

Discipline Equity/Advisory Task Force
January 12, 2017

Present:

Edie Adams, FIC
Gianina Baker, Board of Ed.
Gwenetta Posey, Dr. Howard
Tomeka Whitfield, Edison
Bryan Yacko, Central
Orlando Thomas, Mellon, Chair

Rick Carr, FIC
Jill Johnson, ACTIONS
Jonathon Westfield, Board of Ed.
Joel Wright, Jefferson
Jeanne Smith, Mellon, Recorder

Celebrations

Gwenetta Posey reported that she is having a great year with her students. She attributed this to the training she's received in Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavior Facilitation, specifically the waterline concept.

Edie Adams reported that elementary teachers really enjoyed this month's professional development led by Dr. Edna Olive.

Professional Development Outputs

Orlando stated that our District is lucky to be able to offer professional training on myriad topics. He said when compared to demographically-like school districts that offer fewer professional growth opportunities, our academic and behavior outcomes are similar. He asked those present to hypothesize why our inputs don't result in greater outputs.

One committee member said she feels the District changes directions too frequently. She gave the example of the District using PBIS which utilizes extrinsic rewards and then changing to systems that value only intrinsic rewards. She said it's difficult for staff and students to buy in to a program when it changes frequently.

Other committee members believed the outputs don't equal the inputs due to racial impacts. Jonathan Westfield said he thinks neighborhood schools where students of like races learn together and school resources are within walking distance from home would have a positive impact on African-American student success. He and Gwenetta stated that having African-American staff working with African-American students often affords an automatic level of comfort for African-American students and reduces their sense of isolation. It was acknowledged that neighborhood schools would mean some schools would be racially identifiable; however, it was also noted that despite Schools of Choice, some schools are still racially identifiable.

Other committee members noted drawbacks to neighborhood schools saying integrating students of different races and cultures helps to bridge differences and enhance racial harmony. Bryan Yacko asked what student data of like-districts with neighborhood schools looks like. Orlando said he did not have that data. Orlando noted that prior to the Consent Decree, Unit 4 had neighborhood schools and academic achievement was worse. If neighborhood schools were the model, Jonathan suggested that resources be re-allocated so that the schools with the highest

needs receive the most resources. Jill Johnson mentioned that additional resources need to be systemic and not person-specific. Jonathan also suggested that magnet schools be placed in the neighborhoods with large percentages of minority students in order to attract students of all races to special programming.

It was acknowledged that the District makes concerted efforts to recruit and retain African-American teachers and administrators, but the pool of candidates is small and some educators prefer to live in larger, more urban environments that offer social outlets Champaign-Urbana cannot. Jonathan said he thinks pay is the reason the District loses some of its best employees, particularly administrators who have no union/contract to protect them.

Orlando reported on some new initiatives the District is attempting in order to increase African-American educators to its ranks.

- 1) The District has partnered with the U of I to personally request that African-American student teachers be assigned to Unit 4, if they are agreeable.
- 2) The District is reviewing its interview questions to determine if there is racial bias and is considering using an observation of the candidate's teaching in place of the interview process.
- 3) The District is considering re-prioritizing the skills it should look for in candidates to determine which ones can be grown and which ones are inherent.

Foundational Level Professional Development

Orlando introduced the following Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards and asked the group whether these standards should be the basis for professional development in the future:

- 1) Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.
- 2) Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.
- 3) Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

It was noted that these standards are not new in the arena of special education but many regular ed. staff were unfamiliar with them. Tomeka Whitfield asked how these standards dovetail with the Danielson framework. Rick Carr noted that in recent years the focus has been "teaching to the test," so social-emotional skills have been replaced with attempts to increase academic rigor. He suggested that a balanced approach might be more beneficial.

Orlando posited that having these learning standards as a basis for professional development would place the focus on how adults interact with students and might result in improved student behavior data which, in turn, would positively impact student academic data.

Homework

Orlando asked the committee to consider two questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting:

- 1) These SEL standards have been addressed to some extent this year at the elementary level through Culture and Climate professional development (PBF). What would be the best way to teach these standards to staff at the middle and high school levels?

2) If these standards are valuable, how should this be messaged to staff and community? How would this be received at the secondary level?

Some committee members volunteered an answer to the second question saying how the message is “rolled out” could determine its success. If it is perceived as “just one more thing I have to do,” teachers and administrators would probably not buy in to the concept. Without buy-in, true change won’t occur. Bryan Yacko said he thinks these standards would be accepted positively at the high school level if considered a part of Tier II team goals.

Next meeting: Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, 4:00 p.m., Mellon North Conference Room.

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