Executive Summary

The Baltimore County Board of Education (Board) requested a report on school climate, student behavior, and discipline. This report includes an overview of: (1) the guiding regulations which frame BCPS’ approach to school climate, including the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) and BCPS Board Policies; (2) an analysis of BCPS data, including perceptions of safety and security, enrollment trends, and suspension data; and (3) the BCPS Framework for Climate.

Both COMAR and Board of Education policies guide and frame BCPS’ approach to school climate. COMAR changes in 2014 required local boards of education to adopt policies that created safe schools by: having a philosophy of fostering and teaching positive behavior; designing programs that keep students connected to schools; describing the conduct that may lead to an in- or out-of-school suspension; allowing for administrator discretion in imposing discipline; evaluating and addressing educational and counseling needs; and explaining how and why long-term suspensions and exclusion are to be used as a last resort. More recently, COMAR required the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop a methodology to analyze the impact of disproportionate suspension practices on minority students and students with disabilities.

An overview of current BCPS data on climate includes safety perception data, enrollment trends, and suspension data. The data show that elementary students, parents, and BCPS staff have high perceptions of school safety. Students perceive bullying to be a problem at school to a higher degree than do school administrators, most notably in middle schools. Since the 2014-2015 school year, suspension incidents have increased each year through 2016-2017, with 84% of all suspension incidents occurring in secondary schools. A review of BCPS disciplinary data shows that black or African American students are disproportionately suspended in comparison to their peers who are white. Additionally, students living in poverty and students with disabilities—both of whom are overwhelmingly represented by African American students—are also suspended at disproportionate rates as compared to their peers who are neither living in poverty nor identified for special education services and supports.

The BCPS Framework for Climate—BCPS’ systemic approach to climate—including practices which support students’ needs. These practices are grouped into three categories: prevention, restoration, and logical consequences. Each BCPS school addresses school climate annually via the school progress planning process. School progress plans in BCPS include just three sections: climate, literacy/English language arts, and mathematics, allowing school teams to focus and refine their efforts over time. As a part of the school progress planning process, schools analyze their data, identify the underlying root causes of data patterns, and then identify strategic initiatives, key actions, and professional learning that are aligned to a school’s comprehensive needs and are designed to improve and impact student outcomes.