

**Discipline Equity/Advisory Task Force Meeting
October 10, 2013**

Present:

Katie Ahsell, Jefferson
Ryan Cowell, Centennial
Stephanie Hayek, CECC
Kyle Sondgeroth, Bottenfield
Bryan Yacko, Central
Orlando Thomas, Mellon, Chair

Jamar Brown, Board Member
Katharine Fettig, Central
Cathy Mannen, CFT/Bottenfield
Tomeka Whitfield, Edison
Jeanne Smith, Mellon, Recorder

Celebrations

Orlando reported that there was an overwhelming response to the upcoming PBF training and all of the reserved sub slots were taken. He reported that there are two more training opportunities upcoming, one in February/March and one in June. His office will send out a reminder to all staff. He also reported that Washington and Garden Hills have done building PBF trainings and Joe Williams at Central may consider that option as well.

Orlando reported that there is a tentative teachers' contract which is cause for celebration!

Katie Ahsell reported that there were no elementary suspensions in the District today. Orlando noted that ACTIONS teachers rotated out of FIC and into some elementary campuses so that he and they could lend support and guidance to some elementary campuses that are dealing with some challenging students.

Discipline Data

Orlando stated that discipline data remained stable for the month of September with DR's and suspensions for African-American students constituting approximately 72% of the total.

DEA Work Day

Orlando gave background information on Eddie Fergus' group from NYU (Maria Rodriguez and Nyla Bell, project associates from the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development Center on School Change, Practice, and Policy) who are working with the District to improve: 1) access to AP, honors, and gifted classes, 2) reading/literacy scores K-12, and 3) discipline numbers among African-American students.

Orlando explained that the purpose of the DEA Work Day on Oct. 1 was to determine whether the Student Code of Conduct causes a disproportionate number of African-American students to be disciplined. Orlando reported that although there was a lot of "rich dialogue" that day, the researchers did not leave the committee with any specific action steps despite some members' requests to do so.

One task force member asked how the DEA Task Force, Social Justice Committee, and Equity Committee are related. Orlando answered that all three entities are working with Eddie Fergus to

help ensure equal access to various facets of the educational process. He went on to explain the Social Justice Wheel and gave examples of how it is being used to view different District programs and activities. Orlando reported that the NYU group emailed him yesterday with a sample student code of conduct from the New York City School District as well as two research-based articles which he emailed to this task force immediately. He said the sample code was something task force members wished had been presented during the work day on Oct. 1.

NYC Student Code of Conduct

The rest of the meeting was devoted to reviewing and discussing NYC's student code of conduct. Orlando reported that this task force will continue to review and discuss this document for the next two meetings in order to determine components that we might want to integrate into our Code. Orlando began the discussion by asking members to identify some of the positive features of the NYC Code. Task force members mentioned:

- 1) Restorative approaches described in detail (p. 7)
- 2) Student responsibilities (p. 12—like our PBIS behavior charts)
- 3) Layout of infractions/guidance interventions/range of possible disciplinary responses
- 4) Theme is one of progressive discipline rather than punishment (p. 4, p. 8)

Orlando asked if changing the language in our Code would change student behavior. Tomeka Whitfield said she didn't think it would. She said she would like to observe a/some school districts with which the NYU group has worked in order to see their codes in practice. She said she'd also like to see their discipline data. Tomeka said she believes staff who voluntarily attend professional development designed to enhance understanding of cultural differences will be amenable to change, but others who are mandated to attend will see no purpose in it and remain unchanged.

Jamar Brown said he believes practice is more important than policy. He said changing the language in the Code may eventually change people's thinking, but we could probably keep our Code as it is but concentrate our efforts on changing practices. Bryan Yacko said he thinks some of the language in the NYC code offers families more "hope."

Ryan Cowell said he likes the "positive stance" that is the underpinning of the NYC document, but believes before our District can make a true shift in thinking, a larger group of diverse stakeholders, including administrators, staff, parents, and students, needs to come together to address current practices in the area of student discipline.

Tomeka asked if revised language would impact the 3% of the enrollment (percentage of students who receive 3+ suspensions a year) the District is targeting, the majority of whom are African-American. Jamar stated he believes any changes targeted to impact the 3% would automatically help the other 97%.

Katharine Fettig brought up what she considered a related concern, tracking at the high school level. She said she feels tracking excludes large numbers of African-American students from upper-level courses. She asked, "Who's the community keeping accelerated classes White?" She said he feels more comfortable alienating the White community than the African-American

community when it comes to access to upper-level courses. The issue of African-American students feeling uncomfortable in upper-level courses due to their small numbers was cited. Jamar said it isn't just "one community" preventing access. He said the issue is larger than access to classes. It includes African-American students feeling they can't play in White neighborhoods and not relating to White teachers. It was noted that under the Consent Decree one of the initiatives to encourage African-American students to enroll in upper-level courses was to group them together to form cohorts.

Stephanie Hayek and Cathy Mannen raised the issue that student behavior sometimes prevents students from working to their ability. Jamar asked for clarification and it was explained that sometimes kids can't control their behavior, for a variety of reasons, or act out purposely because they feel they don't fit in with the rest of the class, and as a result their grades suffer despite their having high test scores and high potential. Stephanie asked: As a community, what can we do to assist students who either choose not to take advantage of the upper track or purposely sabotage their success in it. A debate of the merits of tracking ensued with several task force members voicing opposition to it. Tomeka stated she believes if tracking were eliminated, it would result in White flight which would hurt African-American students remaining in the District.

Kyle Sondgeroth stated that intervention blocks look different for high- and low-ability students. He suggested mixing up some of the blocks. Tomeka said, "Doesn't that conflict with RtI?" Kyle said, "Yes."

Ryan suggested that behavior instruction at the Universal level be emphasized since students at the universal level are grouped heterogeneously. He said if behavior could be eliminated as a limiting factor, upper-level classes would be more likely to be racially diverse. Jamar said he'd like to look at school districts with demographics that mirror ours to see what their behavior systems are, what their data looks like, and how/if they ability group students. Orlando said he will request this type of information from the NYU group and continue discussions with the task force.

Marlon Mitchell asked how the NYU group was selected as a consultant to the District. Orlando explained that Cheryl Camacho had Eddie Fergus speak at a Magnet conference and Dr. Wiegand was very impressed with him and asked that his group consult with the District.

Next meeting: November 14, 2013, 4:00, Mellon Board Room.

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