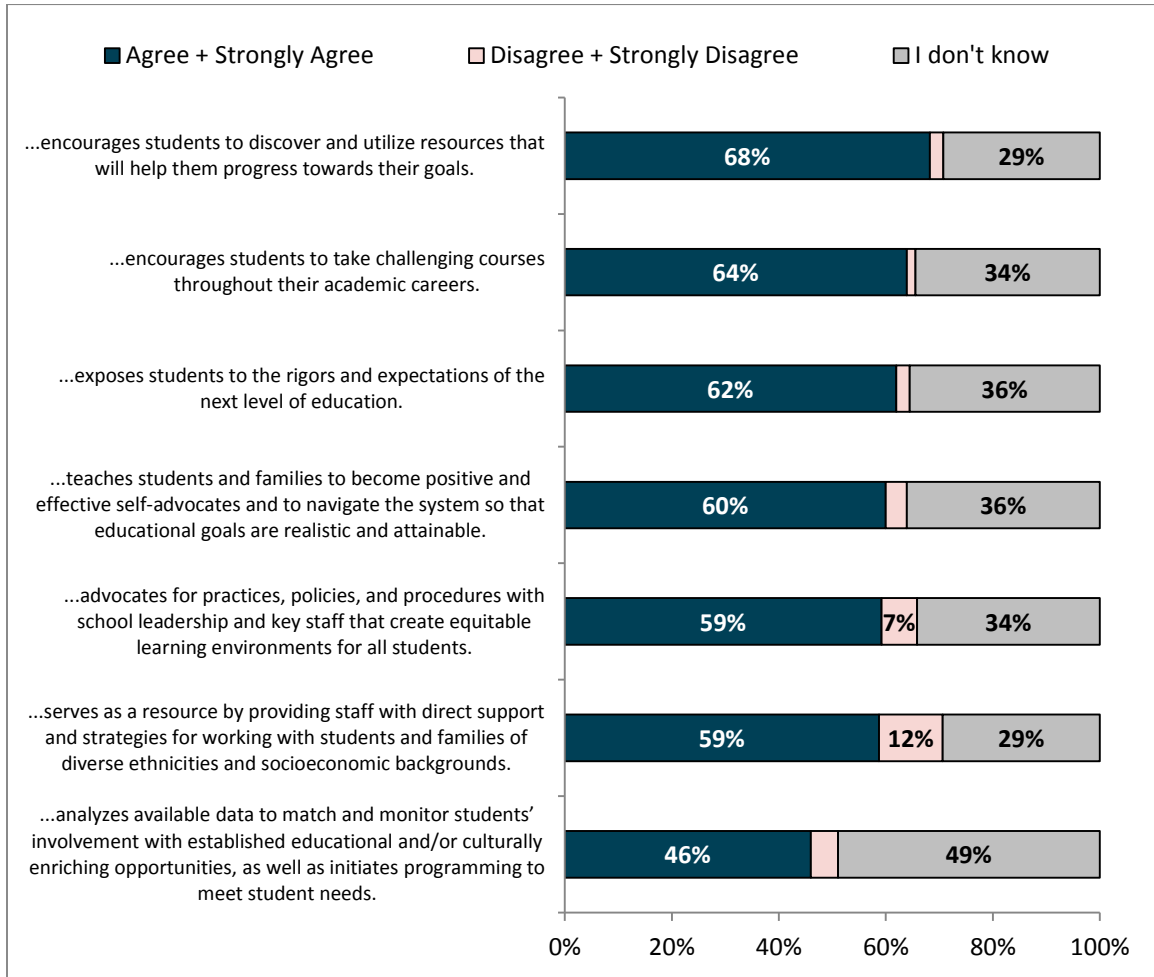
how students are referred, compared to 51 to 53 percent of T-Scale respondents. Most P-Scale respondents believe that students are referred by a variety of individuals, including teachers, the MAC, the school counselor, parents, or self-referrals. While some T-Scale employees selected these methods of referral, the numbers were much smaller, which corresponds to their higher number of “I don’t know” responses (Figure 2.17).

- “Other” responses indicated that **students are referred to Minority Achievement programs and services by the administration, or more generally based on their race or ethnicity** (Figure 2.18).
- When respondents were asked why some students who are identified to participate in Minority Achievement programs choose not to participate, many indicated that they were unsure. Others mentioned that they felt that **students did not want the stigma or to be singled out**. In addition, **some suggested that students did not feel welcome unless they were members of the targeted minority groups**. Many respondents also mentioned scheduling conflicts and not feeling like the programs and services were beneficial enough to merit the time commitment (Figure 2.19).

FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Agreement with Statements about the MAC²²

The MAC...



(n=226-315)

²² Question 11 – Objective 1a, 4a

Figure 2.2: Agreement with Statements about the MAC (by Pay Scale and School Level)²³

<i>The MAC...</i>	Group	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know
...encourages students to take challenging courses throughout their academic careers.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=216)	0%	1%	39%	16%	43%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	1%	1%	39%	30%	30%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	4%	39%	50%	7%
...encourages students to discover and utilize resources that will help them progress towards their goals.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=215)	2%	2%	46%	16%	34%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	1%	0%	45%	27%	28%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	4%	50%	43%	4%
...exposes students to the rigors and expectations of the next level of education.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	1%	1%	40%	16%	42%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	1%	2%	39%	26%	33%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	4%	43%	43%	11%
...teaches students and families to become positive and effective self-advocates and to navigate the system so that educational goals are realistic and attainable.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=216)	1%	3%	43%	14%	40%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	2%	3%	40%	18%	37%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	0%	57%	36%	7%
...analyzes available data to match and monitor students' involvement with established educational and/or culturally enriching opportunities, as well as initiates programming to meet student needs.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	2%	2%	37%	11%	47%
	T-Scale - HS (n=194)	1%	5%	26%	13%	55%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	4%	43%	29%	25%
...advocates for practices, policies, and procedures with school leadership and key staff that create equitable learning environments for all students.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	3%	3%	39%	16%	39%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	4%	4%	41%	19%	33%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	4%	61%	32%	4%
...serves as a resource by providing staff with direct support and strategies for working with students and families of diverse ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.	T-Scale - ES/MS (n=217)	3%	8%	44%	16%	29%
	T-Scale - HS (n=195)	6%	8%	36%	17%	33%
	P-Scale - All (n=28)	0%	7%	68%	25%	0%

²³ Question 11 – Objective 1a, 4a

Figure 2.3: Agreement with Statements about the MAC (by familiarity with MAC’s work)²⁴

<i>The MAC...</i>	Group	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know
...encourages students to take challenging courses throughout their academic careers.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	0%	4%	0%	93%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	0%	0%	37%	5%	58%
	Moderately Familiar (n=146)	1%	1%	44%	15%	39%
	Very Familiar (n=113)	0%	2%	51%	34%	13%
	Extremely Familiar (n=56)	0%	2%	27%	64%	7%
...encourages students to discover and utilize resources that will help them progress towards their goals.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	4%	7%	0%	86%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	2%	0%	40%	7%	51%
	Moderately Familiar (n=145)	1%	1%	54%	12%	31%
	Very Familiar (n=114)	0%	1%	54%	32%	12%
	Extremely Familiar (n=55)	2%	2%	33%	60%	4%
...exposes students to the rigors and expectations of the next level of education.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	4%	4%	0%	89%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	1%	1%	33%	2%	63%
	Moderately Familiar (n=146)	1%	2%	44%	14%	40%
	Very Familiar (n=114)	0%	2%	56%	29%	13%
	Extremely Familiar (n=56)	0%	0%	27%	66%	7%
...teaches students and families to become positive and effective self-advocates and to navigate the system so that educational goals are realistic and attainable.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	4%	0%	0%	93%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	1%	1%	34%	5%	59%
	Moderately Familiar (n=146)	1%	3%	45%	10%	42%
	Very Familiar (n=114)	2%	2%	59%	23%	15%
	Extremely Familiar (n=55)	2%	2%	42%	49%	5%

²⁴ Question 11 – Objective 1a, 4a

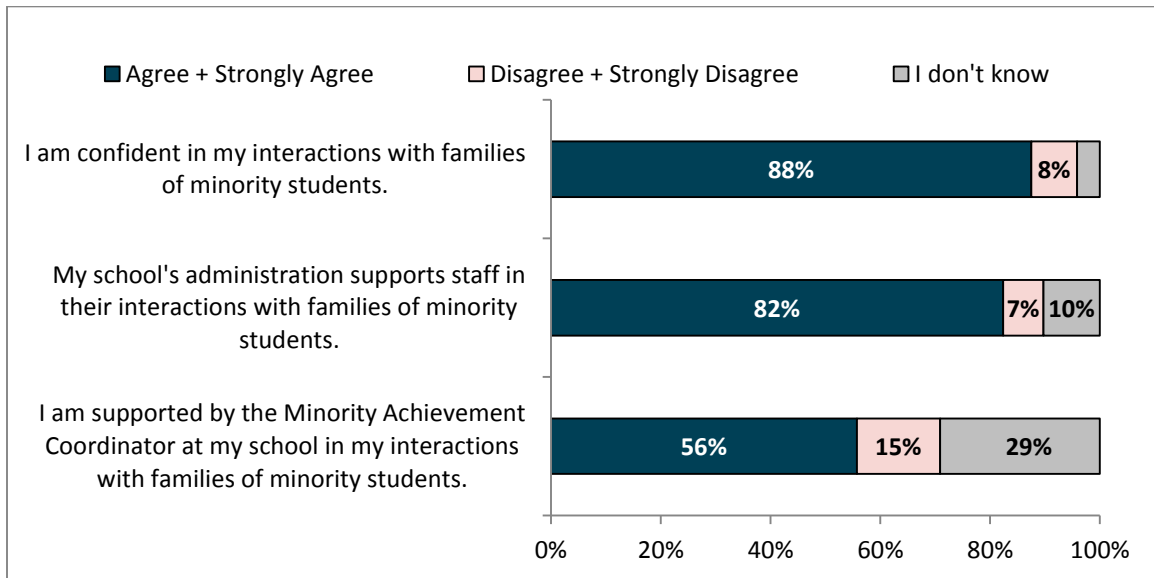
<i>The MAC...</i>	Group	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know
...analyzes available data to match and monitor students' involvement with established educational and/or culturally enriching opportunities, as well as initiates programming to meet student needs.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	4%	7%	0%	86%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	2%	3%	20%	0%	74%
	Moderately Familiar (n=146)	1%	3%	32%	8%	56%
	Very Familiar (n=114)	1%	5%	48%	16%	30%
	Extremely Familiar (n=55)	2%	2%	36%	45%	15%
...advocates for practices, policies, and procedures with school leadership and key staff that create equitable learning environments for all students.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	4%	7%	0%	86%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	3%	3%	30%	1%	62%
	Moderately Familiar (n=146)	2%	5%	49%	10%	35%
	Very Familiar (n=114)	4%	3%	53%	26%	14%
	Extremely Familiar (n=56)	4%	2%	34%	55%	5%
...serves as a resource by providing staff with direct support and strategies for working with students and families of diverse ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.	Not at All Familiar (n=28)	4%	4%	7%	0%	86%
	Slightly Familiar (n=86)	2%	5%	40%	3%	50%
	Moderately Familiar (n=146)	4%	12%	43%	12%	29%
	Very Familiar (n=114)	5%	5%	54%	23%	12%
	Extremely Familiar (n=56)	0%	11%	39%	45%	5%

Figure 2.4: Please describe a time when advocacy by the Minority Achievement Coordinator contributed to a systemic change at your school. – Open-Response Question²⁵

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Committees	3	20%
Professional Development	3	20%
Parent/family communication and outreach	2	13%
Yearly Review	1	7%
Other	1	7%
None	5	33%
Total Valid Responses	15	100%

²⁵ Question 12 – Objective 4a

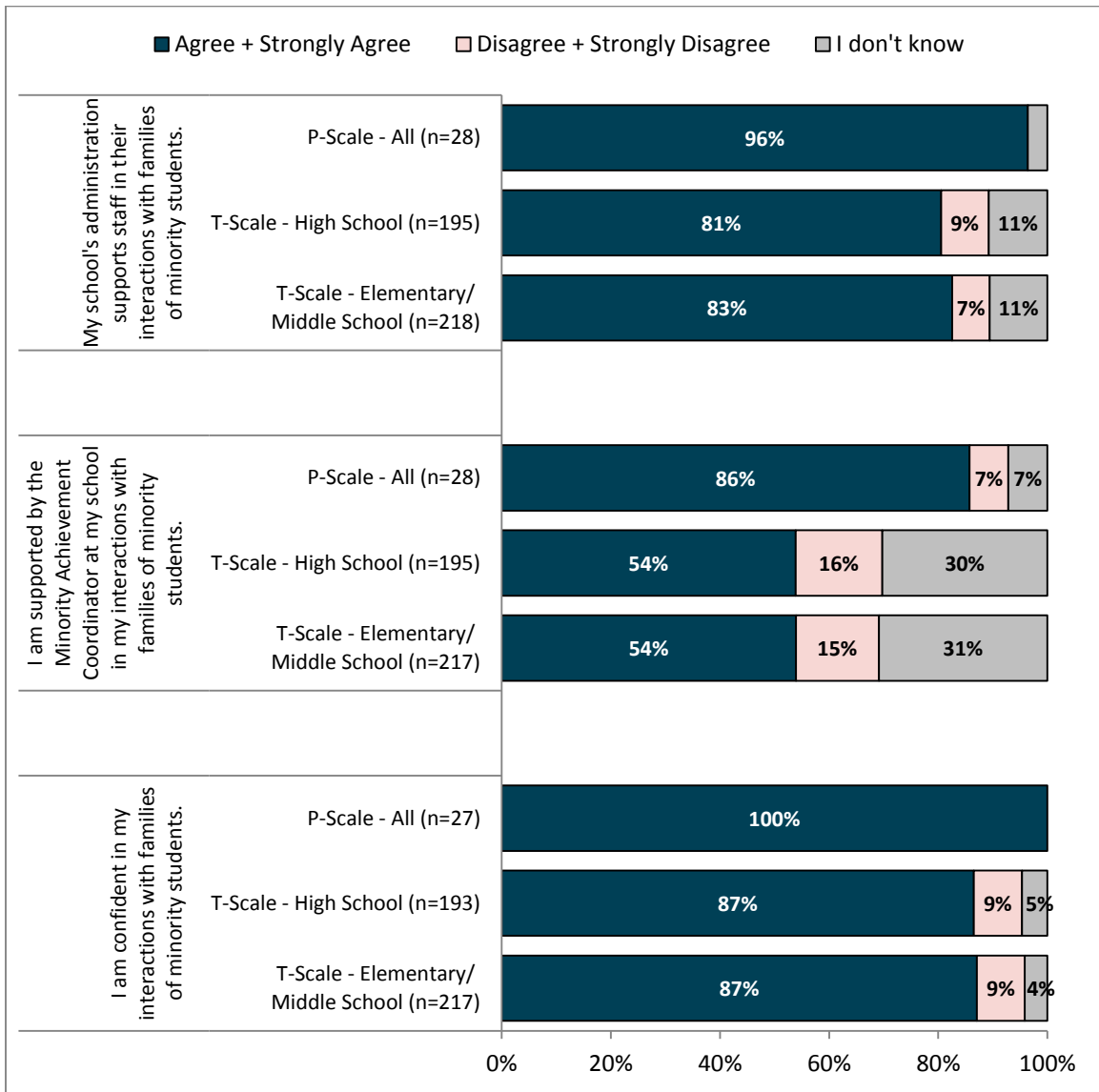
Figure 2.5: How strongly do you agree with the following?²⁶



(n=314-400)

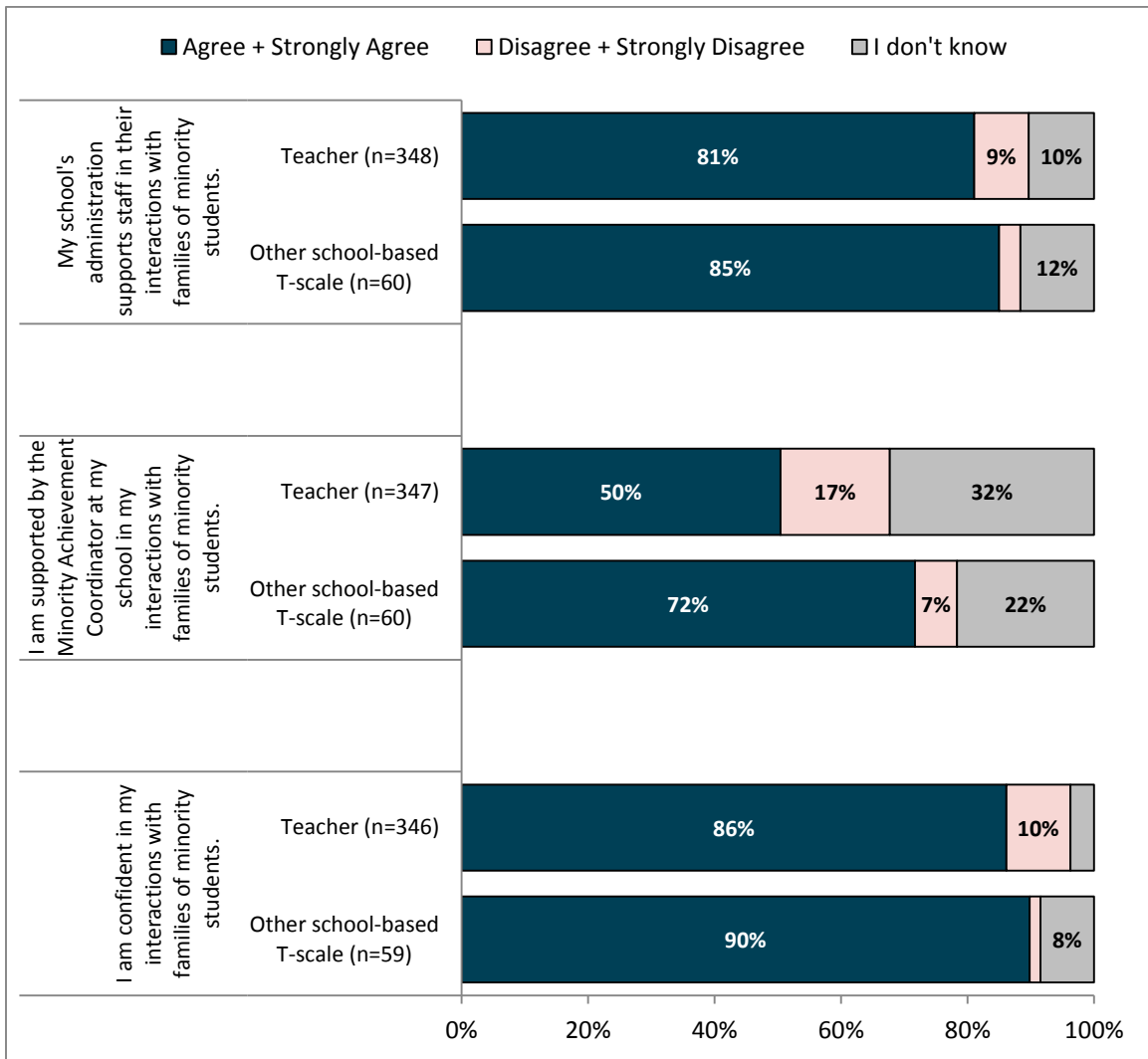
²⁶ Question 13 – Objective 3b

Figure 2.6a: How strongly do you agree with the following? (by Pay Scale and School Level)²⁷



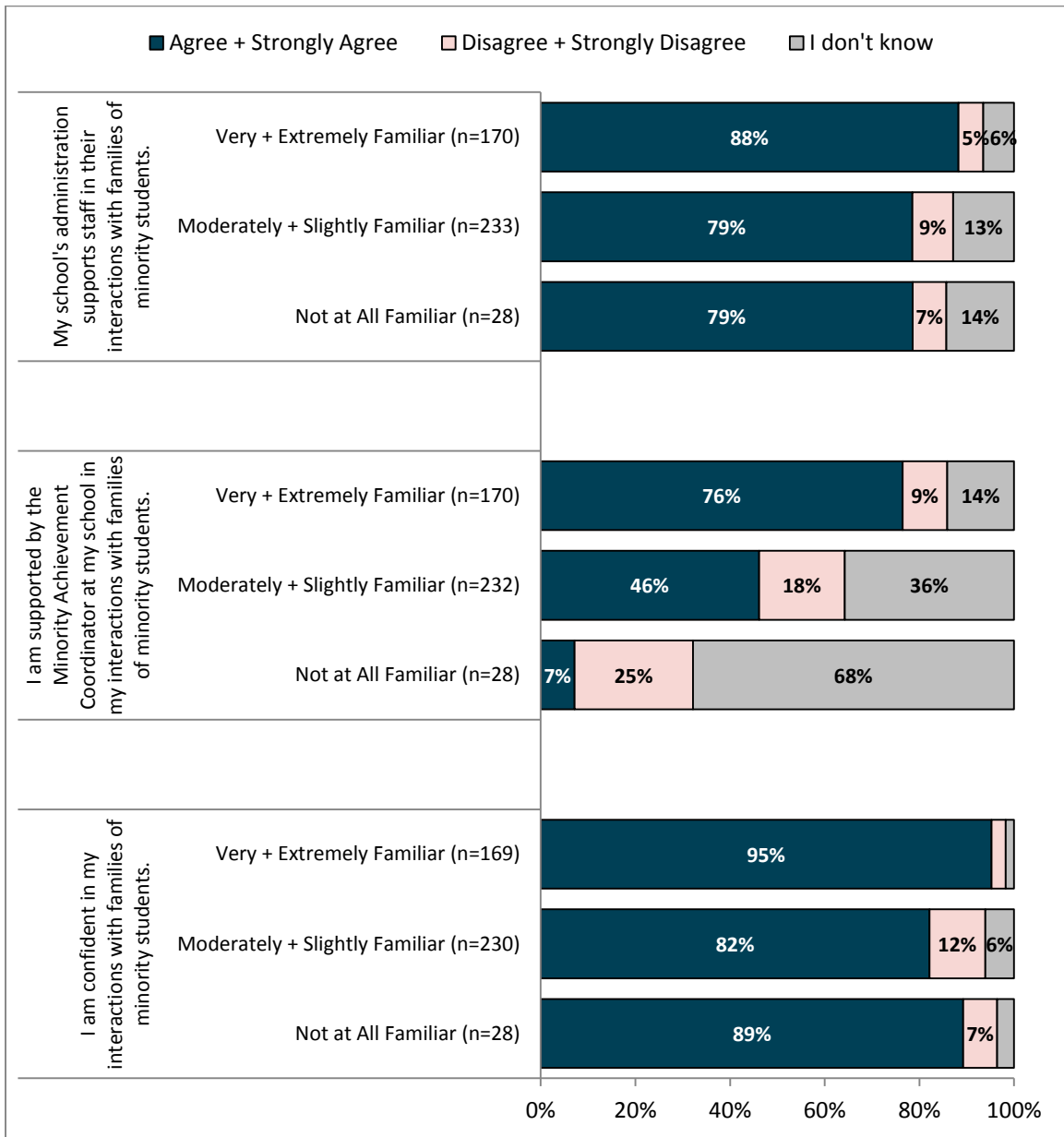
²⁷ Question 13 – Objective 3b

Figure 2.6b: How strongly do you agree with the following? (by T-Scale)²⁸



²⁸ Question 13 – Objective 3b

Figure 2.6c: How strongly do you agree with the following? (by familiarity with MAC's work)²⁹



²⁹ Question 13 – Objective 3b

Figure 2.7: In what ways does the Minority Achievement Coordinator support you in your interactions with families of minority students? – Open-Response Question³⁰

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Helps communication	69	51%
Available for advice/help	69	51%
Helps individual students	47	35%
Attends meetings	36	27%
Provides resources	34	25%
Home visits	6	4%
Total Valid Responses	135	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

Figure 2.8: What additional support would be helpful to you in your interactions with families of minority students? – Open-Response Question³¹

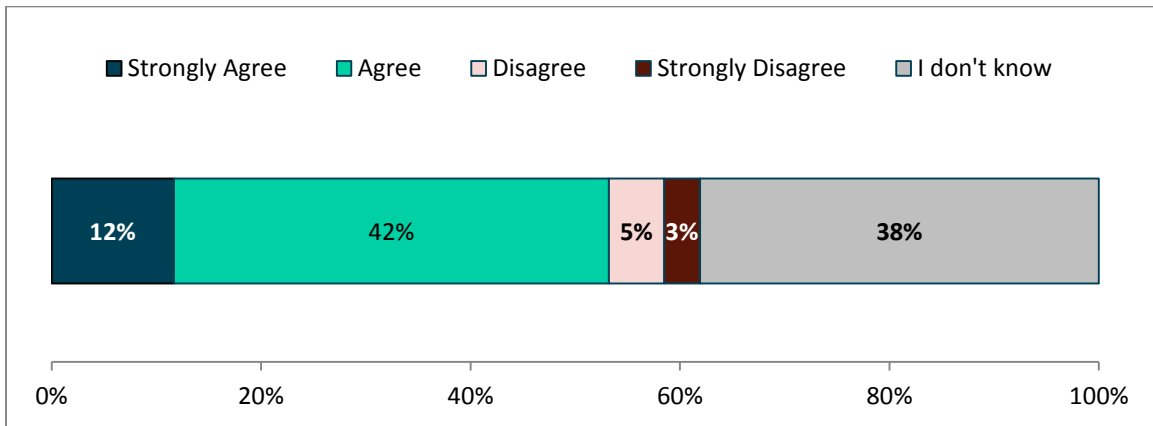
THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Informing about available resources	36	30%
Communication with families and students	29	24%
Translation	18	15%
Sharing information about specific students/families	18	15%
Training for staff/Professional Development	17	14%
More staff/Full-time position	5	4%
Other	17	14%
Unsure/Nothing/Already offer what I need	40	33%
Total Valid Responses	122	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

³⁰ Question 14 – Objective 3b; Respondents were only shown this question if they indicated that they are supported by the Minority Achievement Coordinator in their interactions with families of minority students (Question 13).

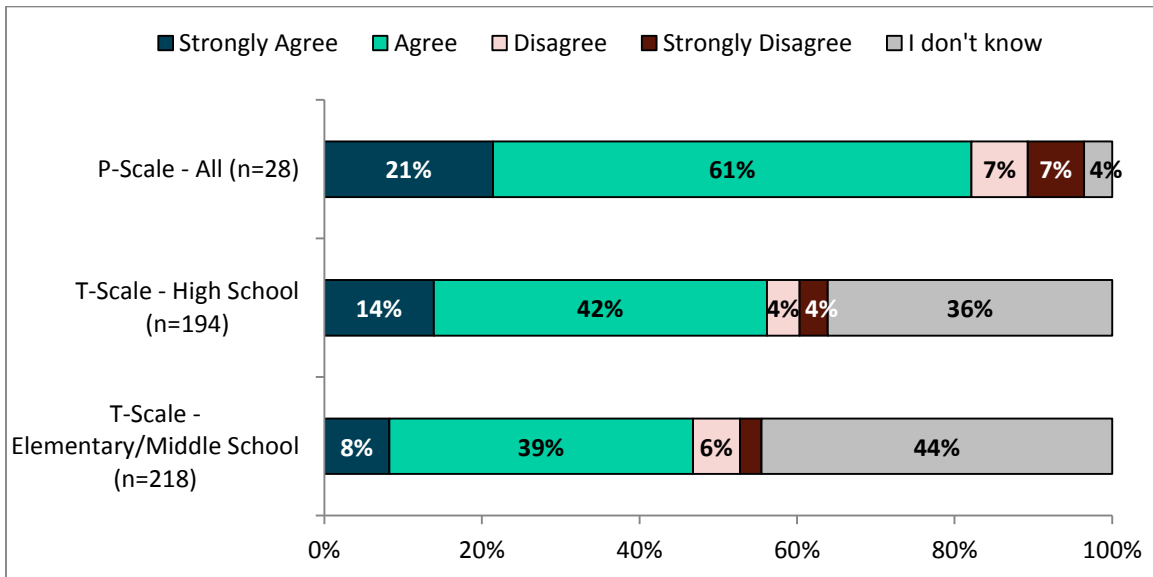
³¹ Question 15 – Objective 3b

Figure 2.9: Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families³²



(n=274)

Figure 2.10a: Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families (by Pay Scale and School Level)³³



³² Question 16 – Objective 3b

³³ Question 16 – Objective 3b

Figure 2.10b: Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families (by T-Scale)³⁴

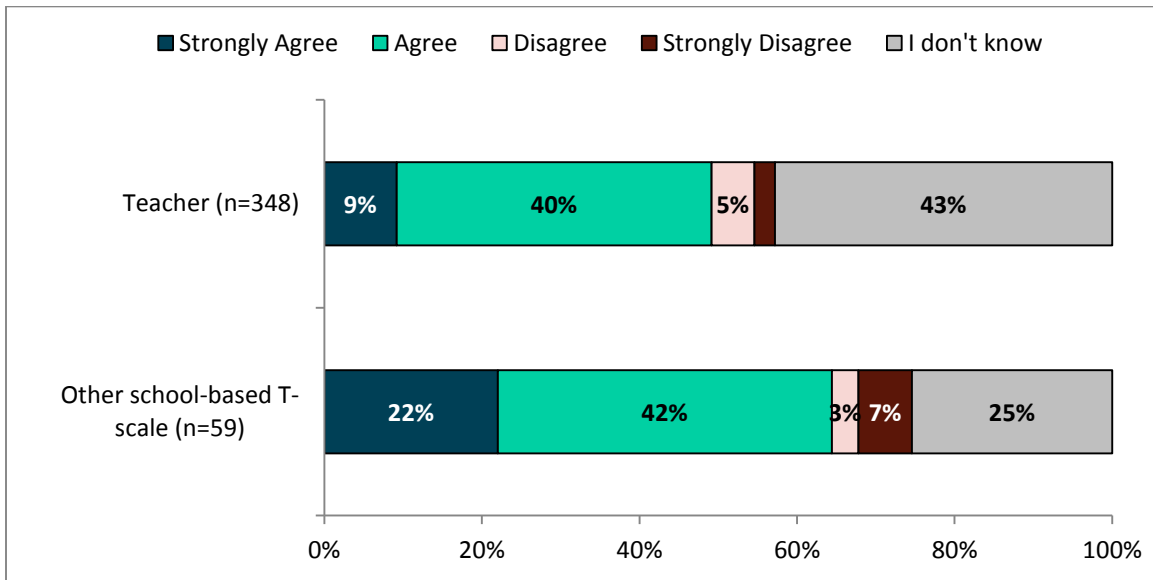
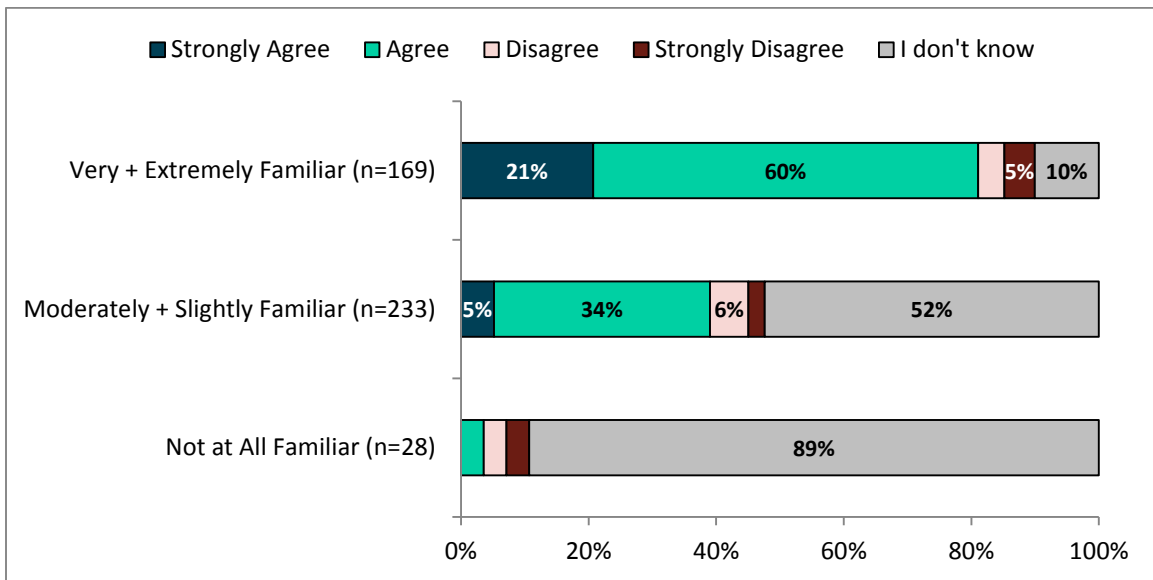


Figure 2.10c: Minority Achievement programs adequately meet the needs of minority students and families (by familiarity with MAC's work)³⁵



³⁴ Question 16 – Objective 3b

³⁵ Question 16 – Objective 3b

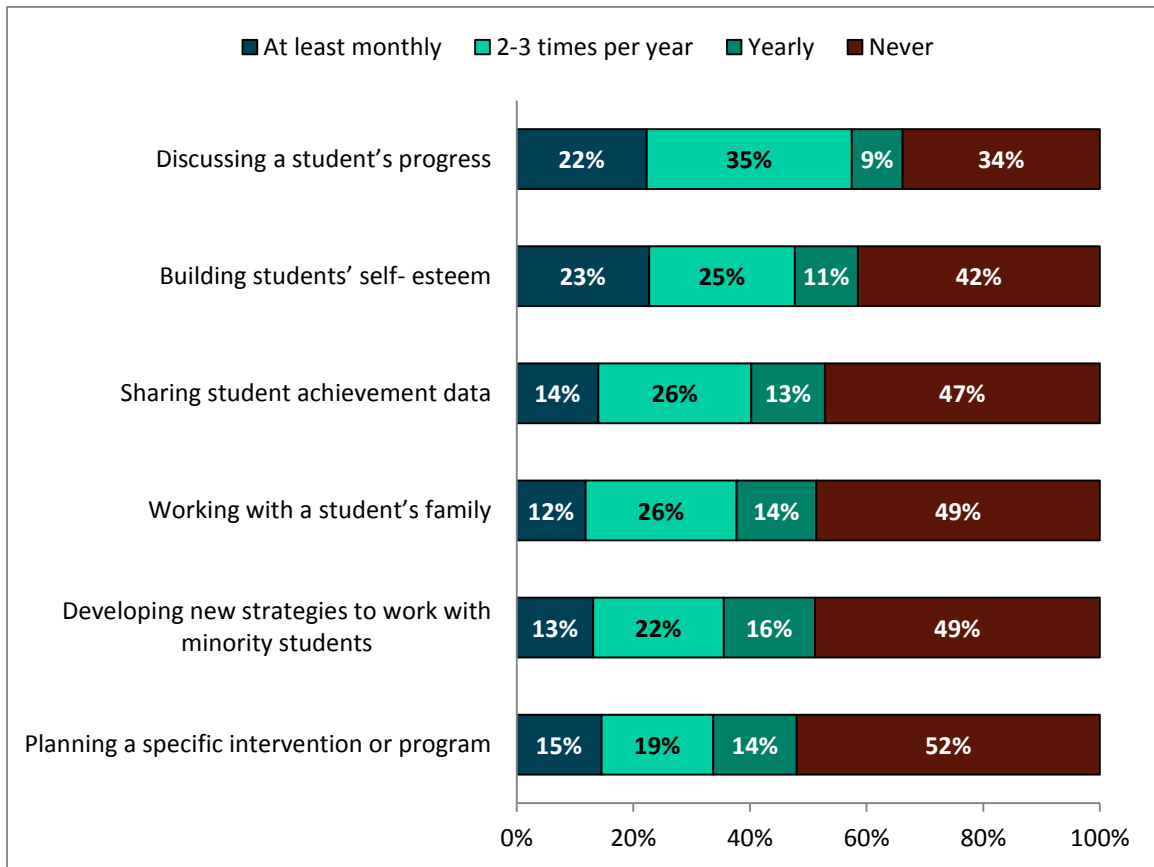
Figure 2.11: Why do you feel that the Minority Achievement programs at your school do not adequately meet the needs of minority students and families? – Open-Response Question³⁶

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Not doing enough, including not enough communication of offerings	15	50%
Only works with specific (usually high achieving, non-HILT) students	13	43%
Not enough time/staff devoted to program	5	17%
Only target specific minorities (African American)	4	13%
School too segregated	1	3%
Other	5	17%
Total Valid Responses	30	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

³⁶ Question 17 – Objective 3b; Respondents were only shown this question if they indicated that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with Question 16: “Minority Achievement programs at my school adequately meet the needs of minority students and families.”

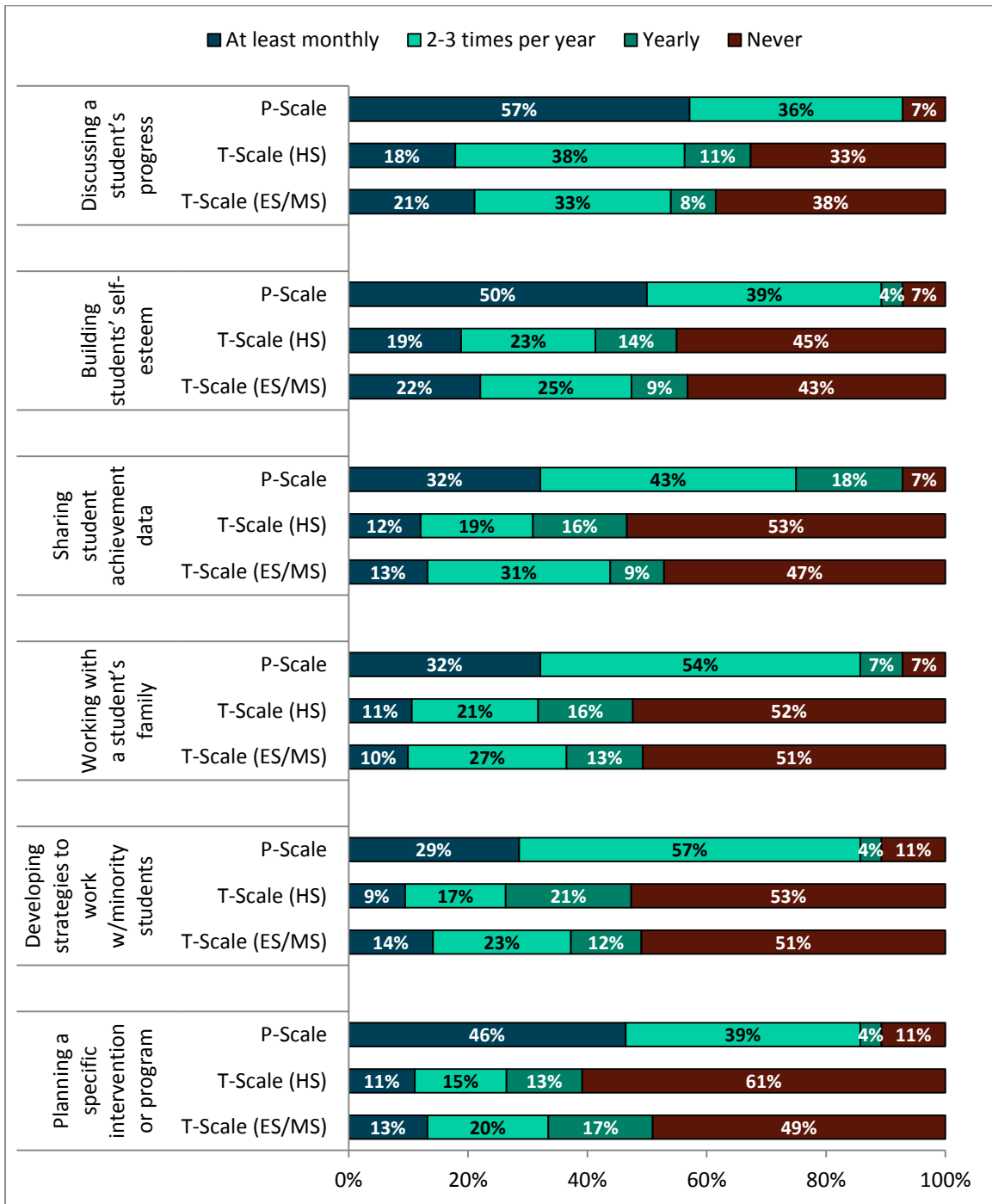
Figure 2.12: How frequently do you collaborate with the MAC for the following?³⁷



(n=432-436)

³⁷ Question 18 – Objective 3a

Figure 2.13: How frequently do you collaborate with the MAC for the following? (by Pay Scale and School Level)³⁸



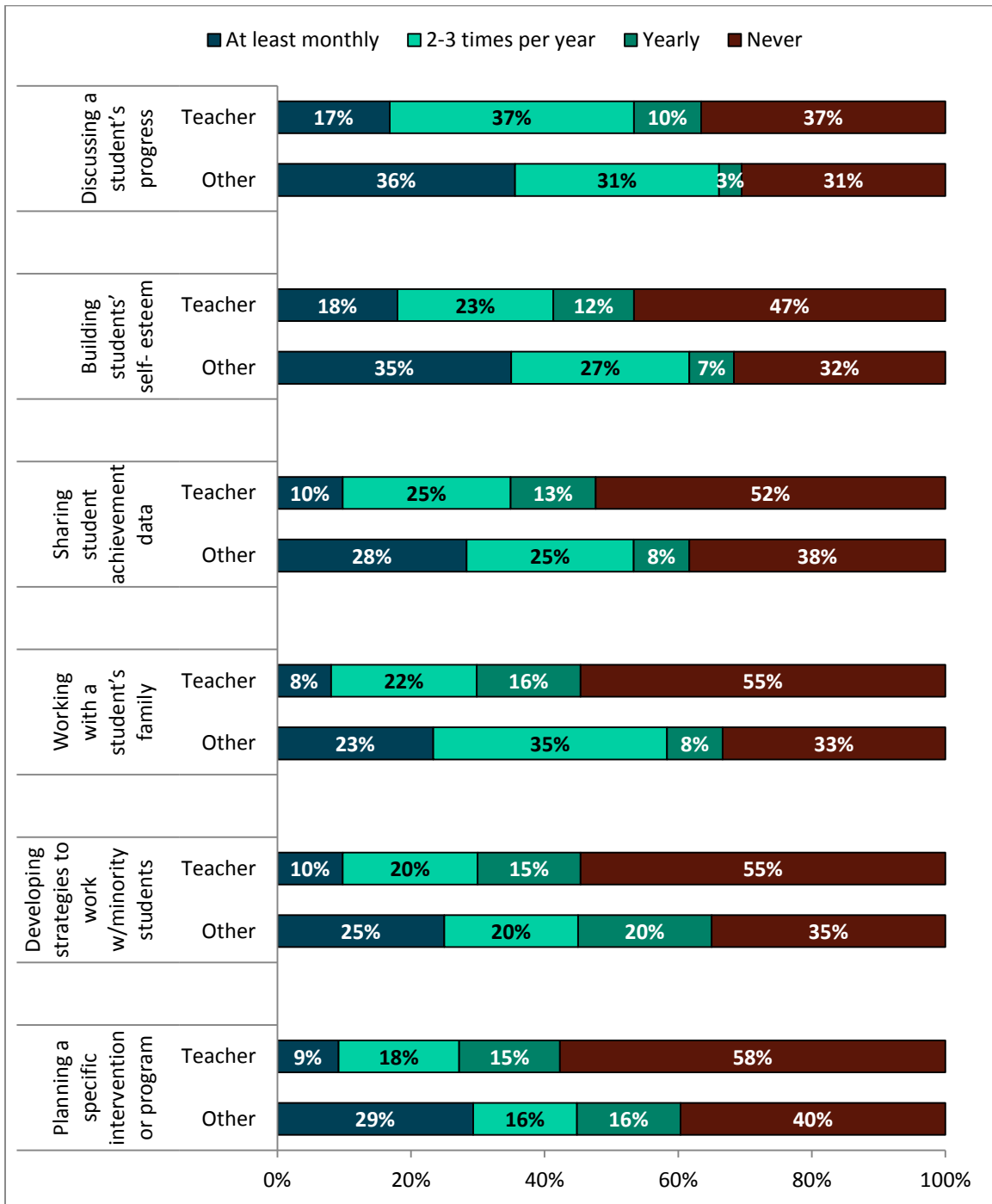
(T-Scale - Elementary/Middle School n=211-213)

(T-Scale - High School n=189-191)

(P-Scale - All n=28)

³⁸ Question 18 – Objective 3a

Figure 2.14: How frequently do you collaborate with the MAC for the following? (by Teacher vs. "Other" T-Scale)³⁹



(Teacher n=335-339)

(Other school-based T-scale n=58-60)

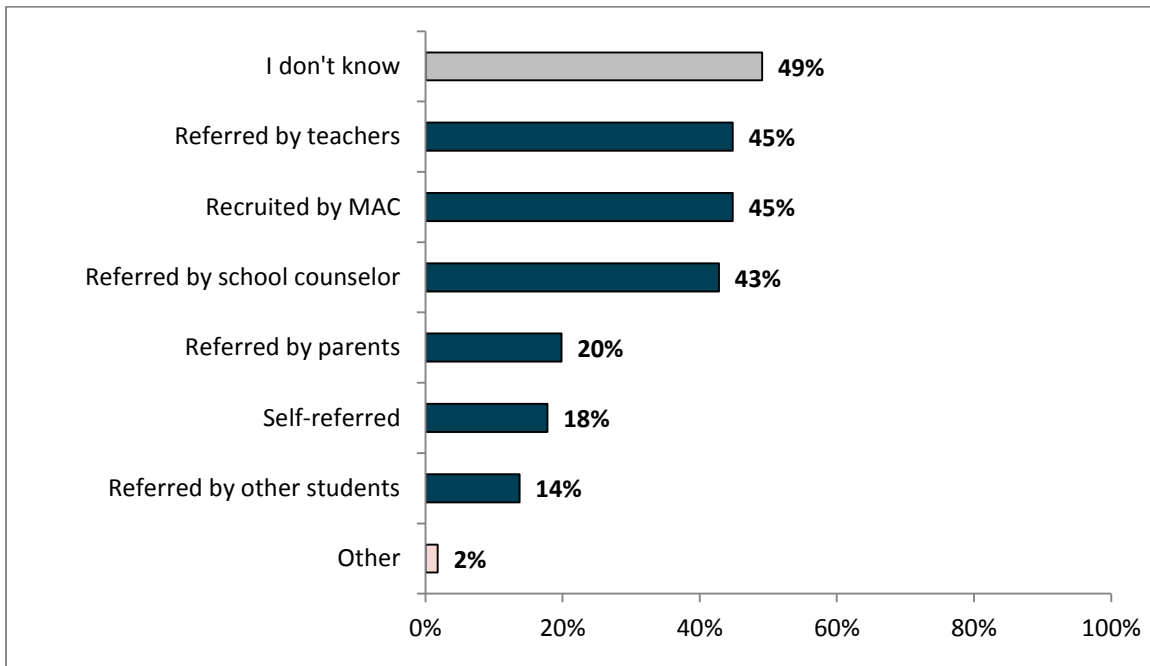
³⁹ Question 18 – Objective 3a

Figure 2.15: In what additional ways do you collaborate with the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school? – Open-Response Question⁴⁰

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Informal help/advice as needed about specific students	45	40%
Events/groups/extra curriculars	26	23%
Resource sharing	12	11%
Meetings	11	10%
Professional Development	9	8%
Other	5	4%
None/Unsure	39	35%
Total Valid Responses	112	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

Figure 2.16: How are students at your school identified to participate in Minority Achievement programs and services?⁴¹



(n=444)

Note: Totals sum to greater than 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple responses.

⁴⁰ Question 19 – Objective 3a

⁴¹ Question 20 – Objective 2b

Figure 2.17: How are students at your school identified to participate in Minority Achievement programs and services? (by Pay Scale and School Level)⁴²

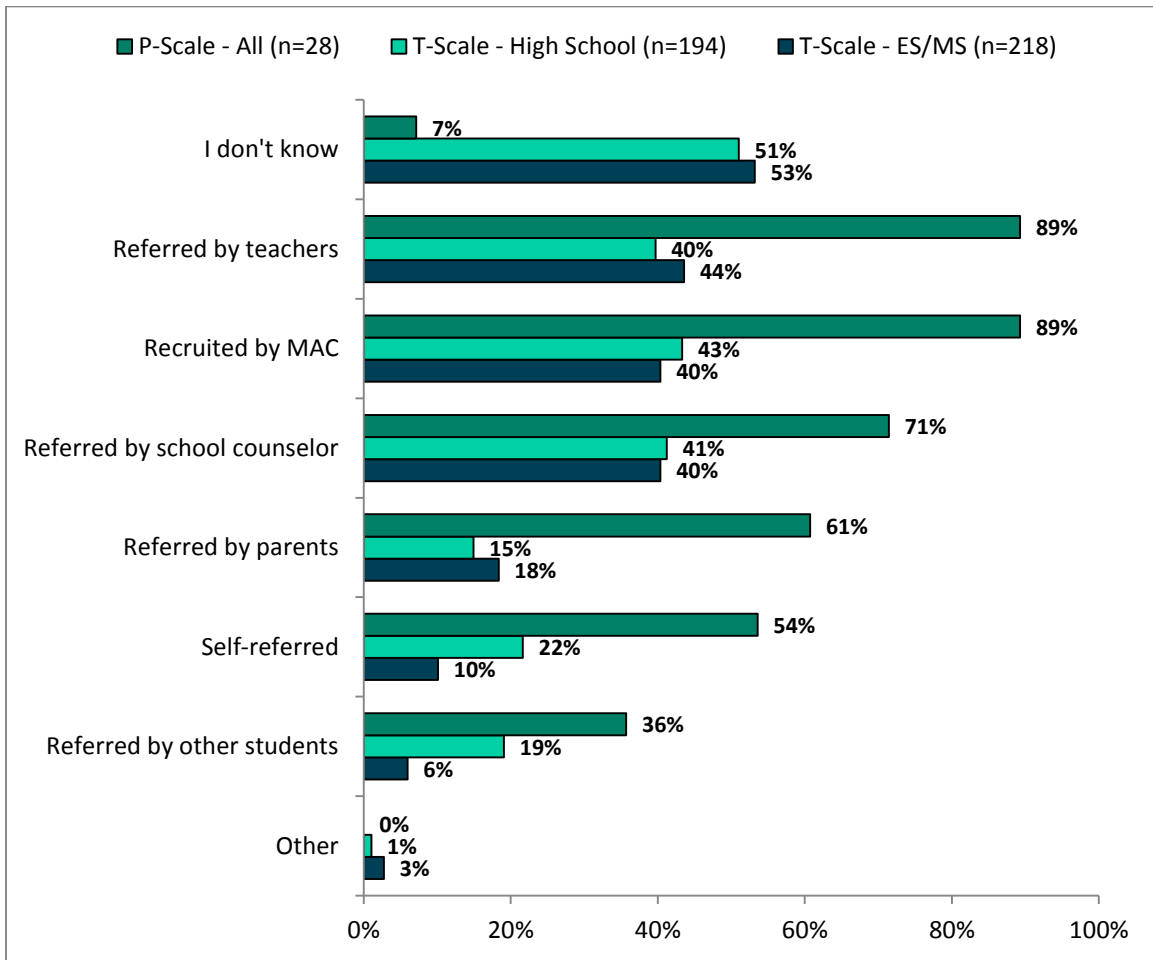


Figure 2.18: How are students at your school identified to participate in Minority Achievement programs and services? – “Other”⁴³

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Referred by administration	2	25%
By race/ethnicity	2	25%
ParentVue	1	13%
Unsure/Other	3	38%
Total	8	100%

⁴² Question 20 – Objective 2b

⁴³ Question 20 – Objective 2b

Figure 2.19: Why do some students who are identified to participate in Minority Achievement programs choose not to? – Open-Response Question⁴⁴

THEME	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	PERCENT OF VALID RESPONSES
Stigma/Don't want to be singled out/Don't feel welcome (mostly targets African American students)	38	27%
Scheduling conflicts	23	17%
Unfamiliar with program	17	12%
Not worth it/Not needed	17	12%
Parents	12	9%
Other	7	5%
Unsure	63	45%
Total Valid Responses	139	100%

The sum of the number of responses is greater than number of respondents because some responses were categorized in multiple themes.

⁴⁴ Question 21 – Objective 2e

SECTION III: BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SEGMENTATIONS

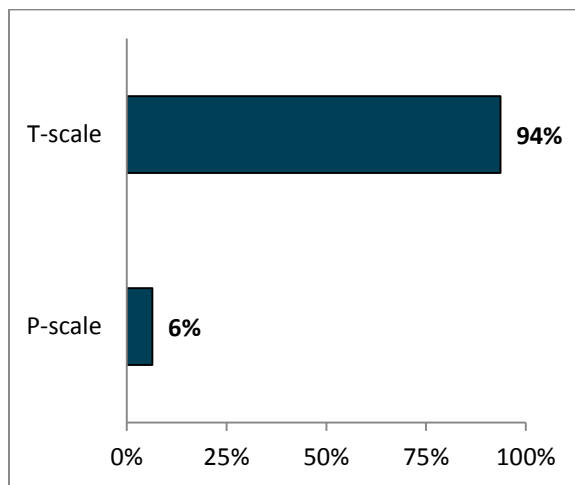
This section presents the background information of respondents that was used for the segmentations in this report.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **More than 90 percent of respondents are T-Scale employees, and most of those employees are teachers** (Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.3).
- **High school and middle school employees each represent just under half of all respondents**, while elementary respondents make up just six percent of the sample (Figure 3.2).

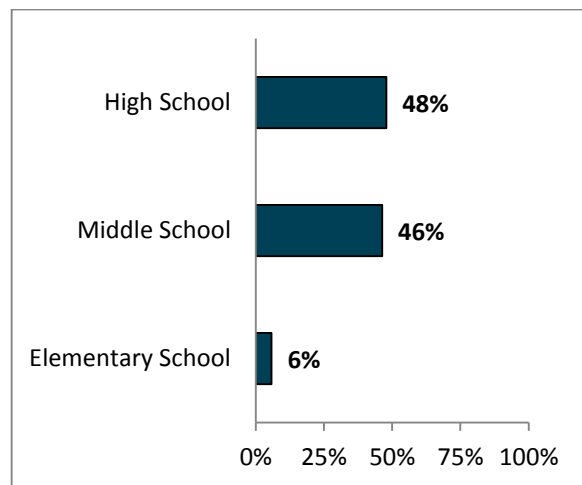
FIGURES

Figure 3.1: What is your pay scale?⁴⁵



(Total n=439; T-Scale n=411; P-Scale n=28)

Figure 3.2: What level is your school?⁴⁶

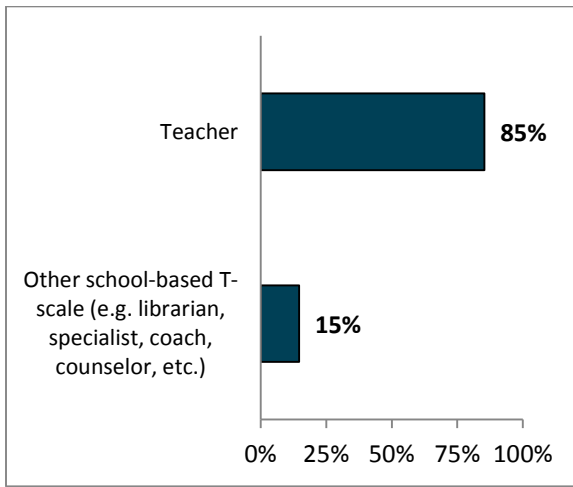


(Total n=447; ES n=26; MS n=207; HS n=214)

⁴⁵ Question 1

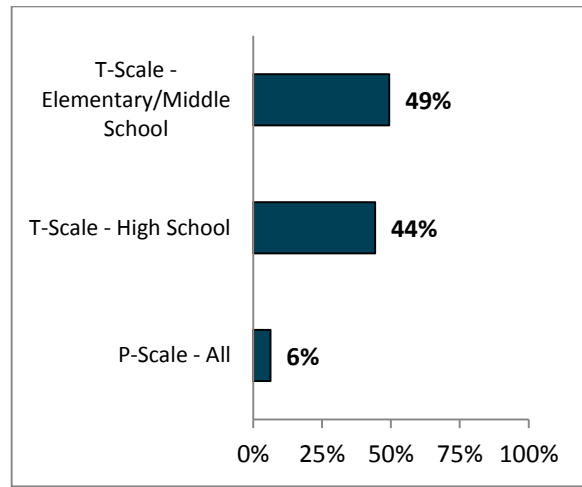
⁴⁶ Question 2

Figure 3.3: Which of the following best describes your position?⁴⁷



(Total n=410; Teacher n=350; Other T-Scale n=60)

Figure 3.4: P-Scale/T-Scale - by school level⁴⁸



(Total n=443; T-Scale ES/MS n=219; T-Scale HS n=196; P-scale n=28)

⁴⁷ Question 3

⁴⁸ Question 1 x Question 2

PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds partner expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.

<http://www.hanoverresearch.com/evaluation/index.php>

CAVEAT

The publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this brief. The publisher and authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this brief and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties that extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by representatives of Hanover Research or its marketing materials. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every partner. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Moreover, Hanover Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. Partners requiring such services are advised to consult an appropriate professional.



4401 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 400

Arlington, VA 22203

P 202.559.0500 F 866.808.6585

www.hanoverresearch.com

Minority Achievement Parent Survey

In spring of 2015, the Office of Planning and Evaluation mailed a survey home to all parents of non-white students at the schools that have Minority Achievement Coordinators. Parents with multiple children were provided the name of one child and asked to answer the survey with that one child in mind. Parents had the opportunity to take the survey online, or to mail back the paper survey. Out of 4,348 survey invitations, a total of 531 responses were received (155 online, and 376 paper). This is a response rate of 12% with a margin of error of 4.0.

The margin of error for this survey is calculated at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that we can be 95% confident that the sample result reflects the actual population within the margin of error. In other words, in 19 out of 20 cases the data obtained would not differ by any more than the percentage points in the margin of error in either direction if the survey were repeated multiple times employing the same survey methodology and sampling method across the same population. When the margin of error is greater than 5, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Description of Respondents

Figures 1- 3 provide information describing the parents who took the survey.

Figure 1: Parent Respondents by Grade Level of Child

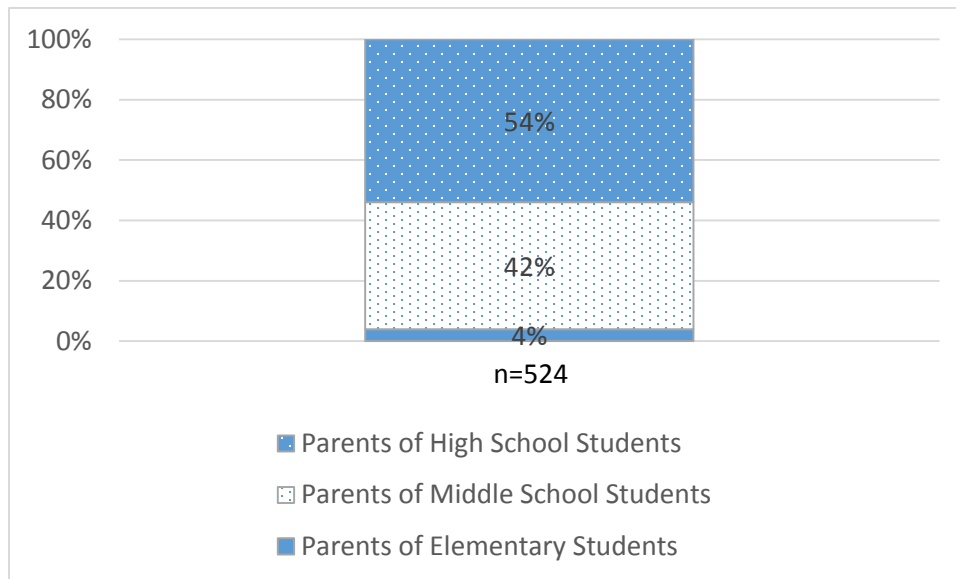


Figure 2: Parent Respondents by Race

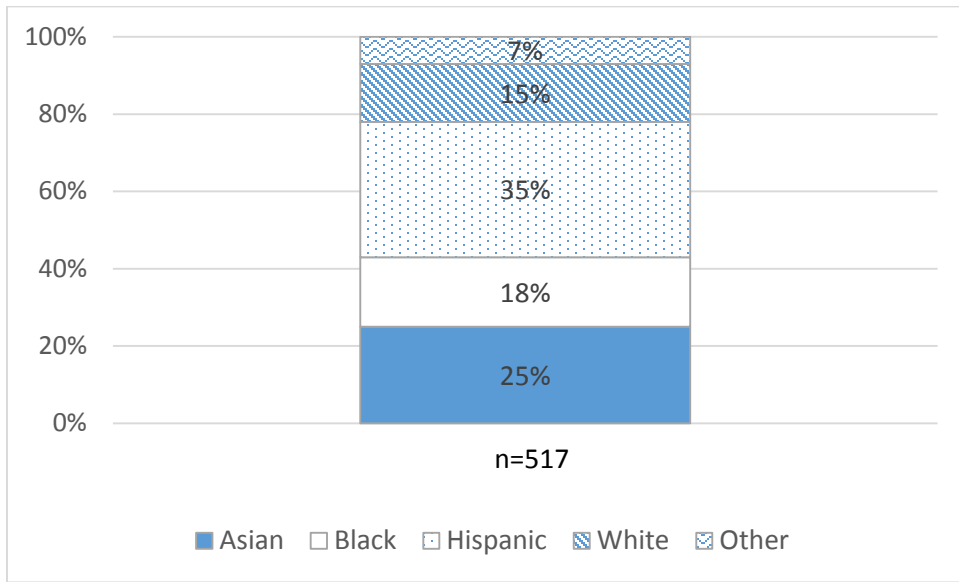
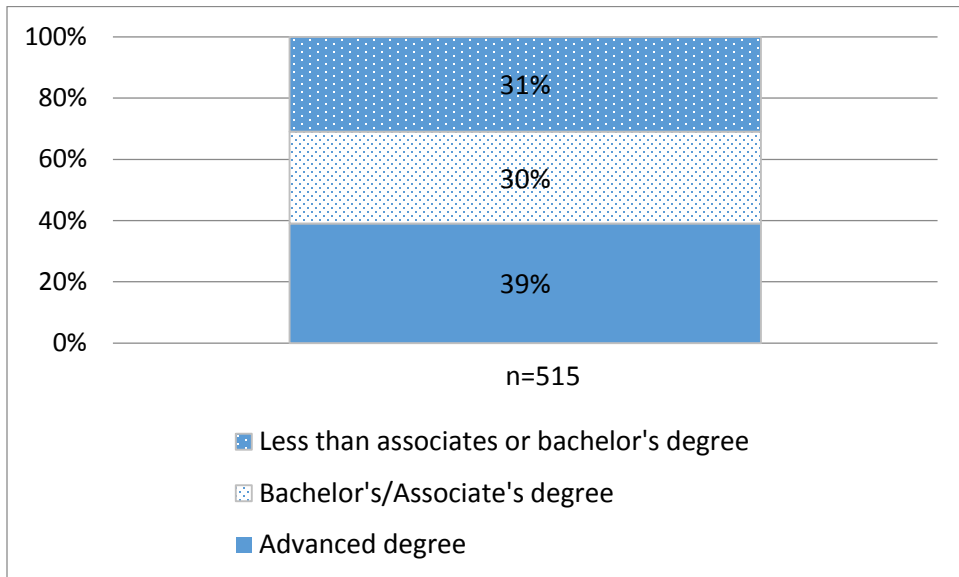


Figure 3: Parent Respondents by Education Level



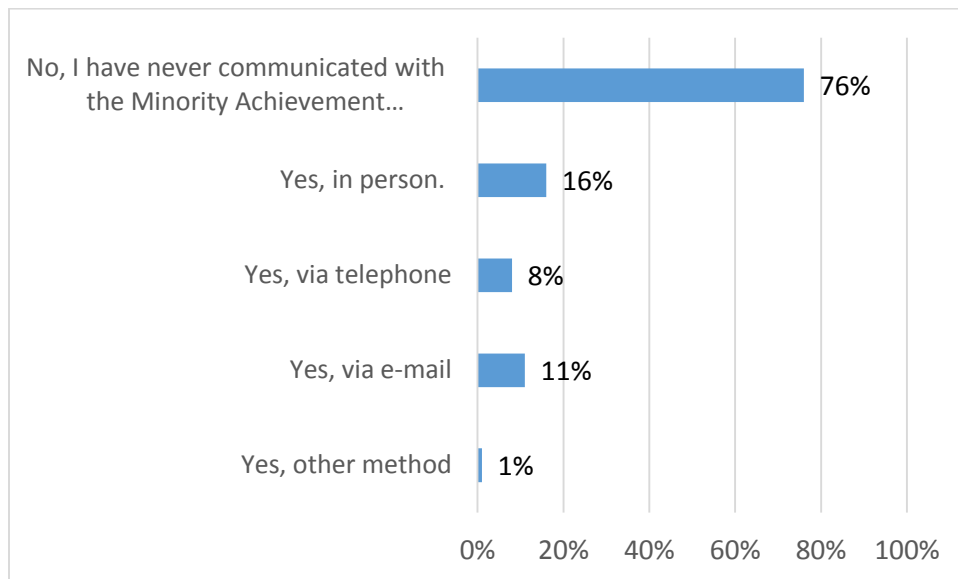
Familiarity with Programs and Services

Tables 1-3 and **Figures 4-8** show parent responses to survey questions about familiarity with and participation in Minority Achievement programs and services.

Table 1: Are you aware that there is a Minority Achievement Coordinator at your child's school?

Response	Percentage
Yes	45%
No	55%

Figure 4: Have you communicated directly with the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school?



Appendix C2

Figure 5: How familiar are you with the following programs and services offered by the Office of Minority Achievement?

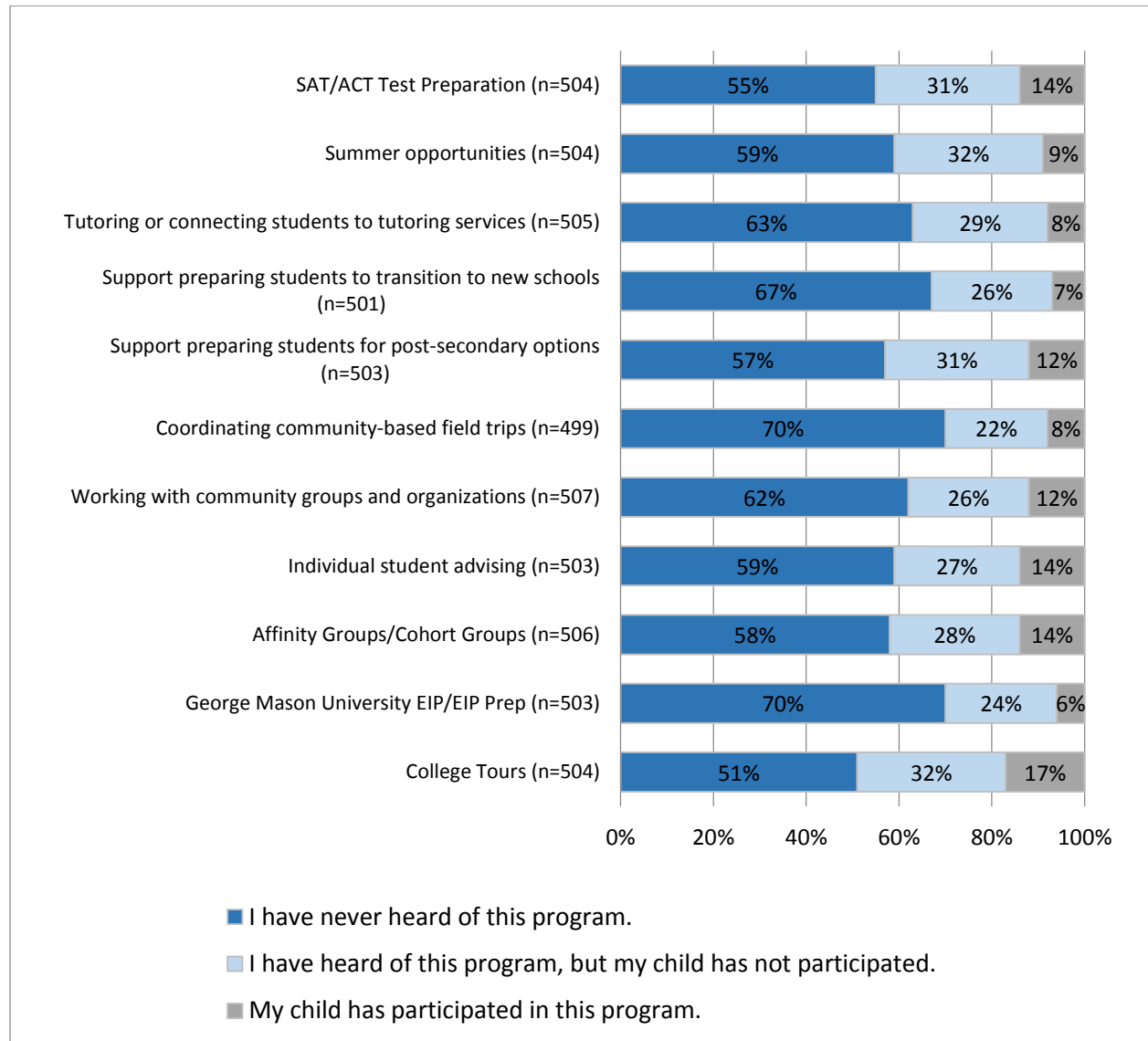


Figure 6: How did you learn about the programs? (n=530)

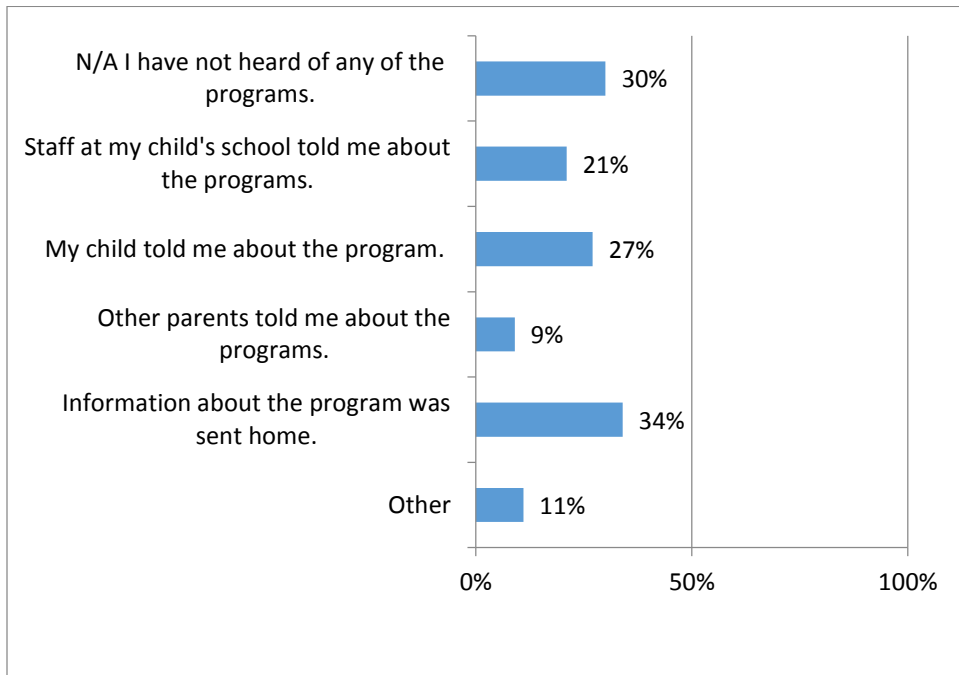


Figure 7: If your child does not participate in any of the programs, why not? (n=436)

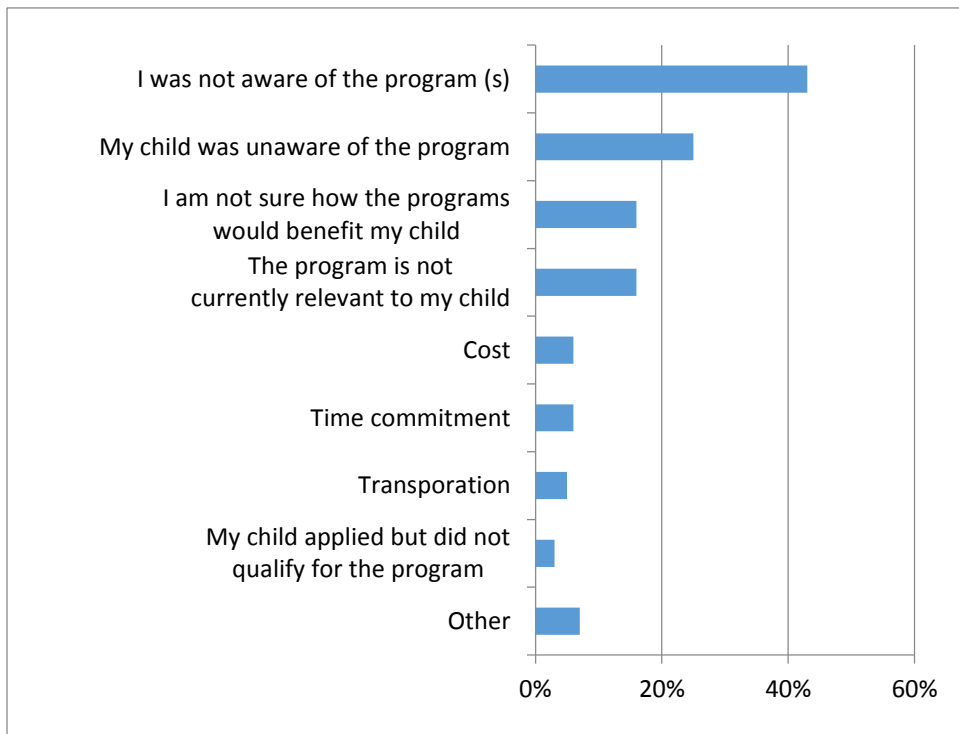


Table 2: What type of additional support could the Minority Achievement Coordinator provide **your child**?*

Categories of open-ended responses	Percent of Parent Responses (n=271)	Examples
More tutoring/advising	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be helpful to provide individual meetings with my son to provide encouragement • After school tutoring
More information about programs provided	21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform them of all programs and services that are available • This is my daughter's first year in public school so I don't have any information about most of the programs. I need to know how to participate in the programs.
More assistance to post-secondary options/colleges	21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting her in preparation for post-secondary education. • College planning and prep
More information on Scholarships	19%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-secondary scholarship information
More enrichment/summer opportunities	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer jobs opportunities • More participation in African American, economic, political and social events such as Congressional Black Caucus
More community connections/volunteer work	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community activity services, (connect my child with the community) • More workshops about participate as a volunteer in the community.
Program to include more groups of students	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing Asians to become members of COHORT
Services for gifted students	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More gifted services

*Reponses could be coded in more than one category

Figure 8: Which of the following services does the Minority Achievement Coordinator currently offer to you as a **parent/guardian**? (n=530)

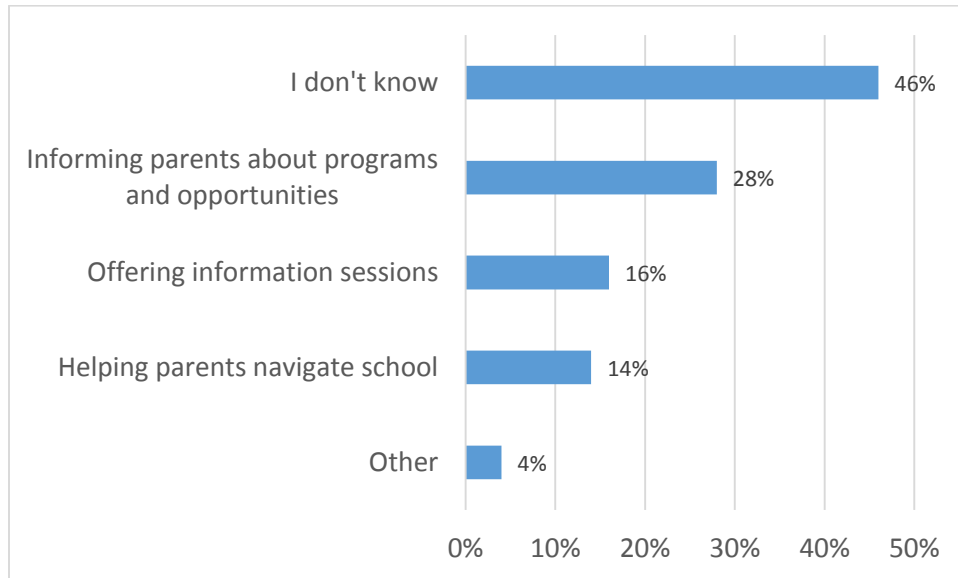


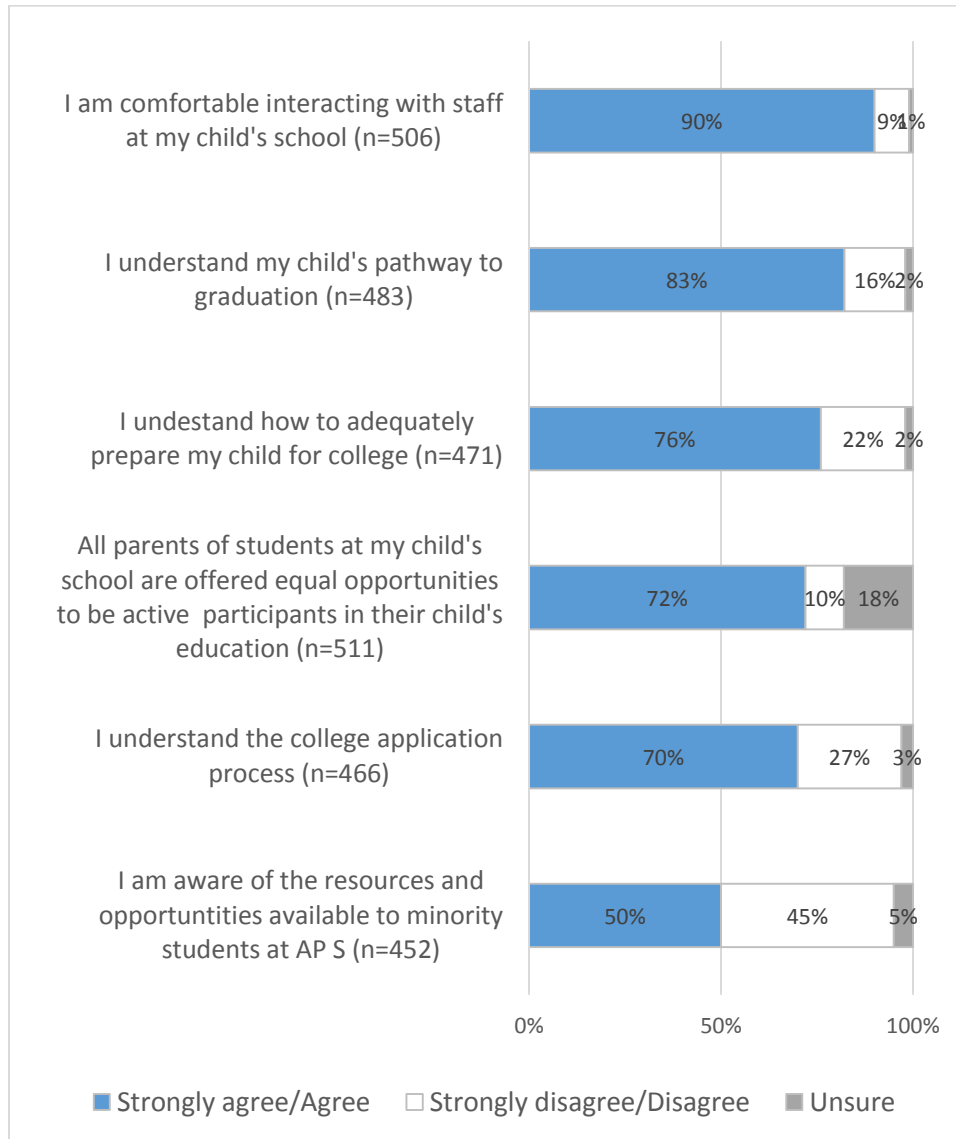
Table 3: What type of additional support could the Minority Achievement Coordinator provide you as a **parent/guardian**?

Categories of open-ended responses	Percent of Parent Responses (n=102)	Examples
More parent communication and awareness about programs/scholarship/college guidance	93%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send email notifying parents of programs More information about programs and how to prepare my child for college
Individual meetings with the Minority Achievement Coordinator about child	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Announce when coordinator will be available for parents' meetings Meeting with coordinator to talk about child's progress in school.
Groups/meetings with other parents	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly or monthly support groups Group for parents of adopted children

Comfort Navigating the System

Figures 9-13 present parent responses to a series of questions gauging their level of comfort navigating their child’s school experience and progress, as well as their perceptions of the extent to which all parents have equal opportunities to participate in their child’s education. These questions are disaggregated by the following demographic information: child’s participation in Minority Achievement programs/services, race/ethnicity of parent, education level of parent, and grade level of child.

Figure 9: Level of agreement, comfort navigating system



Appendix C2

Figure 10: Parent Comfort and Perceptions by Child's Participation in Minority Achievement Programs/Services

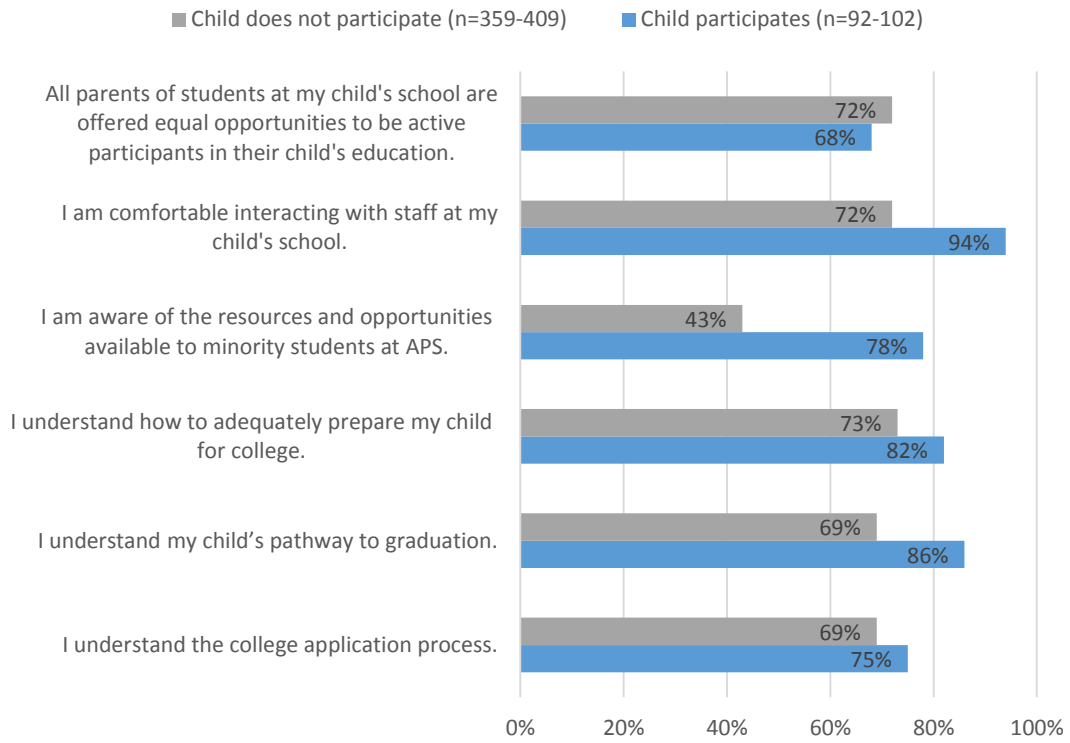
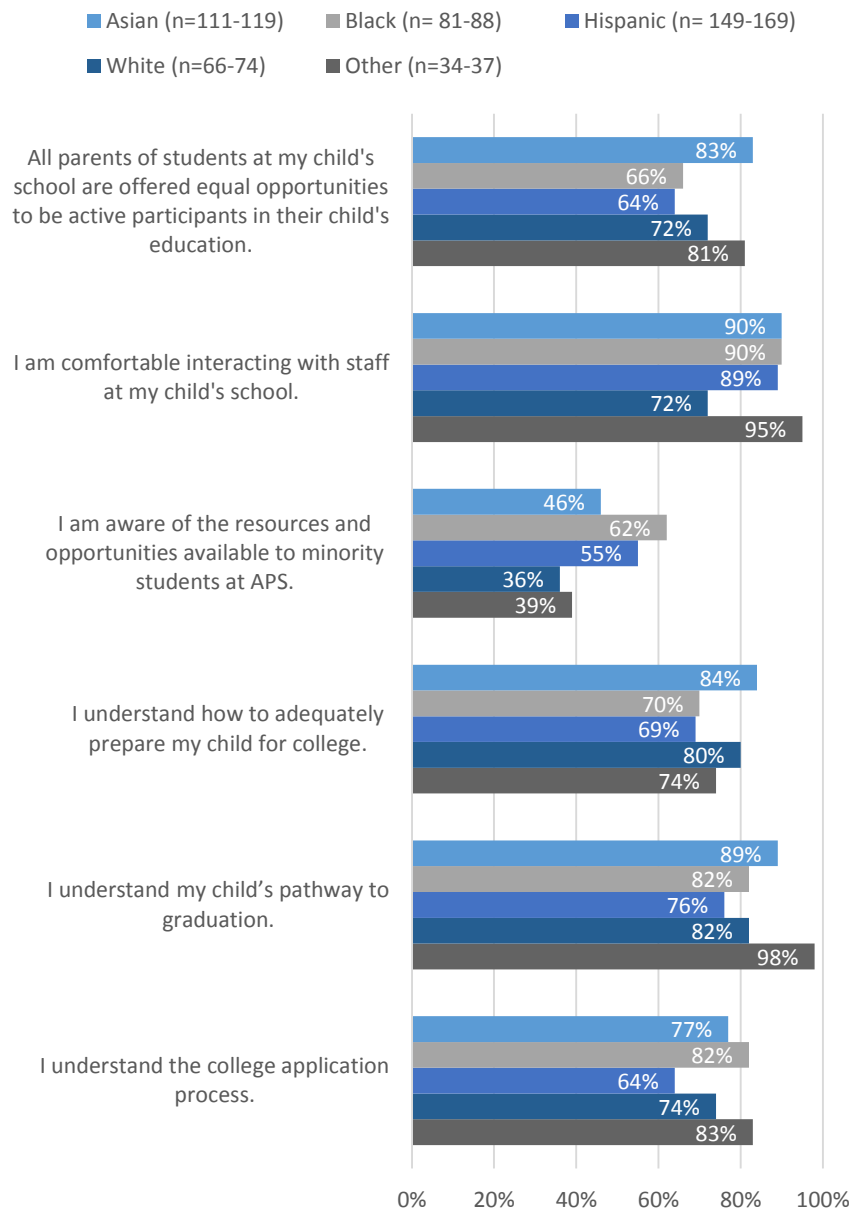


Figure 11: Parent Comfort and Perceptions by Parent's Race/Ethnicity



Appendix C2

Figure 12: Parent Comfort and Perceptions by Parent's Education Level

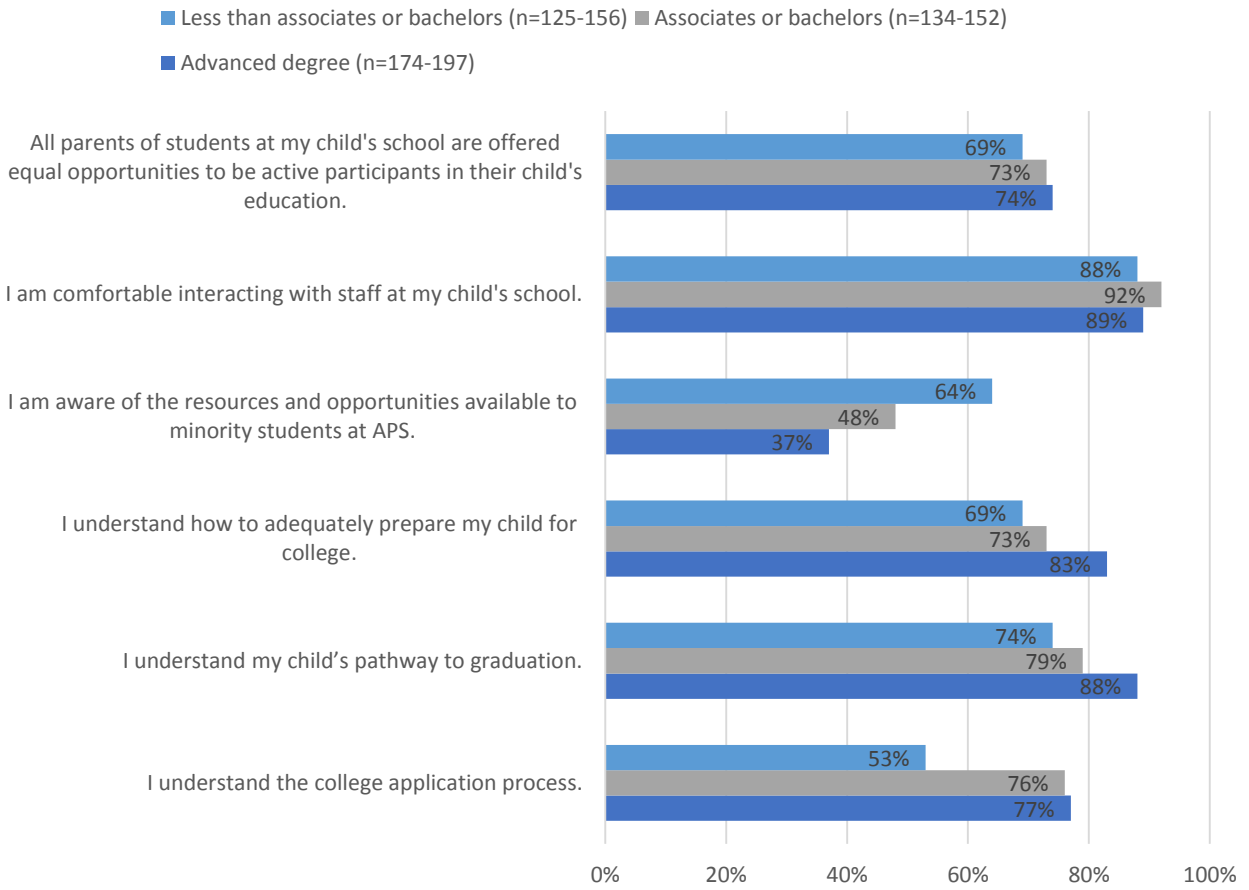
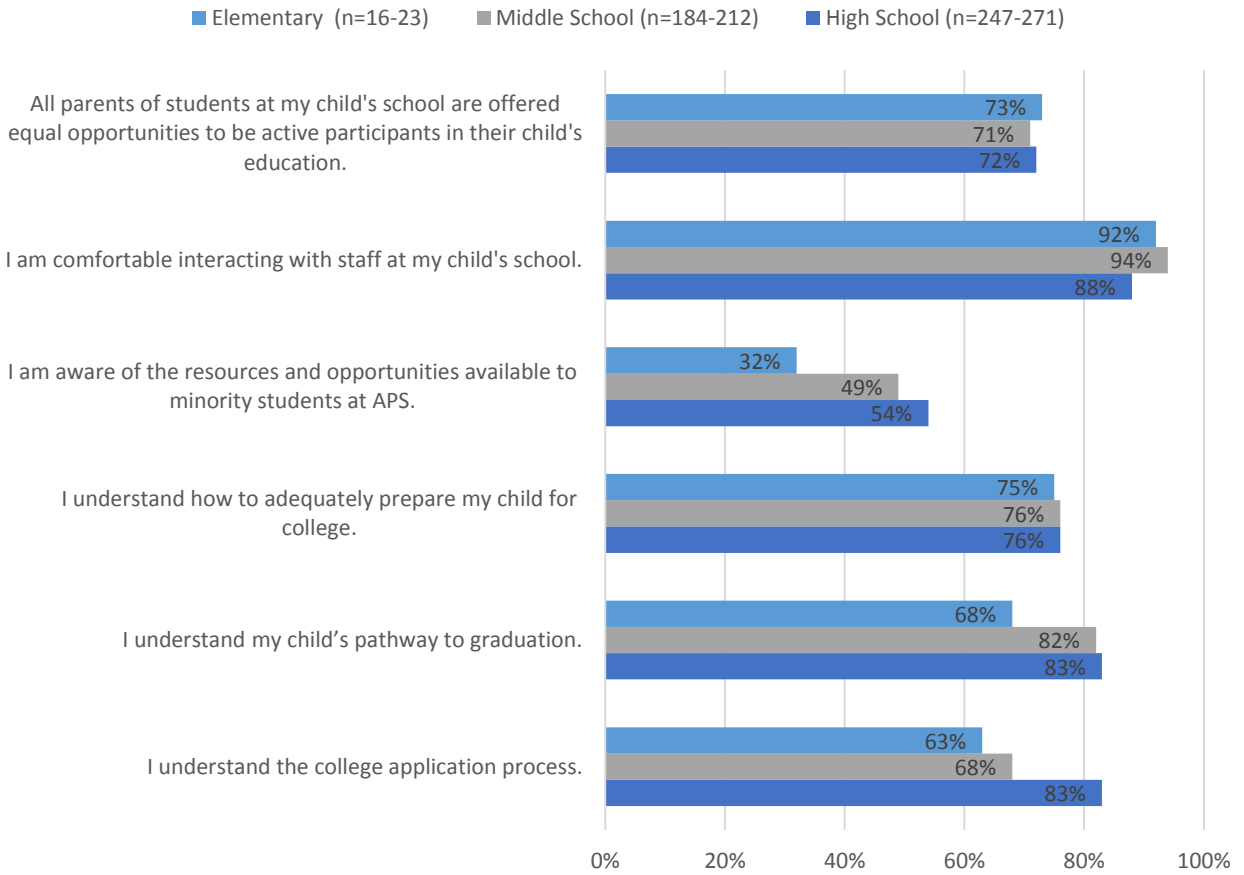


Figure 13: Parent Comfort and Perceptions by Grade Level of Child



**Arlington Public Schools
Focus Group Research with Staff Members, Parents, and Students on
Minority Achievement Programs**

September 27, 2015 – FINAL

Background 59

 Research Purpose 59

 Research Method..... 59

Detailed Findings..... 61

 Coordinators’ Priority Work..... 61

 Coordinators’ Priorities—Culturally Competent Schools with Minority Students Whose Race Matters to Them in a Positive Way..... 61

 Forging Relationships and Meeting Students’ Needs Informally is Central to Coordinators’ Work 61

 Experiences at School 62

 Coordinators Advocate 62

 Coordinators Laud APS for Placing MA Responsibility in Schools, but Feel Underappreciated..... 64

 Students, Parents, and Coordinators See APS Striving for Inclusive, Diverse Culture 65

 Relationships Between these Families and School Seem Good 66

 Being Just One of Just a Few Minorities in Class is Difficult 67

 Less Prominent Themes about Difficulty Included Being Ignored, Dress Code Issues..... 69

 Work To Do: Students’ Self-Advocacy, Flexibility within the System 69

 Finding Out About MA Programs..... 71

 A Web of Relationships and Proactivity Among Staff Helps Bring Students to MA Programs..... 71

 How Parents and Students Say They Find Out about MA Programs 72

 Some Find Out By Happenstance 73

 Coordinators Worry That the “Computer System” Hinders Their Ability to Accurately Identify and Invite Students 73

 Coordinators Would Like to Use the Computerized System in New Ways 74

 Parents Offer Communication Suggestions 75

 Getting Involved in MA Programs..... 76

 Logistics of Getting Involved are Easy..... 76

 Friends, Siblings Play a Major Role in Telling and Motivating Other Students 76

 Teachers, Successes, College Trips, and Pizza Motivate..... 76

 Parents Encourage 78

 Barriers and Discouragement 79

 Experiences in MA Programs 81

 What Students Gain from Participating..... 81

 Downsides or Drawbacks of Participating 83

 Meeting Goals of Challenge, Support, Resiliency 84

 Most Students Found Schoolwork Challenging, Although Some Middle-Schoolers and Parents of Younger Students Were Mixed..... 84

 Most Students Feel Extremely Well-Supported by Adults at School, Although a Portion of Middle Schoolers Felt Less So 87

 MA Programs Support Resiliency 88

Conclusions 91

Background

The Arlington Public Schools (APS) Office of Minority Achievement is dedicated to helping students discover and utilize resources that will help them progress toward their personal goals. The department works to create an equitable, hospitable, safe, and inclusive environment for students, families, and staff. The goal of this work is to create culturally affirming spaces where openness, inclusiveness, respect, and appreciation for diversity of thought, values, cultures, learning styles, perceptions, and actions flourish.

A multi-faceted evaluation of Minority Achievement (MA) Programs at APS is underway. The evaluation explores minority achievement via many different means including data on students' grades and enrollment, a survey of program alumni, SAT participation, data on program participation levels (e.g., SAT preparation classes), and surveys of school staff.

This report summarizes qualitative research findings from a set of 11 focus groups conducted in April, May, and June 2015 with students, parents, and MA Coordinators who work in APS schools. Importantly, all of the evaluation's data should be considered as a whole. In other words, focus group findings will be most meaningful when considered together with findings from other facets of the overall MA Program evaluation.

Research Purpose

The overarching goals of the focus groups were to understand how involvement in MA offerings is achieved and what the effects of that involvement are—from the perspectives of students, parents, and the Minority Achievement Coordinators who work in schools.

Research Method

Eleven 90-minute focus groups were conducted by an independent researcher, not employed by APS. Groups were convened as follows:

In all, 80 people participated in this portion of the Minority Achievement evaluation—56 students, 15 parents, and 9 Minority Achievement Coordinators who work in Arlington schools. The 11 focus groups were organized in this way.

- Elementary school:
 - Students (1 focus group, 10 students)
 - Parents (1 focus group, 4 parents)
- Middle school:
 - Students (3 focus groups, 27 students)
 - Parents (1 focus group, 7 parents)
- High school:
 - Students (3 focus groups, 19 students)
 - Parents (1 focus group, 4 parents)

- Minority Achievement Coordinators (1 focus group, 9 Coordinators)

In the three groups convened among parents, an interpreter worked with those whose primary language is Spanish so that they could participate fully as listeners and could share their opinions. The discussion guides are attached as Appendices A, B, and C. The questions were developed in collaboration with the Office of Planning and Evaluation and the Office of Minority Achievement. In brief, the discussion guides explored:

- **Coordinators' views on students' needs and priorities in minority achievement work at APS.**
- **Students', parents', and Coordinators' experiences at APS in general** (e.g., advocacy in schools, experiences related to race, parents' comfort navigating school).
- **Students' and parents' experiences with MA Programs, specifically** (e.g., what students gain from participating, any downsides they see or changes they would make).
- **How students get involved with MA Programs** (e.g., how Coordinators reach out and families hear about programs, encouragement or discouragement students receive, motivators and barriers to joining, and how easy or difficult it is to join if they decide to do so).
- **Experiences related to MA goals of academic challenge, adult support for students, and fostering resiliency.**

In interpreting the findings presented in this report, it is important to note that focus group discussions are a qualitative research method. While the discussions produce rich, detailed information about the perspectives of those interviewed and opportunities to further explore relevant new perspectives, focus group findings are descriptive in nature and cannot be generalized due to sampling approaches and small sample sizes.

Detailed Findings

Coordinators' Priority Work

Coordinators' Priorities—Culturally Competent Schools with Minority Students Whose Race Matters to Them in a Positive Way

At the outset of their discussion, Coordinators were asked, “What are the needs of minority students at your school that are the top priorities for you as Minority Achievement Coordinator?” The two core themes of their answers were that the priorities are:

1. Fostering a school environment that is culturally competent.
2. Reaching a point at which students feel that their race matters to them and that they find it matters in a positive way.

Ideally, the system would work so well for all kids that [Coordinators] wouldn't be needed... I think that would be the ideal picture, that counselors, staff...everyone in the building is culturally competent and everybody is looking out for every kid. An ideal world. (Coordinator)

Forging Relationships and Meeting Students' Needs Informally is Central to Coordinators' Work

The ways in which Coordinators spoke of their work highlighted relationships with students and the service Coordinators provide *outside* of formal MA groups. High school Coordinators, especially, described drop-in visits at lunch and other times during which students connect with one another and with the Coordinator. Such time together allows for one-on-one support that ranges from managing college applications to handling day-to-day school matters to addressing life challenges. Parents and younger students describe chats in the halls and even doing homework in the Coordinator's office.

There are a lot of kids that just come to my office that want to talk to me. Some of that is because of the connections I have through those groups but other kids know and say [to other students at school] that you can come to me. (Coordinator)

...a lot of the groups are somewhat informal groups.... A lot of it is also a one-on-one counseling. A lot of it is doing paperwork with kids. So college acceptances, calling the college, making sure their residence stuff is in, making sure they know how to pay the cost. [This is needed] because the parents often may not have that capacity to help the kids...that “roll-up-the-sleeves” type of work. I do groups but a lot of my time is spent working one-on-one with kids. (Coordinator)

Students echoed not just the importance of the MA Coordinator role, but specifically the characteristics of the **person** in that role. In this context, the question of what qualities APS should seek in an MA Coordinator was explored. Students' answers covered genuineness, enthusiasm, willingness to speak difficult truths, interest in knowing students as individuals, listening skills, self-confidence, and having an observable commitment to all students without favorites.

He just really believes in you. ...Honestly, he does truly care about the students that he works with and he builds a personal relationship with them. Then he becomes comfortable with them, like, "No [don't take the easy path], I know that you can do this." Even if it's something that maybe the student hasn't tackled before, he pushes them to do it because he knows that it will benefit them. He always tries to find opportunities for us and says, "You can put this on your resume," or "This will prepare you for what you want to do in college or what you want to major in." He just really pushes you to do your best. (HS Student)

[Needed qualities are....] Able to listen..... [Coordinator also] has a way of talking to you and getting to know you to a point where he says exactly what needs to be said. It's one of those things where they have to think and understand you as a person. (HS Student)

Somebody who's truly going to give equal amounts of work to all the students and care for them equally as [Coordinator] does. (HS Student)

Energetic. To get somebody else excited about something. Not make it sound boring. It needs to be a person that understands the way a 13, 14-year-old will think. (MS Student)

Experiences at School

Coordinators Advocate

As a group, Coordinators clearly see themselves as advocates and are keenly aware of that role. As one put it, "I'm the equity guy." In their discussion, Coordinators noted their various approaches, saying individuals undertake advocacy differently, in the manner that suits their personality. In other words some are more strident and some less so. A couple Coordinators spoke of past instances of MA advocacy at the district level. In one example 8-10 years prior, letters were sent to families of students who enrolled in an AP class without a teacher's recommendation. The letter was described as "nasty" and dissuasive as it warned that the student could not drop and would not receive extra support. With effort over time, the letter finally ceased to be used. Similarly, Coordinators have pressed questions like why the numbers of black and Latino males in special education is so disproportionately high. Most examples of advocacy these Coordinators provided were in their day-to-day work at school—ranging from pointing out inequities to advocating on behalf of individual students to ensuring that equity and minority issues are considered in leadership decisions.

I think one of the most effective ways that I've found to advocate really can be those hallway conversations. Sometimes it's an informal advocacy but you're very present in that moment and you're able to talk to the stakeholder, whether it's the teacher, the counselor, the principal, the assistant principal, the head of another program...Also serving on committees and leadership teams [aids advocacy]....So, when I sit at that table and listen to the discussion...I'm always bringing minority achievement to mind and making sure that equity and best practices, all these types of things are present in the discussion. (Coordinator)

I feel our presence became itself an awareness, too in the school, that, "Listen, we need to work on this. This is not equal. There is something there that is not working." Sometimes it's a phrase, sometimes [our presence] says, "Welcome." Every culture in every school is different, but just by our being there, people are aware that they have to do something about it... Teachers ask me, "Can you help me with this?" Okay, I go to the classroom. They are very conscious that I'm there and I'm hoping they have specific practices that I can work with. If they don't, they ask. (Coordinator)

Some of it is calling it out. We had, for example... a black student who was on the [sport] team and one of his teachers came down to the game and saw him playing and said, "He's failing my class. He shouldn't be playing." They weren't going to let him play at the next game. ... I brought up that if we have [class-by-class] grade requirement to play sports, then we should have one. But, we shouldn't be just pulling kids at random... If he knows ahead of time, [that would be fair]. [So], now we adopted a grade policy and the students can't have a D or E... I think calling it when we see these practices, because it wasn't a policy. (Coordinator)

It's not just academically challenged kids. We're advocating for students who are doing very well. (Coordinator)

In the context of advocacy, Coordinators cautioned against complacency at schools—ranging from assuming that minority-majority relationship issues are solved to assuming the presence of the Minority Achievement Coordinator means that others can stand down. The solutions to complacency they proposed included not denying that issues exist, ensuring that cultural competence is exhibited in all academic areas, and hiring more core-subject teachers who are racial and ethnic minorities themselves.

I think it really goes back to the cultural competency work that we're doing and getting more and more people to buy in that's it's needed. I think speaking just for [my school] I think there's a lot of denial that there's an issue [as if to say], "There's no issue. We're all good." (Coordinator)

...we have to continue to push towards diversity, cultural competence in all academic areas. They're used to just thinking, "Minority Achievement takes care of that. Get more minority books. Ask Minority Achievement." Now there are a few English teachers that are saying, "Oh, here are some multicultural books you can read." Social studies... [is asking] "How do our supervisors monitor who's taking what class? What can we do to teach AP Government in a more multicultural differentiated way?" It has to come from all areas, it can't just come from us.... All guidance counselors should be taking kids on field trips, not just, "Oh, Minority Achievement people." (Coordinator)

...We are a very diverse multicultural staff across the county. But when you break it down and you disaggregate and you look at where those staff are, we have a lot of black and brown PE teachers. We have a lot of black and brown special educators. We have a lot black and brown

non-core staff, custodial staff, secretarial staff... Wonderful people but when you have students in the classroom, they need to see throughout their day, "I have white teachers, I have male teachers, I have black teachers, I have Latino teachers." (Coordinator)

Coordinators Laud APS for Placing MA Responsibility in Schools, but Feel Underappreciated

Coordinators strongly felt that part-time Coordinators could do much more if their positions were dedicated to MA full time. In addition, they thought a number of programs started successfully in their department had been taken over by others once the program was established and performing well. Several said they were at ease with where programs were housed, but wanted more recognition for what MA had begun. An example given was TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement), which was said to have begun as an MA program and now resides in Professional Development. In addition, Coordinators wanted better communication about what they do in schools and why —both from themselves and at the county level. They thought, as a group, that they have their “hands in the work” and provide unique support, but that they do not do enough to communicate that work, perhaps because of humbleness. In that context, they noted differences among schools—in some, Coordinators serve on leadership teams and are routinely asked to join guidance and parent meetings, and in others Coordinators have not got such a central and “included” role. In interpersonal relationships, one Coordinator described keeping a bit of distance, avoiding being overly “chummy” with school administration, in order to best serve an advocacy role. Still, in closing their discussion, Coordinators made it a point to laud APS for having MA Coordinators in schools, saying they do not think any other local school system staffs such a role.

I want to say that our department, we don't get the respect that we deserve in this county. We're doing the field trips, we're doing the leadership conferences. We're rarely mentioned, [as in] "Minority Achievement has done _____"... I feel like we're not always.... on the same level as gifted or counselors. We're always kind of ... an afterthought. [People think], "I don't know what they do." Or, "I'm not sure." I still feel that. (Coordinator)

I hear what you're saying but actually I feel opposite because I'm part of all the counselor meetings, the admin meetings, teachers are constantly having me come to their team meetings or parent meetings. I feel like everyone knows what I do and because I'm part of their [day-to-day], they pull me in. That is helpful. That could work in every single school where all the teachers are pulling you in.... (Coordinator)

*...a few of us are part of the admin team or the leadership team. Just **that** is telling you how valuable you are in the building, [affirming] the important information or resources that you have provided....It's kind of validation of the work that we do, that it's important. [In some instances, you tell] people in the school, "I am a Minority Achievement Coordinator." [They wonder], "What do you do?" What it exactly means. There is not a clear understanding of what we do or not a clear communication of what we do. It's us not being clear about the way that we communicate with others, if the administrators, teachers and the community don't really know what we do... (Coordinator)*

Students, Parents, and Coordinators See APS Striving for Inclusive, Diverse Culture

There was largescale agreement across these qualitative discussions that Arlington puts effort into cultivating an inclusive culture that capitalizes on and appreciates diversity. Still-present biases and imperfections were seen and widely acknowledged. But—as shown by the quotations below and throughout this report—both students and adults felt strongly aware of the school system’s work and believed there is positive intent.

We have a Peace Walk. [Another] Oh, that was fun. It’s when we make signs and we walk around the neighborhood. (ES Students)

There was this assembly today and [in the show] the daughter was like, “I want to celebrate Christmas like all the other Christian kids.” And, the mother was like, “But we’re Jewish and we need to be proud of our religion.” (MS Student)

My girls, even though the school is not that diverse, I would say that they’ve had a positive experience in the sense that they’ve helped other cultures, mainly whites, to be able to [learn about people whose race or ethnicity is different from themselves].... (MS Parent)

Especially with minorities, because they know this is a very white school, they try and make that up by giving us more resources. [Coordinator] tells us everything she does. She works hard for us, because sometimes it's hard. (HS Student)

Sometimes, when we have spirit week, they have speak-outs [at school]. One day, Trayvon Martin's birthday, we all did a hoodie out. We got to wear our hoodies and stuff. They try a lot of stuff. (HS Student)

I'm friends with the new girl here, and she's like "There's a lot of white people here." I was like "Yeah, there is." I know a lot of people, minorities that are friends with white people. It's not that bad. Some of them are stuck up, but others are pretty cool. (HS Student)

One Coordinator acknowledged, and others agreed, that Arlington’s minority achievement and cultural goals are a work in progress.

... some of the things we deal with are the overall perceptions. Arlington County, I think prides itself on being diverse but there are also these negative ideas about schools that are majority minority, South Arlington versus North Arlington. So you have these contradictions. We want the students to be in upper level classes but we had [in the past] this letter that intimidates parents when they're putting their kids in those classes. Then there are teachers who don't feel like they should be talking about race or they can see color. There are all these things that impact the relationships and expectations. (Coordinator)

Relationships Between these Families and School Seem Good

Although this qualitative research cannot make generalizations about school-family relationships district-wide, many participants did indicate that their schools and families are in touch.

Her teacher this year has been pretty good about communicating via email and when I see her after school. (ES Parent)

There is a lot of transparency when it comes to the teachers and children. I get notes, I get emails. If the note doesn't come back [from me to school], then I get an email. (ES Parent)

A lot of the people who work here, they know my family. A lot of them went here. (ES Student)

My grandma has a lot of meetings at school. (ES Student)

They usually stay in touch a lot. When I do something really good they call [my mom]. (ES Student)

One of the things the Engagement Committee [at School] does is try to make everybody feel welcome. Not only that, but also giving the information about school to the parents—where to go, how to go to a teacher, what to talk about, what to ask...just finished a program called Face Time, geared specifically for non-English-speaking parents [to help them use ParentView]. That was a shock to the kids when they found out their parents could check grades...because the parents relied on the kids to tell them their grades. (MS Parent)

[School Name] in my experience has been extremely responsive and very open. A lot of people will say things when they're not happy, [so] I'll say we've been extremely happy with the access to the teachers, with their concerns for our concerns. (MS Parent)

And, I do want to say that I have a very good relationship with [Coordinator]. And, my son does, too. Anything that we need that I don't get from the teachers, I go to him and he is on it right away. My son trusts him a lot...And, there are things that sometimes my son doesn't want to talk to me about, so I will go to him and he will talk to my son. So, there is a very good communication there. (MS Parent)

I've been pretty much comfortable. I've had some minor issues here and there, but I view it as dealing with human people. (MS Parent)

You get emails. I was nominated for the Principal's Breakfast by my English teacher and we got a letter and a packet home. They do that. Emails. (HS Student)

My counselor, she always calls home because her and my mom, they always talk. (HS Student)

Yeah, except I was going to say that case carrier, especially my case carrier is kind of more in touch with my parents. Usually when I have to speak with someone, it's not my counselor. It's my case carrier. She's more personal....like for IEP. (HS Student)

I'll call him and say, "[Child's Name]" told me this or that. And, [Coordinator] will say, "Ok, I will pull her out of class [to check with her]." And she'll [chide me for raising an issue], "Mom, he pulled me out of class and we're doing something important, I don't want to miss it." (HS Parent)

The few parents in focus groups who primarily speak Spanish were asked whether they feel like they have ways to communicate with school that overcome language differences. Largely, they said they do. One couple in which the father was bilingual and the mother spoke primarily Spanish attended one focus group. In describing a problem at school, they said the mother called to handle it—which may demonstrate their access to bilingual assistance by telephone. However, one parent said that she could not always easily find a bilingual person to help her at her son's high school.

When I have a question, I go to the school to ask. I have communication with a lady who speaks Spanish. (MS Parent)

There is not always someone at [High School] who can speak Spanish. That is why I liked [Middle School] so much, there was always someone there who could. [At assemblies/events] I have to pay a lot of attention to understand just a little bit. (HS Parent)

Being Just One of Just a Few Minorities in Class is Difficult

Although the overall school experience is clearly positive, supportive, and academically challenging, a couple specific issues were raised by some high schoolers. The difficulty these students expressed largely occurred in situations in which they were the only minority student in a class or one of a very few minorities in a class. In these instances, several students said that they felt uncomfortable asking or answering questions, fearing embarrassment coupled with race-based judgments should they say something "dumb" or incorrect.

I agree completely [with another student's comment], that's how I've felt since 9th grade and I still feel that way today. In classes where...I'm the only one. So, I hold myself back because I'm like, "Wow, they're saying some really smart things. I would've never thought of that." I told one of my teachers last year, "Sometimes I just don't feel like I can speak, or if I do, all eyes are on me and they're probably thinking, "Well that's not as [smart]. That's...a simple thought" or something. I'm pretty much holding myself back because even this year I don't raise my hand when I have a question, when I don't understand because nobody else is raising their hand and everybody seems to understand it so [I don't ask]. (HS Student)

... I would say that as a minority many times, because I take AP and IB classes, many times I would feel like an outsider in those classes because there's not many minorities, like all white.

That's pretty much it. I know last year I took an IB class and there were only 2 other Hispanic kids. They were talking to me and were like, "Do you ever feel like you're out of the loop, or you don't understand certain things, you just feel isolated?" I was like, "Yeah, but it's not on purpose." (HS Student)

Expressing a similar sentiment in the reverse, an elementary school parent noted positive feelings about having her son in a school in which he is not the only student with black or brown skin. Some students at Wakefield High School said that they had transferred from other schools and found the Wakefield environment, which is majority minority, a good fit for them.

[My elementary-age son] doesn't experience any discrimination against him. His class is quite unique because there isn't one kid that is from one ethnicity only. So, he's not the only one who is different. He's the only [student of his ethnicity]. But, everybody is "something." (ES Parent.)

I had the same experience [as another participant]. I was [at another school] 2-3 months and I thought, "Yeah, this is not it," I thought, "Why am I the only Hispanic girl in my classes?" The teachers were also- I could see they treated me different because I was the only Hispanic. I thought, "Yeah, this is not it." So, I transferred here [Wakefield]. The first week, I loved it and I keep loving it and I'm so happy with decision I made. I don't have to feel like I'm alone because everyone else was different. (HS Student)

I was somewhere else for 2 years too, my freshman and sophomore years, I didn't really like it there and when I came [to Wakefield] I loved it. It felt great here. It's more of a welcoming environment here as far as people-wise....Here you can't really tell who the popular kids are...it's more a family here. (HS Student)

Several Coordinators expressed the belief that smaller class sizes would be potentially valuable to foster better student-teacher relationships as would grouping students so that students of color in majority white schools could see more of one another. The conversation also included other grouping ideas—such as cohorts or similar (which are not race/ethnicity based) which might help students to better find their home or a set of familiar faces within a school.

The other issue subsumed under [class size and grouping] is, because of the way they schedule students, they don't cluster, they don't cohort. They don't group students by ability level and also by ethnicity and race and gender. And, so when they sprinkle the kids like pepper and salt, you have one or two black males, one or two Latina females, one or two. You have a sprinkling of all of our ethnicities and genders throughout the classes and I don't feel like those students see each other as an ally, source of support, of academic strength, of bonding, of power....That type of thing is, we all know the research on it. That is a powerful tool for supporting students, especially when you're talking about engaging them in rigorous coursework and rigorous challenging academics. (Coordinator)

I would say the research also shows that...students of color benefit more from relationships with their teachers, are motivated by relationships. I see that anecdotally....But, when you have 30 kids in a class, how can you possibly develop good relationships with them? (Coordinator)

I don't think that the school works well for a lot of minority boys in the beginning of 9th grade. It just doesn't. The way we do it doesn't fit their developmental needs. I think that we don't hit their learning strengths by a lot of the things that we traditionally do. [Proposes exploring the potential value of adapting current groupings in a high school to allow for an all-male student group taught by men and an all-female student group taught by women to better meet 9th graders' needs.] (Coordinator)

Less Prominent Themes about Difficulty Included Being Ignored, Dress Code Issues

A couple high school students said they had experiences in which they felt ignored. This topic was noted, but was not a strong theme throughout the groups.

I've had this experience in my English class. The teacher would want the white kids to read stuff when she wants them to read stuff out loud and she wouldn't really call on the minorities. That's something that I noticed and my friend also told me that too. (HS Student)

A couple high school students and one Coordinator shared the view that dress code violations are more heavily, rigidly enforced for African American students—girls, in particular—than for white students.

[Weather is] getting warmer. I'm waiting for it every year at school. There are kids at school, especially girls who complain about being called for the dress code violation and they say, "The white girls dress the same way, they don't get ..." There's certain conversations you have over and over and over but they send a negative message and the kids know it. They know it. (Coordinator)

I don't know if this applies [to the question asked], but dress-code wise, if you're white and your shoulders are showing they don't say anything about that. I'm not kidding. I could be wearing the same tank top as another girl and they wouldn't say anything, they would say something to me. I noticed that with lots of my non-white friends, we agreed on that. I don't understand where that comes from. (HS Student)

Work To Do: Students' Self-Advocacy, Flexibility within the System

One Coordinator suggested that working on minority students' self-advocacy is an area of need for the Minority Achievement Program and for schools in general. Others agreed and indicated that finding time for conversations that support self-advocacy is much easier at the high school level than at the middle school level because high school students' schedules are more flexible.

*I think our presence in the school brings a sense of safety in terms of [minority students] have a support system with us. However, we are a little bit short on the **self**-advocacy part. I believe many of the students are not [self-advocating] and we need to work more on that in terms of facilitating for them to go and talk to the teachers about what they need. Or if they are not in the level of the class they need, talk to the counselor about it. Some of this stuff we have to still walk them through, but I feel it's time in middle school they have to be able to have this conversation, to say, "I'm not in the right ... this, this, and this...I need to do something about it." Not because I asked him to do it and he's 14 years old....It's part of growing up and it's part of our job to make sure they have the skills to advocate for themselves. [The complication is whether] the school provides spaces for them to talk. Are we providing these conversations? ...Not many people are telling students, "Tell me what is not working." I don't hear that question. I don't hear that conversation. (Coordinator)*

In high school it's easier. [At middle school] it's frustrating because if [one holds] a kid like 5 minutes after lunch the teacher would be mad. At the high school, students can come in. It's more freedom... [At high school], it's independent. [Teachers say], "If you miss 5 minutes in my class then it's up to you to make that up," rather than at [middle school]. (Coordinator)

One theme emerged among Coordinators around the need for teachers to be able to adapt within the overall consistent structure. This is not a question that was directly asked, or even a theme pertaining only to minorities. Rather, it came up in Coordinators' comments enough that it warrants mention. They thoroughly understand and support the need for consistency, but offered various scenarios that called for leeway in support of student achievement, engagement with school, and relationships. Their examples ranged from allowing flexible windows in highly structured middle school schedules for students to spend a few minutes with the Coordinator or speak with a teacher to allowing five extra minutes on a test for a student who knows the material even if an IEP does not specify that need. They worried that pulling a student from a sports game for a poor class grade (a scenario described on page 7) was tantamount to pulling his main engagement with school.

We're moving towards more uniformity, which I think in some ways is good but in some ways it's a little scary because you have to figure out, "How do you individualize instruction when every kid has to take the same unit test around the county?" In math, I have teachers who will say, "Well, I'll let him retake that test but don't tell anybody I did that." Because they're so afraid because.... [the rule is] "No it doesn't matter if the kid's mother died yesterday, they're not allowed to"...And that kind of stuff is just not benefiting our kids. Drives me crazy. Where they can't have any extended time if it's not in their IEP. They can't have 5 minutes into their lunch period to finish the last [test problem]... I had that conversation and the math teacher said, "Well, I know she knows [the content] but the policy is that they have this amount of time to do it..." [I said], "You know she knows [the content] and now she's going to get a D on a test even though you know she knows the information?" I'm worried that we're all moving to this kind of lockstep thing and it's never going to work for kids. (Coordinator)

Finding Out About MA Programs

A Web of Relationships and Proactivity Among Staff Helps Bring Students to MA Programs

Although finding out about good candidates for MA Programs via automated means is useful (e.g., looking up students who qualify via computer), interpersonal and informal channels are clearly critical in this process. Coordinators described a truly wraparound process in which students reach them via widely varied avenues. For example, they invite students who they meet on field trips or come to know at school. They receive candidate suggestions from teachers. And, Coordinators, teachers, and administrators work together to bridge from elementary to middle to high school—with adults sharing information and asking questions both from the younger grade levels up and older grade levels down. Even MA program participants refer their siblings. And, some students initiate participation themselves. This network of support relies, in part, on strong interpersonal relationships and proactive outreach and it was not clear from focus group discussions whether all Coordinators' networks and outreach were equally strong. However, the group clearly believed in the effectiveness and importance of these means of opening doors for students who fit well with various MA Programs.

[In addition to my own outreach], I get referrals from teachers, like, "Hey this kid really seems lost. Can you connect him somehow?" (Coordinator)

Collaboration is a big word. I agree, as [Coordinator] said, [the MA invitation approach] depends on what the opportunity is. For instance, with [program]¹, the high school Coordinator will pull a list but then they always send it to us middle school Coordinators to say, "Is this list complete? Do you think that there are other students to add?" (Coordinator)

...even with things like EIP at the middle school level... I know usually about 10 to 15 students each year that are good candidates but then I'll reach out to the counselors and the teams of teachers and the gifted resource teacher. I have good partnerships with those staff members. I can say, "I know my list is not complete. Give me your candidates." So collaboration is key. (Coordinator)

...my administrators are regularly presenting my programs to the staff. Every month it's the news, like, "This is going on." It's posted and the people know how to get in. They announce it on morning announcements. Every new opportunity is announced at the new week. (Coordinator)

¹This is a reference to a specific school's program. In this report, the names of specific school programs are not shown to help protect identities. Thus, readers should be aware that when they see the term "program" in brackets, it is a reference to an individual school's program—and, not a reference to the Minority Achievement Program overall.

How Parents and Students Say They Find Out about MA Programs

Likewise, in the parents' and students' experience, outreach can be both formal (e.g., a note distributed to all students who qualify for a particular group) and informal (e.g., a direct verbal invitation from the Coordinator).

Our school counselor came up to our class and asked if we wanted to join [YES Club]. She gave the whole class permission slip. You had a certain amount of time to bring it. (ES Student)

[Name] who used to be the Coordinator at our school, she just saw me in the hall and asked me. (MS Student)

I got a letter saying that my minority achievement teacher [Name] recommended me. (MS Student)

It's actually pretty cool because she'll call us up from our classroom and tell us about different programs that she has to offer. Most of them are pretty cool, like classes or a day workshop. [Agreeing] It makes school feel more grown up. In 6th or 7th grade, the only information we ever got was what the school provided. And, if you ever got to go out it wouldn't be a college tour, it would just be a museum where you'd have to follow a chaperone around or some really boring play. But now we have [Coordinator] who sometimes walks down the 8th grade hallways. She sees us and runs up to us really energetic saying, "I found these new scholarships for you. I found this day class or workshops." She really motivates you. (MS Student)

How I found out about the program...and I really appreciate this about Arlington...during the PALS period, [acronym for] "packet, agenda, lockers, something like that." It's a week before school. You go to [school]. They have pizza and stuff. You bring your child and the child gets to go to their locker and stuff like that. That's where I initially met [Coordinator]. She came up and just introduced herself. So, that's how I knew about it. And, I get things in the mail. I get email. I get calls. They communicate a lot. (MS Parent)

I tell my children, "You're supposed to give something to me today [a note or invitation from school]" because [Coordinator] has already emailed me. (MS Parent)

[Coordinator] came by personally and said, "Hey, I want you to join this group. It'd be really good for you." (HS Student)

[Coordinator] and her counselor [Name] came to her and told her about it because she's always on the honor roll and she does her work, her homework. I don't have to chase her to do it....[after they told her], she's like, "Mom, they told me about this program at school. And, I'm going to go visit colleges and we get to do things and discuss..." (HS Parent)

Some Find Out By Happenstance

A few students indicated they found out purely by happenstance and pursued the MA opportunity of their own accord. This manner of learning of MA Programs was far less common than hearing from school staff, friends, or siblings. Still some high schoolers worried that too few know about available the MA Programs.

I pretty much didn't care in middle school. But in 6th grade, I signed up for the book club and... We had a field trip to George Mason University. On the permission slip it mentioned [the term] EIP student ... and I didn't know what it meant. My parents didn't know what it meant. My mom asked and that's how I got into the program...I mean it just was kind of one of those things. I also had a sister who helped me out with finding smaller programs. She told me a lot to talk to [Coordinator]. It's ... I don't know, especially with programs like EIP since there's so many people on the waiting list they can't really go out and say, "Ok we have this meeting for these types of students", it's kind of just one-on-one. (HS Student)

It was sort of more a curiosity too because in middle school I was in the Minority Achievement Program, When I came into high school I didn't hear anything from it so I wondered ... Yeah so then I went to the counselor and she directed me to [Coordinator]. (HS Student)

... I feel like a lot of minorities in the school aren't aware of the programs that are offered unless you hear it from a friend or your siblings or something. I definitely would say spreading the word and making that known... I feel like a lot of people here come in from different countries, because it's very diverse school, but there's always that one group of kids that everybody knows. I definitely feel like we should start helping [students from different countries] and making them feel accepted, like, "Hey you want to be in an AP class? Go for it, if you're up to that level." I wouldn't say there's much negativity, I just feel like the word should be spread about this so everybody knows. (HS Student)

Coordinators Worry That the "Computer System" Hinders Their Ability to Accurately Identify and Invite Students

When asked what hinders identification of students, Coordinators resoundingly pointed to computerized systems used to find candidate students. For example, they may need to identify all students in a school who are male, minority, with a GPA over 3.0. In many instances they find mistakes (e.g., students omitted) or glitches (e.g., results showing no students at all meet criteria) or confounding factors (e.g., multiracial students' races/ethnicities listed nonspecifically). As a result, Coordinators must double-check computerized reports either in painstaking ways such as reviewing paper files or following up with teachers about individual students or by getting others' reviews of lists to check for completeness. The group indicated that the elementary Coordinator does not have access to the computer system. Despite its imperfections, being able to use such a system is better than not being able to at all. One Coordinator thought that the system might have all the capabilities the Coordinators desire, although using the system is very cumbersome.

Well, like for [program]...you have to run a list of the kids that might be eligible. I think the [program] kids you have to have no grades below a C for one quarter [and it is for] black and Hispanic males. Well, it's not as easy with this current system to run those things. The first time we ran it... I looked at the names...I said to [name], my colleague, "This has never happened before. There are no black boys that have gotten all Cs or better in all their classes....This is weird." It was a computer glitch. It didn't identify all the kids. It's a hassle almost every time. She's had to go through and meet with people. It's a complicated process... to try and get an accurate list. (Coordinator)

... a local community organization was trying to give out awards to students who had done well for the last "so many" quarters since 3rd grade. In order for me to do that, I had to actually go to the teacher first. The teacher would say, "I'm not sure." So, then I'd have to go to the cumulative [hard copy file]... Search the names. Go back through and look at their report cards since 3rd grade. The technology just isn't available to everybody. (Coordinator)

I'll ask questions. It took me a year to get somebody to tell me how I can pull kids. I have to have the GPA for my [program] leaders, I have to pull the [names of] black, Hispanic boys with a 3.0 or higher. The first year I had to do that by hand because nobody could tell me... Now I can run that report. But now I'm told, "Well those GPAs aren't always accurate." I'm like, "Okay, now what? Should I still go back and do it by hand?" ... I don't know. [Yet] I think the information is there. (Coordinator)

Coordinators Would Like to Use the Computerized System in New Ways

Besides allowing for "pulling" names based upon specific criteria, Coordinators said that they would like to be able to look at other information—specifically, what classes their students are taking, what students are in particular AP classes to see how students stay or drop over time, and longitudinal data which may illuminate how engaged a student has been and at what schools. Regarding the latter, data are especially important on students who are not involved in small groups like EIP and SOAR and, as a result, are less well-known to Coordinators.

I would love to be able to run a list of the kids on my caseload and what their classes are like.... [Or ask] So who's in AP Psych, by race? Then I could run it again in January and see if they're still there because that's an issue. (Coordinator)

Because when [we] send sixth graders, unless I go to the "cūm" file, I can't see what they've been doing and how they've been engaged with grades since 1st, 2nd, 3rd grade, so that then I can pick up on [any issues]. Of course by the time they come through me and I start to send them out to high schools, [high school Coordinators] have to call us to say, "Was this kid with you?" Or, "Do you know this child? What's going on?" (Coordinator)

Parents Offer Communication Suggestions

A few parents offered complaints or suggestions.

- One group of parents agreed that describing the planned MA activities for the year would help convey to them the sense that the program overall is well-planned, well thought-out.
- The same group emphasized their wish for MA Programs to help students see not only what the program does for them, but also how they contribute to the program and to the community.
- Some elementary parents wished for more knowledge of MA program activities' content so that they can reinforce it at home.
- Several parents wanted online access to items like permission slips or forms that they need to submit, which would be helpful should the parent misplace items that have been sent home.
- One parent says she happens to be on an email distribution list of the MA Coordinator at a middle school that is not where her child attends, as well as on her child's middle school. She says she gets information from the other school's Coordinator that she does not receive from her "home" school, although she does receive considerable communication from her home school. Thus, she wonders why some information is missed by her home Coordinator.
- One mother whose primary language is Spanish indicated that two of letters she has received about MA Programs were not well-translated. In each case, when she inquired about the invitations, she learned that the activity had already happened and that the information as translated in the letter had been wrong.

For me, having 4 children, I need to plan months in advance. If I know you've planned things, to me as a parent that tells me that you've thought it out. You're not just putting stuff out there, even though you could put stuff later on as you find new opportunities. But, if I came in in September and you said, "This is what we have planned for the rest of the year," as a parent, I'd go, "Whoa, they thought this through" versus "Next week" or "We've got something in two weeks." (MS Parent)

She didn't want to [join]....And, that didn't sit well with me because we had to have a huge conversation around what minority achievement meant. So that the kids benefit from the program and other kids benefit because of peer-to-peer role modeling, having the kids understand what minority achievement is and why it matters [would be helpful]. That's something the Coordinators in individual schools could do. (MS Parent)

*My son is a soccer player...he plays with kids from all over the county. It gives him an identity. That's something these programs could do. I'm not sure how. But, give the students an identity, a purpose, something this group is **doing**. The foundation seems to be there. But, ultimately, what I want my children to have more of is more cultural identity. See where they fit in. They fit where they are just fine. But, they're also part of something bigger than that. That's where minority achievement can be achieved... Like, we're going to start a volunteer thing that serves someone else in our community. Something that unifies. (MS Parent)*

Getting Involved in MA Programs

Logistics of Getting Involved are Easy

Logistically, getting involved was said by most to be easy—even for groups that required an application like middle school EIP.

When we came to [school], I really felt like it [MA program] was right there for us. It was communicated to us, like “It’s here. And, we want your family to be involved in this.” Letters that came home. I met [Coordinator] right away. And, then there was an email exchange and phone calls. (MS Parent)

Friends, Siblings Play a Major Role in Telling and Motivating Other Students

The role of word-of-mouth from friends and siblings in reaching new high schoolers, in particular, seemingly cannot be overstated. Middle schoolers mentioned word-of-mouth, but it was not as prominent a factor as for older students.

It’s something that your teachers or friends told you about. That they liked. (MS Student)

I’ve seen junior friends I had, they were in [program] and they would talk about it all the time and I’d ask, “What is that?” (HS Student)

I actually got introduced to it because my sophomore year I transferred here from another high school, so I became friends with a bunch of people who were connected to the Minority Achievement and just one day they were like you should meet [Coordinator]. I got to meet him and he introduced me to a bunch of things that I could do, like be involved in the assemblies, talent shows ... That’s how I made new friends and got involved with that. (HS Student)

... a lot of my friends, they’ve already graduated but we were close before so they had already been involved with [Coordinator]. So, right from 9th grade that’s where I went because all of my other friends went to [a different high school] so I had to find somewhere to fit in and [MA] helped. (HS Student)

My sister, she’s actually in college right now, and she knew [Coordinator] very well and she introduced me to him and got me to do a lot of programs through him. (HS Student)

Teachers, Successes, College Trips, and Pizza Motivate

According to the students in the focus groups, especially middle- and high schoolers, teachers can be powerful cheerleaders encouraging them to participate.

My teacher said, "You should do it!" She seemed really excited about it. "It's going to help you a lot." So, then I got excited about it, too. (MS Student)

[What made me decide to participate was] instead of 'peer pressure', 'teacher pressure.' [Teacher said], "You should really do it. It would be really helpful for you. Especially when you go to [school name]. You'll be more comfortable because you'll be around people who are minorities as well as you." (HS Student)

Hearing about successes strongly encourages older students and their parents and to seek involvement in MA Programs. Likewise, success, usefulness, and in some cases selectivity, can make MA clubs and informal groups a source of pride which attracts participants.

I think [a good candidate for EIP] is someone who gets good grades and is responsible. [Another agreeing] I think someone with potential and dedication to their schoolwork and other activities. (MS Students)

So, I got the letter. And, when I saw that you had to be selected, it made me feel sort of special, I guess—because people are actually noticing my efforts in school. And, not even everybody who got the letter will get in, only a few are gonna get in. I think it made me want it more. (MS Student)

[Some] parents, did not want to be a part of a [college] trip. But, when they would hear about scholarships or hear about successes, then those parents and some of the community would come around. (Coordinator)

Some of them see the change. For example if you are with a student and they go from D to C, this student would bring people over. I have students who, we have a meeting with the administration about students' behavioral problems and instead of sending them to the in-school suspension, they ask me if I can work with them. Then [other students] see they are there, that they listen to music in my office, they can do their homework, and we can work and talk about what happened and alternatives. Their friends, who are in the same kind of mood making [difficulty] in the classroom, they come to visit. Then after that there became a group who are coming too. I think when they see themselves succeeding and getting something that no one else gets....better grades, respect from a teacher....they come back. They feel good about it and they come back. They bring people over. (Coordinator)

So this week I've had three alumni come back who finished their first year of college. The kids see, "Oh, she's back from Virginia Tech. He's back from Longwood. If she can do it I can do it." A lot of us have relationships with kids. I spend a lot of time with alumni. (Coordinator)

On a more practical level, Coordinators said that other factors including college trips, career fairs, and food encourage participation. These factors are not long-term commitments in themselves, but they allow that first positive contact between Coordinators and students that opens up future possibility.

High school students echoed the importance of college trips and food. Regarding the latter, one participant said she had joined the group on a friend's recommendation but she also gave a nod to food, saying, "And, there's pizza." On a cautionary note, however, two parents of middle schoolers thought that their children's college tour should have had more academic focus and less dining hall focus—such as a walk through the robotics lab, in one parent's words, "show them where things get done, show them people who are doing things."

A lot of my contacts come from taking kids on a field trip and meeting them on a field trip and then connecting with them afterwards. (Coordinator)

We had a transition program... one of the boys I met that Saturday, I saw him the first day of [high] school, said, "Oh, come on in. You're eating by yourself." He has been in every day. I said to him, "Remember we met back in 8th grade?" So that's where some of the real meaningful relationships start. (Coordinator)

For me, before I received the letter, I had already taken a field trip to tour George Mason. And, I just felt really interested in George Mason. So, when I received the letter [about EIP and its George Mason connection] I just decided to apply. As soon as I saw "George Mason," I was interested. (MS Student)

In the [college tour] group that my daughter was in, it was led by a [college] student. And, he made a general statement to them like, "What do you all want to do?" Well, they don't know. So [my daughter] felt like he [another parent] just said. She wanted to see more of the school. (MS Parent)

Parents Encourage

Like teachers, parents can be instrumental in getting students involved with MA Programs. In talking about the decision to participate, parents focused on the practical benefits of getting academic support and on the benefits of connectedness to one's cultural group. In considering this finding and all of the parent input in this report, readers should bear in mind that the parents who attended the focus group are likely highly motivated and involved, given that they are ones who voluntarily gave up an evening to visit school and share their experiences with MA Programs.

My mom did, encourage me. My mom and [Teacher Name]. [Teacher] and my mom are in contact. One day, I think I was outside playing [at school] and my mom and Ms. [Name] ran into each other and Ms. [Name] was telling my mom about YES Club. (ES Student)

So, I got the letter and I started reading it and I got excited about it. And, I was showing my mom. And, she was like, "Okay! You should do this." (MS Student)

[School Name] from what I understand and what I see, it's mainly a white school. So, with my black, African American children going through the system...my sixth-grader this year, she told me that out of 6 or 7 classes, there are only 2 other blacks. For her, she makes friends with

everyone, but, for me, I thought, "This [MA group] is an opportunity for her to get to know others." My thought was, "Get to know other minorities so you fit in [and know others]." (MS Parent)

They sent the letter in the mail for the little pizza party [for program], when they come talk to you and stuff. Then, my mom, she signed me up. So I really had no choice. [Another agreeing] When I came [to the school at first] they kind of introduced it to me and my family. Since I was coming in new, my parents kind of saw it as, "Oh, this is a good activity you can do. Maybe you can meet other people." (HS Students)

Barriers and Discouragement

Students perceived few barriers. Specifically, students at all age levels thought that others who do not participate have other activities or are simply not interested. There were virtually no paperwork or application-type barriers. Only middle schoolers commented on having an involved application process for EIP and scholarships. For these students—who participate in one or more MA program—that paperwork did not deter them. A couple speculated that it could be an advantage, resulting in only students who really want to participate making it into the group. A couple elementary school students mentioned parents' worry about being able to provide transportation if the student stays for an after school activity.

They [other students] were positive [about YES Club]. But, some people didn't join because they had choir. They didn't want it to interfere. Cause they had afterschool activities. (ES Student)

I think it keeps them away if they have a lot going on, maybe. (MS Student)

They may have better things to do. A lot of people here do sports. There's a lot of after school things. (HS Student)

When I was trying to get the paper from YES Club, it was hard because my grandma and dad were like, "Maybe I can't pick you up after school. I have work. I don't know." For a while I had to walk home every day. But, now my dad picks me up." (ES Student)

My first answer was, "No" [to YES Club] because he was in so many things and I couldn't keep up with what he was doing. He's hyper. But, he got really excited [about YES]. He told me they have their own lunch. They go on field trips. He actually asked [Coordinator] to ask his mom. [Coordinator] took the time to speak with me. He asked, "What are your reservations?" He took that extra step. (ES Parent)

In two instances, students noted that racial classifications in the school database were a barrier. In these two cases, students were listed as white, but were not. One high schooler had invited a friend to join a minority achievement program. The friend was only marginally interested and the need to go change his racial classification was enough of an extra step to keep him from attending. In another example, a student corrected her race in the database in order to be able to participate.

Actually the one who told me about this, she's a senior right now...She introduced me to [Coordinator]...at first, I was down as, my ethnicity said I was white, I'm actually Egyptian, North African. There's a debate about that. Some people say that North Africans are white and some others say, "I identify as black." [Coordinator said] "You should go change it, you should go tell them that you identify as black." Therefore I was able to be in the [group]. (HS Student)

By far, the biggest perceived barrier among Coordinators was that each is a solo person in a school building working with a large student population, in some cases full-time but in others half-time. They said the need is great and that they work with not only the minority population in their schools, but with students of all races to achieve APS goals. These Coordinators expressed great happiness and respect for APS that schools even have Minority Achievement Coordinators, knowing that other school systems do not have a school-based Coordinator role.

I think one of the things that is a barrier for us to work, reach out, and close the achievement gap is totally related to our part-time positions...it's hard in ".5," in two days and a half [per week] to close the gap or to work with the students one-on-one when they really need to walk through the process to achieve a specific goal. That's a barrier for us. We cannot reach out to every student in the school but the expectation is that you do something about all of them. It's a mismatch between the expectation and the time that we are allowed to work with them. (Coordinator)

Affinity groups [are strong at my school], so [having them] is not an issue at all anymore. I think when you have a full-time person in the building, you can contribute to that true multicultural environment. Half-time is difficult. (Coordinator)

I think one of the things that, again, that works against that is just having the resources, the time, the manpower to do more of it. The kids that come to it, in my opinion, really benefit from it. Just want to do it on a broader scale. (Coordinator)

A couple people, Coordinators and parents, noted some disincentives—perhaps that children at a majority white school felt they would be further singled out by participating or that children who were already achieving wondered why they would need to participate. But, these voices were few, thus the issue seems a relatively minor barrier among those mentioned. However, in this context, a couple Coordinators mentioned that sometimes when they gather a group of minority students (e.g., middle school girls with Bs in science to form a robotics team), the students look around the room and observe their racial or ethnic similarities and wonder “Why are we all here?,” or even “Are we in trouble?” A couple parents in one group proposed that ways to reduce any stigma include clarifying a group’s goal or purpose and to emphasize what the groups do for others or for the school and community, not just for participants.

Or at [School] at least, it's kind of the opposite, where the minority population's pretty small and so some kids don't want to be singled out as being part of a minority program because they're really the minority. (Coordinator)

[School] is "majority majority"....Some of the kids who are eligible don't want to come. I've had not many, maybe 5 in the last 2 years that said, "Please don't invite me anymore." (Coordinator)

I don't think it's a big deal, I think it's just that not every program is effective for [all] kids. It's not like it's tragic if they don't want to come and be part of Latinas Leading Tomorrow. It's just not their thing. That's fine. Latinas Leading Tomorrow is very empowering for the group of girls that are there. (Coordinator)

When we got the letter, I thought, "What is this? Minority?" Do they think we're poor? I thought it was insulting. Then, when I talked to my kids, they said, "No. Minority means this." They explained for me. (MS Parent)

Unfortunately, my children did see it as a negative. [Another parent] I think [Child Name] did too. That was just her not understanding the whole picture....When she looks at all the things Arlington offers her. It's a wonderful school system. When she views this type of program, it's almost patronizing. Perhaps that's very strong language. I don't mean to offend anyone here. I think she views it, "That's not for me." But, I say, "No, but it can be." When you identify the goals of what it's trying to do. (MS Parent)

*I think the word choice for her of "achievement" was really difficult. She was like, "Mom, I'm an awesome student. I get good grades. I don't belong there." She was thinking about people who have so much less than she and she didn't want to participate on that level either. But, then I was explaining to her how I feel and that she could **offer** so much. It's not always about receiving, it's also about giving. So, I think to have Minority Achievement across the whole county, which I think is a wonderful thing, to work to have it perceived by students from both perspectives because the students will get more out of the program, rather than as handout. (MS Parent)*

Experiences in MA Programs

What Students Gain from Participating

When parents and students were asked about the benefits of participating in MA Programs, nearly all emphasized finding their place in the school community as a key benefit. In addition, for middle- and high school parents and students, the help of MA Programs in opening up the possibility (the likelihood!) of college was a second prominently noted benefit. There were two nuances in that middle school comments focused on exposure to college as a possibility and to college life through campus visits while high schoolers spoke more of specific guidance with the practical matters of applying. At the elementary level, the second main benefit—as opposed to college planning—was that MA Programs serve children's learning and developmental needs.

...I feel like I gain leadership skills because taking initiative and doing a task that you wouldn't normally do helps you become independent and it prepares you for what's to come when you

graduate high school, college. I definitely think it helps me talk to new people, get to know new people, and just come out of my shell. Everybody's real welcoming so I think that it definitely helps being able to lead something as well as gathering other people to join in. (HS Student)

I think it helped me know that I'm actually a part of this school. Since this school is kind of small, [Coordinator] will come to you personally...It helps you actually become used to this school. (HS Student)

[Dear Coordinator Name], When I first came here last year I was very nervous. You helped me so much. I felt very welcomed being invited to this Minority Achievement group. I've never been a part of something like this before, so it's new and fun. You also helped me get to know a lot of people. The first week I went to [School] I sat by myself the first few days at lunch. Then, the next week I was invited by a senior to attend the group and eat lunch. I felt very at home. (HS Student, via email)

For [Child Name], it's her sense of identity. Like, me [mom] as a white person and dad not [white], she aligns herself more toward the white upper middle class. And, it's important to us that she has an identity tied to the Latina community and how she sees herself in that. So, I want her to be engaged in opportunities to interact with people [who are Latino]. (MS Parent)

I think he socializes a lot more. Gets friends. He has more friends. My son came back from camping [with MA] a different child, more grown up. (ES Parent)

[MA Programs] helped me decide what I wanted to do because I didn't really know what I wanted to do after I graduated, or what schools to think about. The whole program did that...stressed college....visited some colleges and I really found one that I loved...I realized that I really did have a chance to do something after I graduated. (HS Student)

[Program] got me thinking about college, to take it more seriously. I was thinking about college before I joined [Program] but it took it to a different level, a higher level. (HS Student)

[My daughter gets] drive from being part of [MA Program]. She gets it from school and from me at home, college, college, college. She gets it from both sides....And, then going to see the colleges, she gets a vision of what college life is all about. It pushes her. Like, "I want that." (HS Parent)

...a high percentage of college students in Virginia are white so having a group like this makes you feel like yeah, you have a chance, you can do anything you want. That feels really good. (HS Student)

I'm getting knowledge for it because they give you a lot of opportunities for scholarships and they'll tell you how college is going to be, such as, "Don't slip up" and they try to tell you stuff to help you for the future. (HS Student)

[He gains] the opportunity to go to [visit] college. Because I don't have time to do that. It's good that they start early [in middle school]. (MS Parent)

I think it's a great opportunity [college visit]. When you put kids on a bus and let them see themselves in that setting as a community with their peers, like "We can all do this." No matter who you are, that's a wonderful thing. (MS Parent)

When we go to Jireh's Place, only girls are allowed. We learn about protecting yourself. We talk and do activities. The Jireh's Place is fun because you talk about things you haven't learned yet. (ES Student)

There are really no negative things about YES Club. You can do your homework at YES Club. The good thing you can play around, play basketball, play football. You get to go on field trips. We went to the Zoo Lights and where Abraham Lincoln died. (ES School Students)

One benefit, like with Girls Character Club, is that instead of it being just me saying things, they're talking about the same things. It's someone else's viewpoint that says, "Your mom knows what she's talking about. We have those same views [within the club]. She's not just telling you to hear herself talk." It teaches good things. Manners. College. (ES Parent)

My son learned how to behave differently in different situations. For example, if he's at the zoo, he acts like he's at the zoo. He also went to the White House. He learned how to behave. What I'm trying to say is, he learned. (ES Parent)

My son has been to National Airport. They had an African American pilot from the second World War. And, he told them all the experience of African American soldiers. My son felt very strongly about it. He still reads. He still Googles it. It's fun. But, they learned so much. (ES Parent)

Downsides or Drawbacks of Participating

In discussing downsides, students of all ages tended to focus instead on tradeoffs—participating in one group or activity necessarily cuts time that could be spent in leisure or on another enjoyable group, activity, or elective course.

I would also say that another downside would be that it's time consuming. Everything we do is time consuming. Most kids our age are like, "Oh we want to go hang out, we want to go have a party, have a bonfire", stuff like that. And, we're just like, "Oh no we have to go to SAT Prep or

we have to go to EIP or anything." It's like you don't make a personal life, you just already start growing up. (HS Student)

Like [Name] said, last year we were in [program]. We could've been taking an elective that we wanted or class we wanted, but instead we took [program]. (HS Student)

As their comments throughout this report reflect, parents were very supportive and very enthusiastic about MA Programs overall. When “downsides” were explored, there were a couple who said their children’s experience in middle school peer groups that meet after school had been a letdown. In these cases, the parents perceived the groups as being so loosely run that they had little specific cultural or peer-to-peer benefit. In one example, the adult in charge takes a laissez faire approach, which the parent indicates results in cliques of students merely hanging out and not “doing,” discussing, or learning in a purposeful way. The group “looked good on paper” said the parent, but the execution did not match. On a practical level, another parent indicated that a homework-based club started too late in the school year (a few weeks in) and ended too soon (a few weeks before the end). Perhaps this timing was related to bussing, but she felt students were missing homework club time they could have used.

Meeting Goals of Challenge, Support, Resiliency

Most Students Found Schoolwork Challenging, Although Some Middle-Schoolers and Parents of Younger Students Were Mixed

The Coordinators felt that progress toward academically challenging minority students on the whole is well underway.

My job has really shifted. [In the past] a lot of it was how to get a kid in. How do we fight to get a kid in AP classes? Now it's how do you support them, how do you make sure they're doing well?...[I watched] a group of African-American kids [leave after] an AP Psych exam...When they left...I said, "Oh my God, that would not have happened 10 years ago." Because minorities often were put in regular psychology, not AP psychology. It's natural [now]. It's not a phenomenon to see [minority] kids in AP physics. It's just more about how to support them. That's a huge shift. (Coordinator)

A couple things that we do, we accomplish that goal [of challenging students]. I feel like the students who take advantage of the opportunities that we present, they're headed in that direction [of finding academic challenge]. They're always coming back and making sure that they get more. (Coordinator)

Likewise, most students felt they are sufficiently challenged. In particular, high schoolers felt more challenged as a group while younger students expressed more of a range. Parents’ comments reflected this pattern—with most feeling children are challenged, especially high schoolers’ parents, but some parents of younger students seeing the work as relatively easy.

Using a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is extremely challenged, virtually all of the high schoolers chose 7, 8, or 9. The 1 to 10 scale was simply a prompt to gain a general sense and then, more importantly, to explore the reasons behind the numbers. Just a couple high schoolers noted instances in which they felt minorities were given easier work. Although these instances are noted, the issue was not a prominent theme.

I'll tell it to you, 3 AP classes, that's hours worth of homework and then I have sports and that's 2 hours of sports...Then senior project and then you have to apply for colleges at the same time. (HS Student)

I was just thinking about my AP English and my AP [math] class, they're both challenging in a different way. My English class, he likes to give us so much work. Not hard, but it's just so much that it takes a really long time to do. Finding the time to do all that is challenging. But my math class...Since the teacher does the flip class, you learn at home and then you practice in class, you actually have to learn the material at home and knowing how to study for it is a different type of challenge. (HS Student)

To add something to the challenge too is at the beginning of the year when you don't really know how to study for that class. It took me 2 quarters and a half to figure out how to exactly manage APUSH (AP US History). (HS Student)

My daughter works so hard. Sometimes she even cries. She'll say, "Mom, it's so hard." But, I say, "I know. But, it will pay off." (HS Parent)

I actually think challenge is less than what it should be...I feel like they hold us sometimes to a lower standard. If we do the same thing as a different person, you would get more credit for it, or you will be congratulated for it. [Another agreeing] They have low expectations for us, but that's why our counselors try to push us. (HS Students)

...in my physics class, it's a pretty small class and more than half of the kids are white in that class and there are a couple minority kids and then the teacher he- I've noticed that and I've also talked to someone else because I thought I was the only one thinking that- the way he treats the white kids, he says, "Oh, you know this. This is easy, you know this," then when they ask him for help he's pretty happy to help them but when the other kids ask him questions he's like, "Oh, you're still on this question?" [as if to say] "Okay, let's dumb it down a little." (HS Student)

Among middle schoolers, there was more variation with some saying "2" on the 1 to 10 scale, many mid-range at "5" or "6," and some higher. Many middle schoolers needed help grasping the idea of "challenge" as it was intended—positive challenge, hard school work that you tackle and come out understanding better. Before that clarification, those giving higher ratings typically said that having too great a volume of work led them to feel challenged. Even those who chose low numbers said that they chose a low number because some classes were challenging and some were not. In sum, most of these students said that they felt sufficiently challenged—that is, that school is not too easy.

I picked a higher number because we have a test once a week. And sometimes we have another test the same day or the same week. And, it's stressful. (MS Student)

In Algebra, we always have to learn the next thing. It's coming fast. [Another agreeing] I think the same thing for Algebra. It's really hard and you've got to keep up. (MS Students)

[I chose 5 because] sometimes it can be hard and sometimes not that hard. (MS Student)

Overall, elementary school students felt sufficiently challenged—although they, too, needed to grasp the concept of “challenge.”

Sometimes it gets really easy and sometimes it's really hard. It's hard when you get started on it, but once you figure it out, it gets easier. (ES Student)

In general, many parents of children in elementary and middle school thought their children's work should be more challenging. When pressed on the question of whether minority students in particular had academic challenge similar to others, parents did not feel they have the big picture perspective to say. While some parents spoke of working “to keep grades up” as if doing so did not come easily, only a very small number shared any major worry that their children were not meeting the challenges of schoolwork.

For my daughter, it's a walk in the park. I want her to be more challenged all the time. She's got a lot else going on. But, I would say I wish the writing was more rigorous. The mathematics. I would say it's too easy for her. (MS Parent)

I think teachers are under pressure to not burden the children with homework. They [children] have so many activities. This one has soccer. That one has lacrosse. At some point, the teachers need to be able to look someone in the eye and say, “That's not my problem.” I mean, what are we here to do, really?...where we live, I think there is a lot pressure on schools to back off, because “I want my kid to have a birthday party” or “I want my kid to have lacrosse camp” or whatever it is. [Another] And, that work doesn't have to take the form of homework—whether it's project-based learning or integrated activity. And, that's what I would like the Minority Achievement Office to be able to offer. More of that. (MS Parents)

He's made A-B Honor Roll all year. I don't see him struggle a lot with homework. It's tough to know. (MS Parent)

I would say they have too much homework. But, I guess that's the way it is around here. So much competition. But, I would say they have the resources they need. (MS Parent)

Every time homework is given to him at a 5th grade level, he can't. So, the teacher gives him homework for a 3rd grade level. And, my son tells the teacher to help him do the 5th grade. And, she says he needs to do the 3rd grade, which is the one that he can do. So, he asks, “Why am I not doing what the rest of the class is doing (ES Parent)

Most Students Feel Extremely Well-Supported by Adults at School, Although a Portion of Middle Schoolers Felt Less So

Students were asked to rate how supported by adults they feel at school on a 1 to 10 scale, where 10 is completely supported. Across the age groups, most students' ratings were very, very high—mostly 8 or higher. Parents echoed this sense of support. When students were asked the reasons for their high ratings, they gave many specific examples of supportive people and what they do. Even students who said they had not asked for help said they felt they could do so. Several elementary students wanted to be able to say “100” or “1,000” on the 1 to 10 scale. Still, about a half-dozen middle schoolers from different schools rated support low—between 2 and 5. The middle schoolers who gave low ratings said that some teachers are not supportive or said that they do not have much closeness with their counselor.

[Adults] try to help us learn. Help us with tests, like SOLs. They notice if you're sad. They cheer you up. (ES Student)

*There is one teacher that I like. Her name is Ms. [Name]. She actually talks to you and tells you **how** to get better grades. She motivates you. (MS Student)*

I would have to say the Minority Achievement Coordinator, Ms. [Name]. In [School] how it works is that your counselor stays with you for all three years. And, my counselor never really helped me. But, Ms. [Name] she helps me. She finds scholarships. And, she is also giving me this emotional push...I feel like I can trust her 100%. (MS Student)

[Teachers who support] give you opportunities to stay after school and do some homework. Sometimes they invite you for lunch. (MS Student)

She is getting good support. That's why she's achieving. (MS Parent)

I'm really bad at World History. It's my weakest subject. Last year I took AP Government and this year I'm taking APUSH. So, I have the same teacher and every time I go to him—could be during lunch or [open] period—even though he's doing something and I ask him if he can help me, he always puts his work aside. He helps me and he works me through whatever I don't understand. Every time I go there I know that he's there to help me. He won't say, "Oh can you come back later?" He'll say, "Okay, I'll help you right now." (HS Student)

My counselor and [Coordinator] are supportive. I can go to [Coordinator] any time of the day. And, then it's funny but, my freshman year math teacher still helps me. I go to her every single day...me and my friend, we don't even have her class and we go there every single day....I was just so surprised how she was willing to help us although we're not even her students and she's working with us every day. She's always excited to, too. (HS Student)

My art teacher. She's really good at art but she's actually really smart on other topics so she helped me with my English essay, she edited it for me and helped with my math homework. (HS Student)

I say more like a 7 because in the beginning of the year I was struggling with AP Stats but my teacher, she saw that and she offered to stay after school with me for most of the days and help me out. (HS Student)

It's not that I've really asked them for help because I do it on my own. You feel that they are there in case that you need them and they're supportive, "If you need something, I'll be here." (HS Student)

Being a minority, you have even the principals and more counselors to support you and stuff. (HS Student)

Our counselors, they help you and talk to you. My counselor, she just talked to me yesterday or Monday. She was just checking on me to see if I was okay... (HS Student)

I think the teachers here are really, really good. Every single teacher is very ... It's not common for me at most schools, but I like all my teachers in almost all the periods. They teach very well, they're really nice, and they'll get on a personal level, too. If you talk with them, it's really a different thing. [Another agreeing] They always make time for you. (HS Students)

[Counselor] has been supporting her since freshman year. They're very, very close. He'll call me if he has any questions or concerns. [Counselor] has been a big part of our lives. (HS Parent)

MA Programs Support Resiliency

A key goal of MA Programs is to foster resiliency among minority students. To explore whether, and how, programs do so, focus group participants were introduced to the following definition of resiliency.

People who are resilient...

- Feel like they can take actions to affect the outcome of an event.
- Take advantage of opportunities.
- Address challenges in a calm, rational way.
- Ask for help.
- Have supportive people around them.
- Talk about challenges as a way to help solve them.
- Do not think of themselves as victims.

They were asked to review these qualities and think about which among them their MA program participation most helped, if any. Resoundingly, students and parents said MA Programs help students

“take advantage of opportunities,” “ask for help,” and “have supportive people around them.” At all three age levels—elementary, middle, and high school—opinions tended to converge around these three points. Regarding supportive people, most focus was on supportive adults. But, a couple middle and high school students also specifically noted the support of peers.

When he needs help, he asks. (ES Parent)

It's not the Minority Achievement Program that has taught me how to take advantage of opportunities. It's [Coordinator name] that's taught me that. [Another agreeing]. (MS Student)

[Coordinator] is very supportive. And, opportunities. They take advantage of the trips and leadership programs. (MS Parent)

They also talk how your inaction can affect you. If you don't apply to college and stuff like that or if you don't you push yourself to take more challenging classes, how it can influence your path... (HS Student)

I think I agree with “taking advantage of opportunities,” “asking for help” and also “talking about challenges as a way to solve them.” For [program], if you're signing up for the ACT, we have to sign up, and then when we go on a college trip we have to pay a specific amount. Instead of complaining, “Oh, this is too much, I can't go,” they actually help you figure out a way to pay that money or even if you can't pay they will provide that for you. (HS Student)

That's how it's always worked at our school. Either you hang around the smart people who influence you [positively] or you hang around people that don't influence you well. (MS Student)

[In MA groups] you can also learn teamwork as well because you work with other kids who are basically ... They're not exactly the same as you but they share the same stories. (HS Student)

Have the “supportive people around.” I mean because you're in a group so the other girls, they're going through the same thing and they're there too. (HS Student)

It's like a family base. Not only do we help each other find themselves, they help us find ourselves. We have a mentor program where university students from George Mason University, they come over and they help us out. Not only are we getting help and easier access to what university life is, but we're also learning more about anything. (HS Student)

I've helped a lot of people and supported them and got them to join. I used to not ask for help from teachers or anything and after the groups, I ask for help. (HS Student)

Although students did not tend to specifically note some aspects of resiliency as having come from MA Programs, like having an internal locus of control or not feeling like a victim, they demonstrated these

qualities. Of course, we do not know precisely how these qualities were acquired, but they were apparent.

...last year in [class], we actually worked with the HILT kids for a project and none of them spoke English... and I remember one of the girls she was talking to me in Spanish and she was like, "You know I really wanted to come here and be involved in AP class," because one of her friends told her [about AP]. And, she was like, "But I can't really speak English"... The one thing that I told all the kids in my group was that, "You can do whatever you want to do in this life and right now it's hard because you're still learning the language." The point of the whole story that I'm trying to tell is that, "At times as a minority you will feel like you don't belong in certain scenarios but it's who you [determines your path], what you choose to be involved with." (HS Student)

[When you are a lone minority student in a class] There are some small things that boost you up and break that layer a little bit like if a fellow student that's white asks a question that you know about and you're just like, "Oh, I know this." Or you keep getting reminded that you are Hispanic...and you are 1 of the 3 or 2 Hispanics there, you feel like you're making a difference. You are showing that you're Latina, you're Latino, you're Black...you're not white, you're Asian, you're whatever. It doesn't matter. You're making a difference. You're showing everyone that you can do it. You're showing other individuals...you're showing other people that you can do this. (HS Student)

It's kind of a little more difficult for me though because my mom and my dad both don't speak English very well. My mom and my dad never graduated high school....I agree [with another participant], though. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but I grew up independent from my parents. I signed up for SAT Prep by myself because I wanted to. I did all of these college tours because I wanted to. I make my own decisions and I think that added a level of responsibility. And, so whenever I was in class, or like now when I'm in my AP class and I see all of those white kids, I don't feel as intimidated because I made my own decisions. So I don't really focus on race. I'm not like, "Oh wow they all have rich families. They all have a house to go home to, and I have an apartment." I don't really think about that, I just think about, "I made it." (HS Student)

My son works so hard. I am a single mother. I do not know how to use a computer. But, my son does so much. After he finishes with his work at [Name of School], he goes to [job] to work. All of this work and all of this sacrifice because he wants to go to college. His aspiration, he wants to go to Virginia Tech....He will be up so late doing homework. I sleep in the living room. I look at the light in his room and he says "a little more" and 2 hours go by. I cannot sleep because [I keep checking]. So, [laughing] both of us are going to be graduating. (HS Parent)

Conclusions

Coordinators' Priority Work

- **In discussing their priorities, Coordinators focused on two points.** First, at the school level, the priority is fostering a school environment that is culturally competent. Second, for individual students, they strive for each to reach a point at which students feel that their race matters to them in a positive way.
- **Forging relationships with students is central to Coordinators' positive impact.** In other words, much good work and impact happens outside of formal groups.
- **Students echoed not just the importance of the MA Coordinator role, but specifically the characteristics of the *person* in that role**—perhaps because of the centrality of their relationship with the Coordinator. In describing the ideal characteristics of an MA Coordinator, students covered genuineness, enthusiasm, willingness to speak difficult truths, interest in knowing students as individuals, listening skills, self-confidence, and a having an observable commitment to all students without favorites.

Experiences at School

- **At school, Coordinators view themselves as advocates—both for individual students and on a broader scale, such as ensuring that equity and minority issues are considered in leadership decisions.**
- **Coordinators specifically laud APS for having established the Minority Achievement Coordinator role, but feel underappreciated at times.** These Coordinators do not think any other local school system staffs such a role. Yet, they also felt that part-time Coordinators could do much more if their positions were dedicated to MA full time and wanted better communication about what they do in schools and why. For the latter, they saw room for improvement not only at the district level, but also among themselves. They are certain that they provide unique support, but there is concern that they do not do enough to communicate that work—perhaps, some said, because they're so focused on it (we have our "hands in the work") and perhaps because of humbleness.
- **Coordinators cautioned against complacency at schools.** Risks of complacency range from assuming that minority-majority relationship issues are solved to assuming the presence of the Minority Achievement Coordinator means that others can stand down. Their proposed solutions to complacency include avoiding denial of the existing issues, ensuring that cultural competence is exhibited in all academic areas, and hiring more core-subject teachers who are racial and ethnic minorities themselves.
- **Coordinators noted that the centrality of their role differs across schools.** In some, Coordinators serve on leadership teams and are routinely asked to join guidance and parent meetings, and in others Coordinators have not got such a central and "included" role.
- **Students, parents, and Coordinators saw considerable evidence of APS's hard work and positive intent toward cultivating an inclusive culture that capitalizes on and appreciates diversity.** Still-present biases and imperfections were widely acknowledged. But, there was no

doubt that work is underway. In interpreting this finding, and indeed all of the students' and parents' perspectives, it is relevant to bear in mind that those who took part in this qualitative study also are participants or parents of participants in at least one MA Program.

- **Relationships among these parents and their schools seem largely positive and comfortable.** Parents and students spoke of considerable openness between parents and school. All but one of the small number of parents who primarily speak Spanish said that their children's schools have bilingual staff to help them address questions and issues.
- **But, the experience of being the only minority in a class (or one of few) is on the minds of students, parents, and Coordinators.** Several high school students indicated that scenario adds a dimension of pressure. They described a tentativeness asking or answering questions in class because they feared embarrassment coupled with race-based judgments should they say something incorrect. Parents noted this challenge as well, by appreciating their children's opportunities to be in the presence of other students of color. Some students at Wakefield High School said that they had transferred from other schools and found the Wakefield environment, which is majority minority, a good fit for them. Several Coordinators expressed the belief that smaller class sizes would be potentially valuable to foster better student-teacher relationships as would grouping students so that students of color in majority white schools could see more of one another.
- **One Coordinator suggested that working on minority students' self-advocacy is an area of need for the Minority Achievement Program and for schools in general.** Others agreed and indicated that finding time for conversations that support self-advocacy is much easier at the high school level than at the middle school level because high school students' schedules are more flexible.

Finding Out About MA Programs

- **Although formal database lists and invitation letters have a role, informal channels within Coordinators' networks are clearly critical in the process of identifying and inviting students to MA Programs.** Coordinators described a truly wraparound process in which students reach them via widely varied avenues (e.g., meeting students first on field trips, receiving suggestions from teachers). Many students spoke of direct one-to-one invitations from their Coordinator as well as referrals from older friends and siblings. This network of support relies, in part, on Coordinators' strong interpersonal relationships and proactive outreach and it was not clear from focus group discussions whether all Coordinators' networks and outreach were equally strong.
- **Coordinators worry that an imperfect computerized database system hinders their ability to identify students who should be invited to MA Programs.** One Coordinator thought that the computer system might have all the capabilities the Coordinators desire, although using the system is very cumbersome. Coordinators would also like to be able to use computerized systems in new ways, such as looking across what classes their students are taking, what students are in particular AP classes to see how students stay or drop over time.

Deciding to Get Involved in MA Programs

- **The logistics (paperwork, etc.) of getting involved in MA Programs were not regarded as a barrier by any of these focus groups.** Some middle schoolers spoke of involved paperwork for EIP and scholarship applications, but even these did not seem to be major barriers—although it is worthwhile to acknowledge that focus group participants were those who were taking part in an MA Program, so had not been deterred by paperwork.
- **Older friends and siblings can play a key role in encouraging participation**—particularly in reaching new high schoolers.
- **Students perceived few barriers to involvement.** They mostly thought nonparticipants were probably too busy with other responsibilities or activities.
- **Coordinators said that they could serve more students—thereby removing barriers—with more staff working full time.**
- **Coordinators and parents, thought children at a majority white school might not participate if they thought doing so would single them out from the larger school population or that children who were already achieving would wonder why they would need to participate.** But, these voices were few, thus the issue seems a relatively minor barrier among those mentioned. A couple parents in one group proposed that ways to reduce any stigma include clarifying a group’s goal or purpose and to emphasize what the groups do for others or for the school and community, not just for participants.

What Students Gain from Participating

- **Parents and students highlighted finding their place in the school community as a key benefit.**
- **For middle- and high school parents and students, the help of MA Programs in opening up the possibility (the likelihood!) of college was a second prominently noted benefit.** At the elementary level, the second main benefit—rather than college planning—was that MA Programs serve children’s learning and developmental needs.
- **In discussing downsides, students of all ages tended to focus on tradeoffs—participating in one group or activity necessarily cuts time that could be spent in leisure or on another enjoyable group, activity, or elective course.**

Meeting Goals of Challenge, Support, Resiliency

- **Most students found schoolwork challenging, although some middle-schoolers and parents of younger students were mixed.** In general, Coordinators also seemed to feel that schoolwork was sufficiently challenging.
- **Although they described themselves as personally challenged at school, a few high schoolers shared stories in which felt minority students were given easier work.** Although these instances are noted, the issue was not a prominent theme.
- **Among the strongest themes in this series of focus groups is that nearly all students and families who participated feel proactively well-supported at school.** A small number of middle schoolers—a half-dozen from different schools—said they felt less well-supported. In exploring

that, they said that some teachers are not supportive or said that they do not have much closeness with their counselor.

- **Resoundingly, students and parents said MA Programs help students “take advantage of opportunities,” “ask for help,” and “have supportive people around them”** when they were asked to review the qualities that make up resiliency and think about which among them their MA program participation most helped, if any. At all three age levels—elementary, middle, and high school—opinions tended to converge around these three points. Regarding supportive people, most focus was on supportive adults. But, a couple middle and high school students also specifically noted the support of peers.

**Arlington Public Schools (APS) Minority Achievement Evaluation
Focus Group Research with Students
Moderator’s Guide
October 2014**

WELCOME, PROCEDURES (10 minutes)

- First, **thank you** so much for your time and help.
- **Introduce** self (name, independent researcher not employed by APS).
- **Purpose** today is to talk about your experiences and thoughts related to school. Each year, APS evaluates different aspects of education to see how to serve students best. This year, one focus is programs under the umbrella of the Office of Minority Achievement. At [SCHOOL] you know these best as the programs and activities that Mr./Ms. [NAME] leads. [If new coordinator, also mention previous coordinator’s name.]
 - So, that is why you were selected to be here today—because you have experience with these programs and can help us know what works and what to work on.
- **Open, honest opinions**—both positive and negative—are most important of all. [Moderator will work through this a bit, and involve the group in: 1) agreeing everyone has different experiences/opinions and 2) buying into shared goal of being comfortable with their own view and everyone else’s.]
- Our hour together may even surprise you—it will be enjoyable. I have some questions you might not have ever thought about.
- I would like to **audiotape**, to help with my report. But, all answers are **confidential**. I will keep the tape. My report will not use any names, rather it will describe what “participants” said, and talk about the group as a whole. Is taping ok with you?
- **Some basics** to help make sure that I still learn all I need to from you.
 - This conversation is all about experiences, which means there are no “right/wrong” answers and everyone will probably have something to say (no silent participants).
 - Talk one at a time, loudly enough for tape to pick up.
 - No side conversations, please.
 - Many questions to get through. So, you might find I give you that feeling like I’m “moving us along.” That is just because we have 1 hour and my role will be to make sure that we get through all the questions in that time.

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS (5 minutes)

In a moment we’ll do introductions, starting with [NAME] and going around the table. Tell us your **first name**, what **grade** you’re in, and something memorable about **the special or extra**

activities you have participated in so far in [elem., middle, high²] school—perhaps an after school activity, an in-school club, sports, a mentoring program, college trips (HS only), or group activity. [This is just a general question designed to be easily answered, solely for the purpose of getting students talking and feeling comfortable. If prompts are needed, mention programs these students participate in (from Office of Minority Achievement-supplied list).]³

EXPERIENCE WITH PROGRAM (15 minutes)

1. Let’s zero in on some particular programs and activities for a bit and then we will talk generally about school. Tell me what [PROGRAM NAME] is like. [THIS QUESTION FOCUSES ON MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAMS. USING APS-SUPPLIED LIST, ENSURE EACH STUDENT SPEAKS TO HIS/HER PROGRAM(S)—ITS PURPOSE, WHAT THE STUDENT DOES OR HAS DONE, HOW OFTEN, WHO THE ADULTS ARE.]
 - a. What do you gain from participating?
 - [IF NEEDED, PROMPT] So, if you were going to encourage another student who is similar to you to participate, what would you say?
 - b. Are there any downsides, or drawbacks to [PROGRAM]?
 - [IF NEEDED, PROMPT] If you could change something, what would it be?

GETTING INVOLVED (20 minutes)

1. How did you find out about [SPECIFIC MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM]?
 - a. Did anyone encourage you to participate? If so, who and how did they encourage?
 - b. Did anyone discourage you? Who/How so?
2. What were the reasons you joined in?
 - a. What factors were you considering when deciding?
 - b. And, was it easy to decide to join in, or tough to decide? How so?
 - c. Once you decided, how easy or difficult was it to get started? And, why?
3. I have a guess that some students don’t participate who actually would do well in [PROGRAM] or find it valuable. As far as you know, are there some students not in the program who you think could or should be?
 - a. [IF YES] What do you guess is keeping them from participating?

² Ask elementary schoolers about elementary school, middle schoolers about middle school, and high schoolers about high school.

³ [Conclude introduction by setting focus on Minority Achievement Programs. “Now, I’m going to zero us in on some specific programs, the ones Mr./Ms. [NAME] leads.” Or, address each participant: “For the rest of the discussion, I want you [NAME] to focus on [PROGRAM]. And, [NAME], you think of [PROGRAM]....”]

OVERALL EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL (15 minutes)

1. Let’s talk about how you would describe your experience at school. And, let’s make sure we are thinking especially about race and ethnicity. How would you describe your experience as a [LATINO, BLACK, ASIAN, MULTIRACIAL....] student at this school?
 - a. And, overall, how have the programs and work of the Office of Minority Affairs affected your experience, if they have?
2. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is extremely easy and 10 is extremely challenging, how much challenge do you feel in your schoolwork?⁴ What are the reasons for your choice?
 - a. And, when you think of what makes school “challenging” or not, what do you have in mind?
 - b. And, overall, how “challenged” do you think [BLACK, LATINO, ASIAN, MULTIRACIAL...] students are? [EXPLORE REASONS.]
 - c. And, when you think about how challenging or not school is, would you say the programs of the Office of Minority Affairs play a role in that? If so, how so?
3. And, another 1 to 10 scale... I’m wondering how supported you feel by the adults at school. So, choose a number on the scale again, where 1 is not at all supported and 10 is completely supported by adults at school. What are the reasons for your choice?
 - a. Describe to me how they show support.
 - b. Or tell me about the times when you have felt *not* supported.
 - c. And, overall, how supported do you think [BLACK, LATINO, ASIAN, MULTIRACIAL...] students are? [EXPLORE REASONS.]
 - d. Who at school would you say supports you? Is there a person (or more than one person) who has a supportive relationship with you or your family? Tell me about that.

RESILIENCY (10 minutes)

1. In addition to everything we have talked about, there are some qualities and abilities that APS Minority Achievement Programs are meant to foster. As you look over these, I am interested in how participating in [PROGRAM] has helped you—if it has—with these in particular qualities and abilities. [SHARE PRINTED LIST.]

⁴ The 1-10 scale is meant to give students a way to express how challenging, but the “real” question is the “why” question, “What makes it so?”

People who are resilient...

- Feel like they can take actions to affect the outcome of an event.
- Take advantage of opportunities.
- Address challenges in a calm, rational way.
- Ask for help.
- Have supportive people around them.
- Talk about challenges as a way to help solve them.
- Do not think of themselves as victims.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Our time is nearly up. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share?
Thank you so much for your time and all your help.

Arlington Public Schools (APS) Minority Achievement Evaluation
Focus Group Research with Parents
Moderator’s Guide
October 2014

WELCOME, PROCEDURES (10 minutes)

- First, **thank you** so much for your time and help.
- **Introduce** self (name, independent researcher not employed by APS).
- **Purpose** today is to talk about your experiences and thoughts related to your children’s school. Each year, APS evaluates different aspects of education to see how to serve students best. This year, one focus is programs under the umbrella of the Office of Minority Achievement. At [SCHOOL] you know these best as the programs and activities that Mr./Ms. [NAME] leads. [If new coordinator, also mention previous coordinator’s name.]
 - So, that is why you were selected to be here today—because you have experience with these programs and can help us know what works and what to work on.
- **Open, honest opinions**—both positive and negative—are most important of all.
- Our time together may even surprise you—it will be enjoyable. I have some questions you might not have ever thought about.
- I would like to **audiotape**, to help with my report. But, all answers are **confidential**. I will keep the tape. My report will not use any names, rather it will describe what “parents” said, and talk about the group as a whole. Is taping ok with you?
- **Some basics** to help make sure that I still learn all I need to from you.
 - This conversation is all about experiences, which means there are no “right/wrong” answers and everyone will probably have something to say (no silent participants).
 - Talk one at a time, loudly enough for tape to pick up.
 - Many questions to get through. So, I you might find I give you that feeling like I’m “moving us along.” That is just because we have limited time and my role will be to make sure that we get through all the questions in that time.

Lastly, let’s make sure we are thinking of the same programs. In our conversation today, we will focus on [PROGRAM NAMES]. [AS NEEDED, SPECIFY CHILD(REN) TO HAVE IN MIND THROUGHOUT DISCUSSION]. I have some specific questions about these programs and some general ones about school.

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS (5 minutes)

In a moment we’ll do introductions, starting with [NAME] and going around the table. Tell us your **first name**, what **grades** your children are in, and something memorable about **the special or extra activities they have participated in** so far in [elem., middle, high⁵] school—perhaps an after school activity, an in-school club, sports, a mentoring program, college trips (HS only), or group activity. [This is just a general question designed to be easily answered, solely for the purpose of getting parents talking and feeling comfortable. If prompts are needed, mention programs these parents’ children participate in (from Office of Minority Achievement-supplied list).]

EXPERIENCE WITH PROGRAM (15 minutes)

1. Let’s talk about some particular programs and activities for a bit and then we will talk generally about school. Tell me what [PROGRAM NAME] is like. [THIS QUESTION FOCUSES ON MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAMS. USING APS-SUPPLIED LIST, ENSURE EACH PARENT SPEAKS TO HIS/HER PROGRAM(S)—IF NEEDED, PROMPT FOR ITS PURPOSE, WHAT HIS/HER CHILD DOES OR HAS DONE, HOW OFTEN, WHO THE ADULTS ARE.]
 - a. What does [NAME] gain from participating?
 - [IF NEEDED, PROMPT] So, if you were going to encourage a parent to have his or her child participate, what would you say?
 - b. Are there any downsides, or drawbacks to [PROGRAM]?
 - [IF NEEDED, PROMPT] If you could change something, what would it be?

GETTING INVOLVED (15 minutes)

1. How did you find out about [SPECIFIC MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM]?
 - a. Did anyone encourage you or your child to participate? If so, who and how did they encourage?
 - b. Did anyone discourage you? Who/How so?
2. What were the reasons your child joined in?
 - a. What factors were you considering when deciding?
 - b. And, was it an easy decision join in, or a tough one? How so?
 - c. Once you decided, how easy or difficult was it for [NAME] to get involved? And, why?

⁵ Ask elementary school parents about elementary school, middle school parents about middle school, and high school parents about high school.

COMFORT NAVIGATING SYSTEM (20 minutes)

1. Thinking about yourself for a moment. How comfortable would you say you feel doing things like visiting school, asking teachers questions, or bringing up a problem? [Explore reasons.]
 - a. Are there folks at school who do an especially good job of making you feel comfortable? If so, who and how so?
 - b. And, the flip side, anything or anyone that makes you feel not comfortable being involved, asking questions... Tell me about that.
 - c. How about [COORDINATOR] in particular—in what ways does he/she make you feel more comfortable or less so?

2. [High school parents only] What has been your experience with planning next steps as your son/daughter moves through high school? For example, I am thinking of things like figuring out classes, other graduation requirements, joining mentoring groups.
[Middle school parents only] What has been your experience with planning next steps as your son/daughter moves through middle school? For example, I am thinking of things like figuring out how to be ready for high school, the requirements for any programs he/she might want to do (Jack Kent Cooke scholarship, EIP, SOAR, Wakefield Boys Cohort, IB)?
 - a. [IF PARTICIPATED] How has that experience been?
 - b. [IF NOT PARTICIPATED] What stands in the way, makes it difficult?
 - c. And, how about [COORDINATOR’S] role, what has been your experience working with him/her on “navigating” high school?

3. And, how about beyond high school? In general, when it comes to preparing for life after graduation—including college—how able do you feel?
 - d. Tell me about any help you have found at APS. [After answer, prompt for college-related support specifically: What has been your experience with needs like college tours, support for taking the SAT, completing applications.]
 - e. What questions do you have?
 - f. And, how about [COORDINATOR’S] role, what has been your experience working with him/her on preparing for life after high school?

OVERALL EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL (15 minutes)

1. Let’s talk about how you would describe your child’s experience at school. And, let’s make sure we are thinking especially about race and ethnicity. How would you describe your experience as a [LATINO, BLACK, etc.] student at this school?
 - a. And, overall, how have the programs and work of the Office of Minority Affairs impacted your child’s experience, if they have?

2. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is extremely easy and 10 is extremely challenging, how challenging would you say school is for your child?⁶ What are the reasons for your choice?
 - a. And, when you think of what makes school “challenging” or not, what do you have in mind?

3. And, another 1 to 10 scale... I’m wondering how supported your child feels by the adults at school. So, choose a number on the scale again, where 1 is not at all supported and 10 is completely supported by school. What are the reasons for your choice?
 - a. Describe to me how adults show support.
 - b. Who at school would you say supports your child? Is there a person (or more than one person) who has a supportive relationship with your child or family? Tell me about that.
 - c. Or tell me about the times when your child has felt *not* supported.

RESILIENCY (10 minutes)

1. In addition to everything we have talked about, there are some qualities and abilities that APS Minority Achievement Programs are meant to foster. As you look over these, I am interested in how participating in the programs that we are talking about has helped your child—if it has—with these in particular qualities and abilities. [SHARE PRINTED LIST.]

People who are resilient...

- Feel like they can take actions to affect the outcome of an event.
- Take advantage of opportunities.
- Address challenges in a calm, rational way.
- Ask for help.
- Have supportive people around them.
- Talk about challenges as a way to help solve them.
- Do not think of themselves as victims.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

Our time is nearly up. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share?
Thank you so much for your time and all your help.

⁶ The 1-10 scale is meant to give parents a way to express how challenging, but the “real” question is the “why” question, “What makes it so?”

**Arlington Public Schools (APS) Minority Achievement Evaluation
Focus Group Research with Minority Achievement Coordinators
Moderator’s Guide
August 2014**

INTRODUCTIONS/WARM UP (10 minutes)

Good afternoon everyone. My name is _____. First, thank you for taking the time to join us. A word on our purpose today... Everyone here is a Minority Achievement Coordinator, as you likely know. Our purpose is to talk about your experiences in that role with the intention of learning from your experiences and insights in order to strengthen the work of the Minority Achievement Office in the future.

A. Disclosures

- Audio taping. The tape will only be available to me to help me write my report. Once my report is accepted in final, I will delete the tape. I will not share it with anyone else.
- Confidentiality.
 - This focus group is unusual in that you may know one another or know people in common. I hope that you will feel comfortable sharing your opinions. And, I ask that you keep what is said here in confidence. That said, I cannot legally bind anyone here to keep what they hear confidential. Therefore, you may choose not to say some things. If that happens and you wish to share information with me later, please feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail.
 - When I write my report, it will not identify anyone by name. Rather, I will use phrases like, “Several providers expressed the opinion that _____.”
- I am a professional moderator, and not an expert on teaching, school administration, minority achievement. My job is to listen to you and convey your input to the Offices of Planning and Evaluation, and Minority Achievement.

B. Ground rules

- Need to hear from everyone; one at a time please
- Please turn off cell phones
- No right or wrong answers

C. Participant introduction

- Your first name only.
- How long you have been with APS and what kinds of minority achievement programs you oversee at your school(s).

MINORITY STUDENTS’ GENERAL NEEDS (15 minutes)

1. We will come back to the specific programs in a minute. First, I’d like to get a sense of the context and needs at your schools. So, tell me...what are the needs of minority students at your school that are the top 2-3 priorities for you as minority achievement coordinator?
[Generate easel list.]

GETTING STUDENTS INVOLVED (20 minutes)

1. How do you find out about students who might need your available programs or might fit well with them?
 - a. How formal or informal is the process?
 - b. In your experience, what facilitates effective identification?
 - c. What hinders or challenges it?
2. How do you go about reaching out to students?
3. What barriers to participating do you find students face?
 - a. Among these, which do you see as the most common?
 - b. And, conversely, what motivates students to engage the minority achievement programs?
 - c. What other factors (in addition to motivation) tend to help students to engage these programs? And, why?

ADVOCACY (10 minutes)

1. One part of your role, as I understand it, is to advocate for equitable practices, policies, or procedures, when needed. Is that something you have found a need for in your current setting? If so, describe the advocacy in which you have been involved.
 - a. What advice or lessons learned would you share with a new Minority Achievement Coordinator when it comes to being an effective advocate?
 - b. What factors or situations make advocacy difficult?
 - c. And, what makes that part of your role easier, supports that work?
2. In what ways do you communicate with staff members about minority achievement?
 - a. [If needed, prompt:] How do you reach out? In what settings?
 - b. Is communication regular?
 - c. How is the topic received? How do staff members show support, or not, for minority achievement programs?

GOALS (15 minutes)

1. Key overarching goals of the Minority Achievement Program are for students to feel academically challenged, to feel supported by adults, and to become better able to self-advocate. Tell me some ways in which you see the program achieving these aims, if you do.
 - a. And, in what ways does it fall short—in your experience—in achieving these aims?
 - b. What suggestions do you have for the future?

5. CLOSING (5 minutes)

Our time is nearly up. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share?
Thank you so much for your time and all your help.

Minority Achievement Alumni Survey

As part of the Minority Achievement program evaluation, the Minority Achievement Office and the Office of Planning and Evaluation developed an alumni survey for former APS students who participated in Minority Achievement programs or events while attending high school. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on topics such as next steps following high school and the impact coordinators had on students' success. The survey was administered during the summer of 2015.

Alumni were selected for the survey if they had participated in Minority Achievement programs or events as either a 10th, 11th, or 12th grader during the 2011-12 school year. While the alumni were selected based on their participation in high school programs, the survey included questions about participation in Minority Achievement programs at the middle school level as well. Given the selection criteria, not all respondents had participated in programs at the middle school level.

Using the last known street address from the APS student information system, the Office of Planning and Evaluation mailed a letter to selected alumni inviting them to participate in the online survey. In addition, an invitation email and two reminder emails were sent to the subset of alumni who had provided their email address in the senior survey of their 12th grade year. Of the 450 alumni who were selected to participate in the survey, 353 had provided an email address. Of those, 11 bounced back. The survey response rate and margin of error are listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Response Rate of the 2015 Minority Achievement Alumni Survey

Response Group	Population	Survey Responses	Percentage of Population	Margin of Error
Alumni Students	450	49	11%	13.2

The margin of error for this survey is calculated at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that we can be 95% confident that the sample result reflects the actual population within the margin of error. In other words, in 19 out of 20 cases the data obtained would not differ by any more than the percentage points in the margin of error in either direction if the survey were repeated multiple times employing the same survey methodology and sampling method across the same population. When the margin of error is greater than 5, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 1: Distribution of the Total Number of Programs/Events Alumni Participated in During Middle and High School

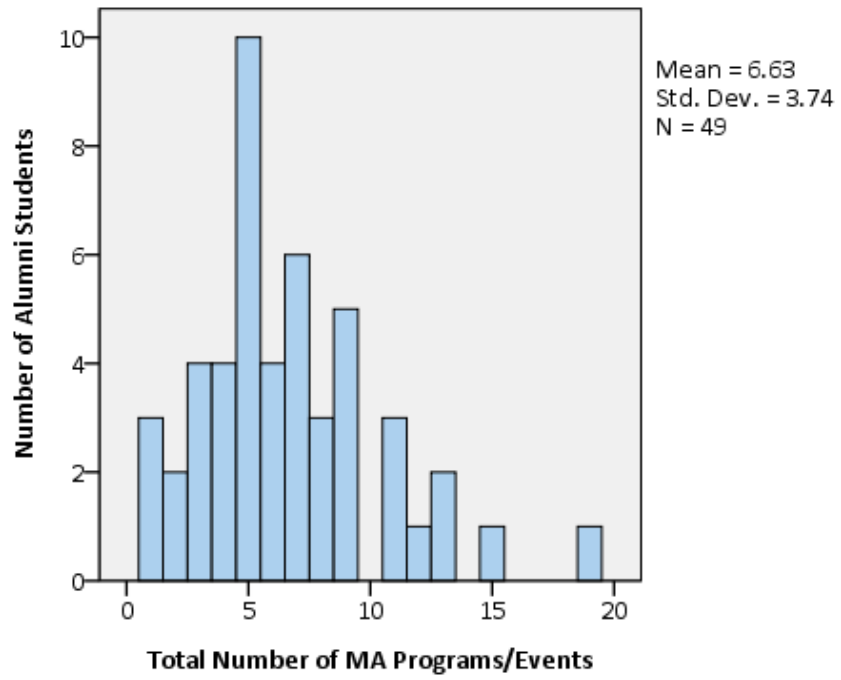


Figure 2: Distribution of the Number of Programs/Events Alumni Participated in During Middle School

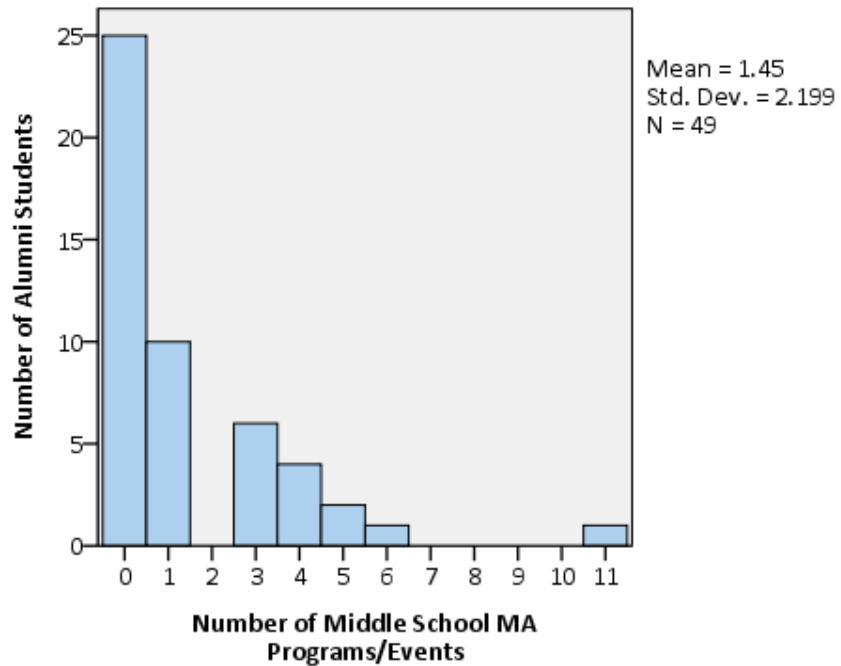


Figure 3: Distribution of the Number of Programs/Events Alumni Participated in During High School

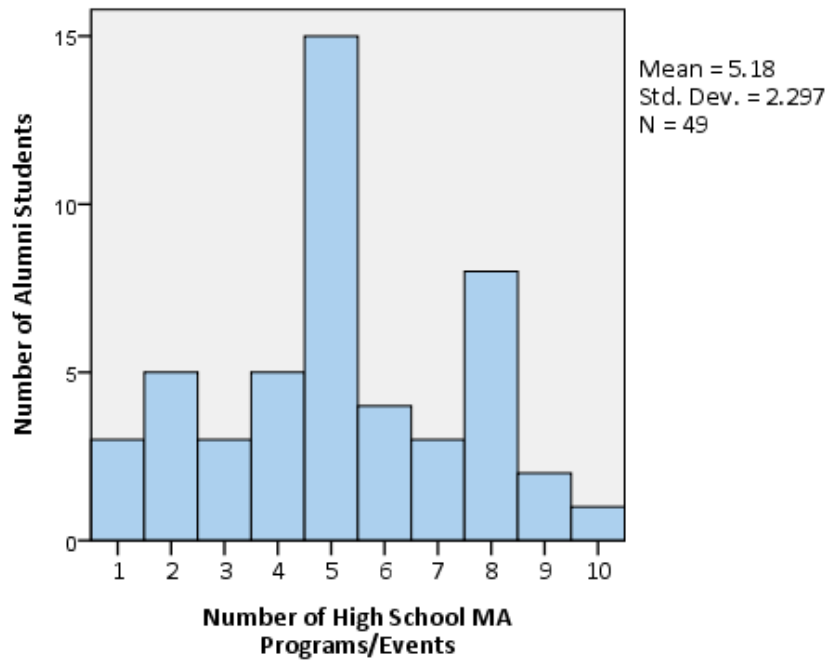


Table 2: Percentage of Alumni Respondents who Participated in Specific Minority Achievement Programs/Events*

	Middle School Participation (N=49)	High School Participation (N=49)
College Tours	16%	86%
EIP/EIP Prep	12%	18%
Affinity/Cohort Group	14%	65%
Individual Student Advising	14%	53%
Community Groups	22%	31%
Field trips	25%	55%
Support Prep	2%	71%
Transition Prep	14%	10%
Tutoring	12%	18%
Summer opportunities	6%	22%
Enrichment opportunities	6%	29%
Sat/ACT Prep	2%	55%
Other	0%	6%

*Percentage does not equal 100%, several alumni participated in multiple MA programs/events

Figure 4: As a middle school/high school student in APS, to what extent did you feel supported by the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school?

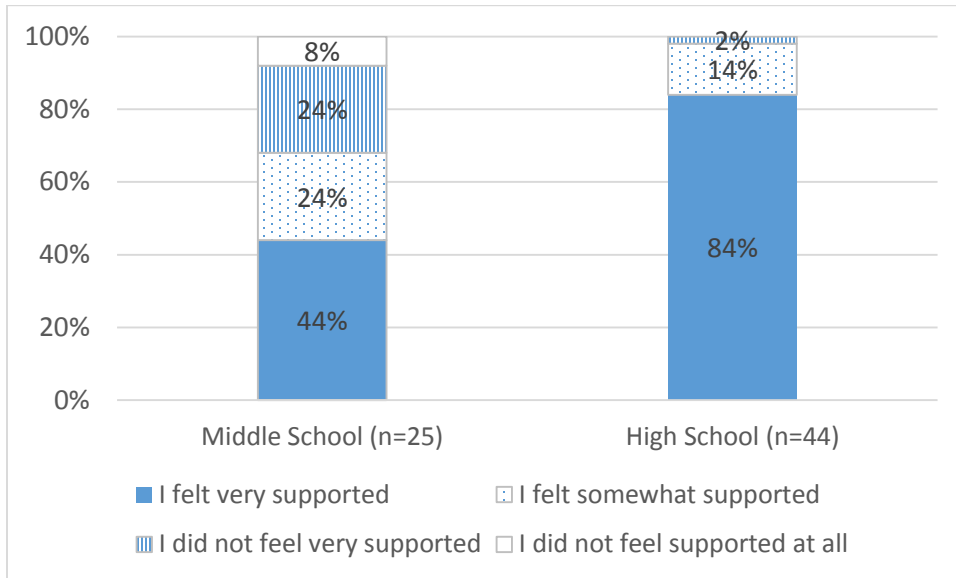
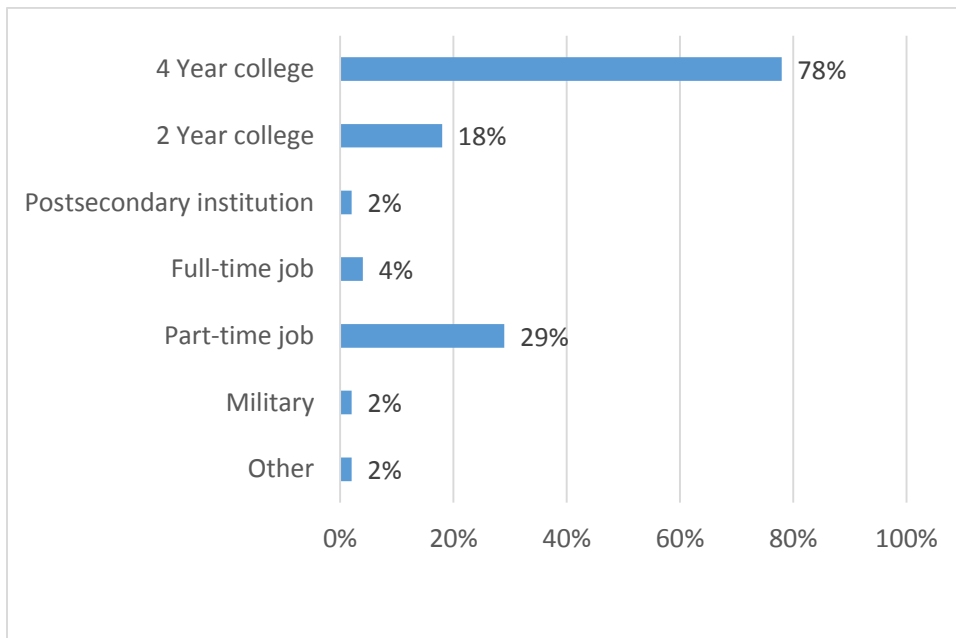


Figure 5: After you graduated from high school, what was your next step?*



*Total percentage does not equal 100%, alumni could select more than one response.

Figure 6: How prepared were you for your next step after high school?

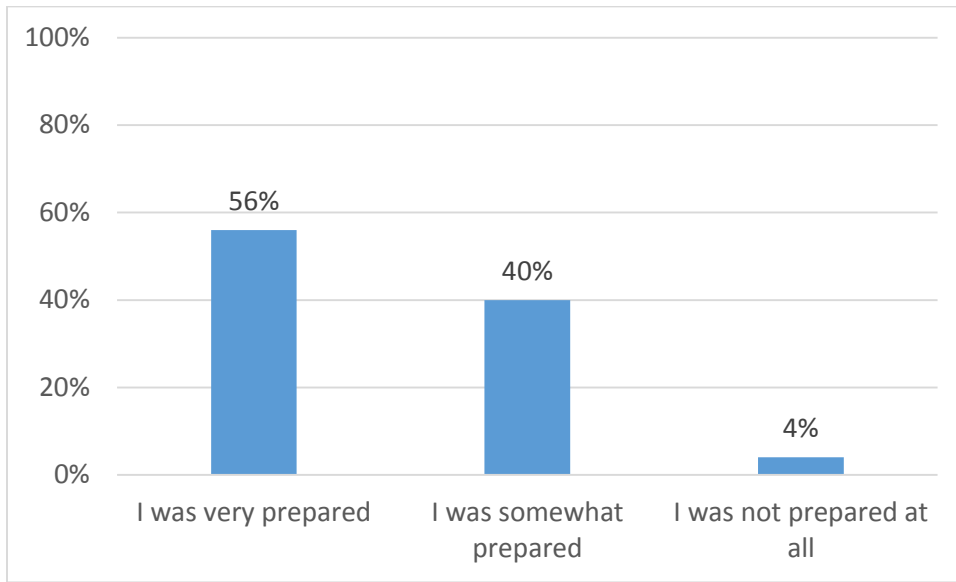


Figure 7: To what extent did the Minority Achievement Coordinator help prepare you for your next step after high school?

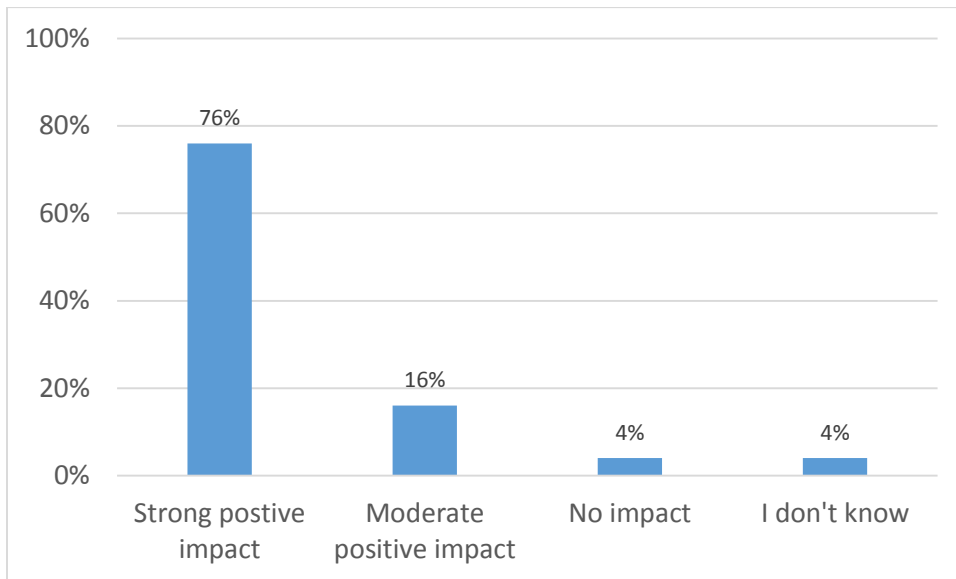


Table 3: How did the Minority Achievement Coordinator help prepare you for your next step after high school?

Categories of open-ended responses	Percent of Alumni Responses (n=34)	Examples
The MA coordinator presented expectations of college/conducted college tours/supported application process	65%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They helped me with my college applications such as writing recommendations and lending me books on certain colleges.
The MA coordinator provided support/advising directly or through a student group	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had unwavering support from my coordinator. My coordinator asked questions about how I was doing and handling my questions and the more personal my connection was with my coordinator, the more I felt like they actually cared and I took their advice more to heart.
SAT/ACT Prep Program	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She [MA coordinator] introduced me to SAT courses that were offered at a reduced price.
The MA coordinator exposed students to leadership/enrichment opportunities	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most helpful experiences I had in high school was going on the MSAN trips (twice). These conferences helped me define my values and goals outside of academics.
Other	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By having former APS students come in to discuss their college experience, I felt that I got a good idea of what was to come

*Open-ended responses could be coded in multiple categories.

Figure 8: To what extent did your participation in APS Minority Achievement programs help you to develop your self-advocacy skills?

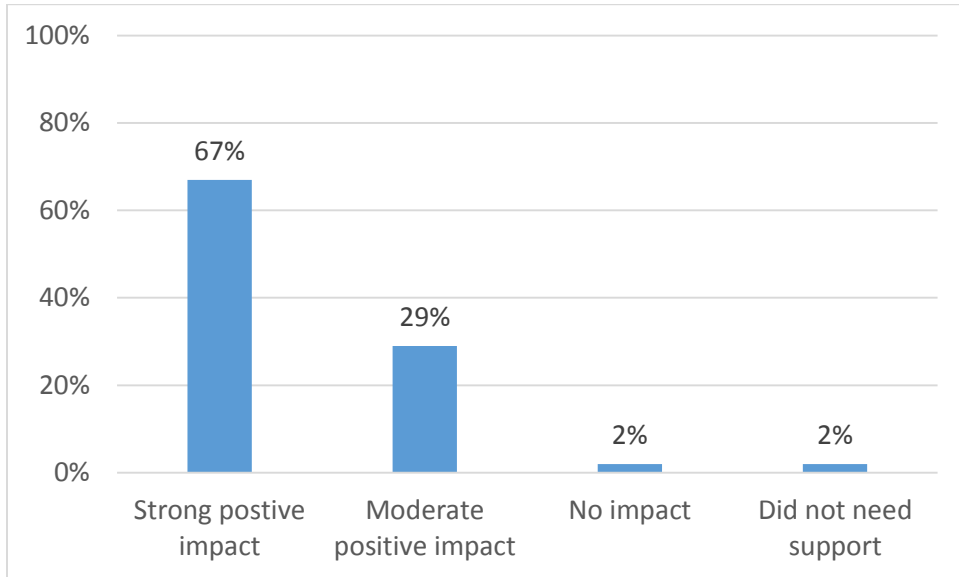


Figure 9: What impact did your relationship with the Minority Achievement Coordinator at your school have on you?

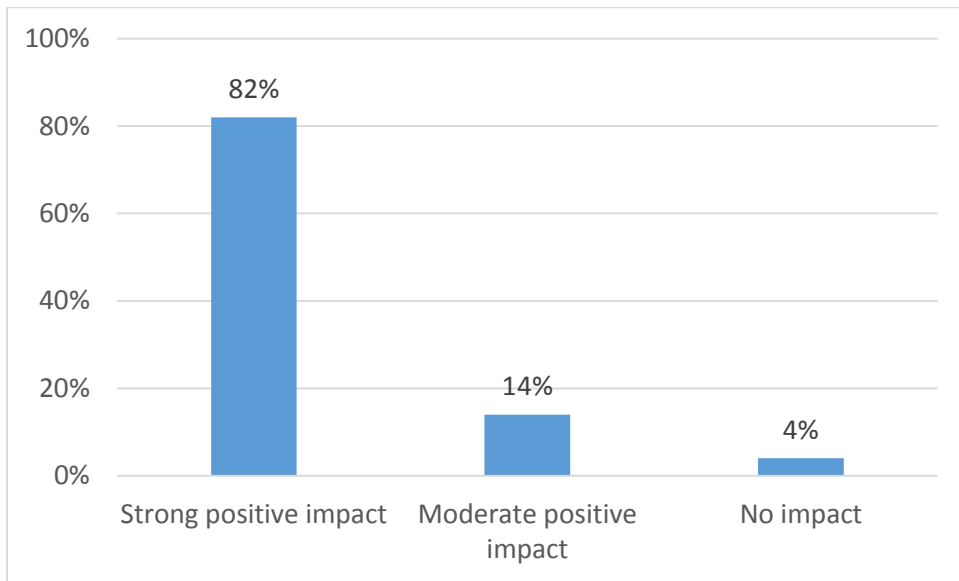


Table 4: Please share an experience that you had with a Minority Achievement Coordinator in middle school or high school that had an impact on you, your experience as a student, or on your preparedness for your next step after high school/middle school.

Categories of open-ended responses	Percent of Alumni Responses (n=29)	Examples
MA coordinator provides encouragement/support for student achievement	52%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I didn't believe I could actually take and succeed in an advanced placement class in high school and I tried so hard again and again to escape from it because I was so afraid of failure. My negative mindset alone was a recipe for failure and as I tried to drop these classes my coordinator never agreed with me and constantly encouraged me to get up and give it my all.
MA coordinator supports the college application process	52%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In high school my Minority Achievement Coordinator helped me figure out what I was able to financially afford after my financial aid letters. He outlined what everything was called, what it meant and most importantly, what it meant for my future. He helped me establish a decision about where I would go and how much I could afford.
MA coordinator is someone who listened	28%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He really cared for all of the minority students in cohort and UMG. His door was always open for anything I needed. He gives his undivided attention and what makes him special is that he actually cares enough to check back in with his students to make sure they're okay.
The MA programs provided leadership/enrichment opportunities and resources	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My minority achievement coordinators helped encourage me to participate in a lot activities that I wouldn't have done by myself. They wanted to bring me more out of my shell and I appreciated that. They helped make my experience as a student more fulfilling.

Categories of open-ended responses	Percent of Alumni Responses (n=29)	Examples
The MA coordinators inspired self-confidence	21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was a really shy but intelligent student when I was in high school and my shyness was getting in the way of achieving my dreams but after I met the coordinator everything changed. I graduated high school feeling very confident in myself and my abilities as a black female.
Other	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cohort lunches were not my absolute favorite thing in High School but I knew enough to know that I learned some of the most valuable lessons there, and now looking back I know that I wouldn't be at Stanford without the influence of the Minority Achievement programs

*Open-ended responses could be coded in multiple categories.

Table 5: Please share any additional feedback you would like us to know about your experience with the Minority Achievement Program in APS.

Categories of open-ended responses	Percent of Alumni Responses (n=19)	Examples
Program provides minority students with opportunities/prepares them for college and supports achievement	47%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This program is necessary for the support and the nourishment of countless minorities in Arlington County. Not only does it challenge stereotypes, but it exposes many first generation students to academic and professional opportunities.
Alumni have a great appreciation for their MA coordinator	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I really liked and really appreciated my Minority Achievement Coordinator.
Participation in the program helped to inspire confidence	21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This sort of on hand assistance is essential to students' success and even their confidence.
MA programs offered peer support	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most important thing for me was feeling like I belonged to a special group almost family, all working towards the same goal.
Other	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring in more successful alumni.

*Open-ended responses could be coded in multiple categories.