

**Discipline Equity/Advisory Task Force Meeting
September 10, 2015**

Present:

Katie Ahsell, ACTIONS	Kendra Bonam, Centennial
Danielle Cook, Jefferson	Katharine Fettig, Central
Tom Lockman, Mellon	Suzanne Meislahn, FIC
Marlon Mitchell, parent	Mallory Morris, Stratton
Amber Owens, Bottenfield	Gwenetta Posey, Dr. Howard
Robyne Scott, Washington	Ben Trupin, Mellon
Jonathan Westfield, Board	Tomeka Whitfield, Edison
Joel Wright, Jefferson	Bryan Yacko, Central
Jeanne Smith, Mellon, Recorder	Orlando Thomas, Mellon, Chair

Task Force Roles and Responsibilities

Orlando Thomas introduced the Task Force's role and responsibilities for 2015-16. He displayed a graphic depicting the inter-relationship among: District philosophy, CRE and social justice goals, Senate Bill 100, discipline data disparity, effects of interventions and supports, and culture and climate shift on student success. He explained that the 2016-17 Code of Conduct would need to reflect the above-listed components and to do so may require more meetings than originally scheduled. At the end of the meeting, task force members indicated that additional meetings might be necessary but they were unsure that they could commit to meeting twice a month on a regular basis. Potential additional meeting dates will be discussed at a future meeting.

Senate Bill 100

Tom Lockman, Chief Financial and Legal Officer, shared a PowerPoint presentation on Senate Bill 100 which takes effect with the 2016-17 school year. Although the District has already implemented many of the requirements of the Bill, highlights of that presentation included:

- Language provided in correspondence to parents regarding the rationale for suspension (or recommendation for expulsion) will need to be tweaked.
- Except in the cases pending expulsion hearings, suspensions may not exceed three days. This means progressive discipline may not be possible in some cases.
- Some Board policy changes will need to occur.
- Suspensions exceeding three days will require the provision of educational services (ACTIONS). (If parents decline ACTIONS, the District cannot be held accountable for failure to provide required services. Jonathan Westfield suggested that parents sign a waiver in cases where they decline ACTIONS in order to prevent them from claiming the services were never offered. Katie Ahsell responded that all Notices of Suspension and suspension letters inform parents of the availability of ACTIONS, so the District should be covered in this regard.)

Suzanne Meislahn asked who could be monitoring Senate Bill 100 compliance. Orlando stated he believes it would be the ISBE.

Orlando reported that LUDA (Large Unit District Association) and the OCR (Office of Civil Rights) asked District representatives to give a presentation on the discipline initiatives the District has implemented which address the goals of SB 100. He stated that despite the myriad interventions and supports in place, discipline data remains racially disparate with African-American students receiving the lion's share of disciplinary consequences.

Jonathan Westfield responded to Orlando's comments by laying the responsibility for student misbehavior on the community and families. He stated that schools are held accountable for issues beyond their control. Orlando stated that although violence in the community and family factors are beyond the schools' control, educators need to do the best they can with students during the seven hours a day they have them, including teaching behavioral expectations that may differ from the expectations students learn at home. Jonathan suggested that school expectations be presented to parents via "road shows" in their communities and explained using scenarios to which parents can relate. Gwenetta Posey suggested having walks in the community to share this information. It was noted that community walks had been held in the past to communicate information about attendance and Community Coalition goals.

Discipline Data

Orlando shared discipline data comparing last year to previous years. It was noted that the significant increase in suspensions from 2012-13 to 2013-14 was due to some schools improperly under-reporting.

It was reported that expulsions decreased the past two years, in part, because of a new expulsion protocol that requires the administrative team at each school to answer a series of questions prior to making a decision to proceed with expulsion.

Analysis of the data shows that 92% of all students in the District never received a suspension in 2014-15; however, of the 8% who were suspended, 80% were African-American. In contrast, however, in reviewing discipline data of African-American students on the whole, 84% of them never get suspended. Four percent of African-American suspensions are students with three or more suspensions. Although some on the committee believed this analysis of African-American suspension data shed a more positive light on the interventions implemented to reduce racial disparities in discipline, Katherine Fettig disagreed stating that 84% is still not an acceptable percentage.

Jonathan Westfield commented the students who do what they're supposed to should receive recognition. He said currently, students with a history of behavioral infractions are provided incentives to behave while those who behave well consistently are overlooked. This comment led to a discussion of intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards and whether students can make the transfer from extrinsic to intrinsic. Amber Owens said she believes the most effective reward is one of relationship building. When students feel there is an adult(s) that cares about them, the relationship that develops is the reward.

Robyne Scott reported that sometimes students come to school angry, for very legitimate reasons. They often cope with their anger by fighting. She said BTW has an after-school

program just for girls to discuss how to deal with stress and anger. She recommended that this type of support be available to children at a young age because the indicators are there early on. Gwenetta Posey went a step further to say social/emotional learning needs to be a part of the school curriculum.

Jonathan Westfield said he is leery about putting schools in the role of parents. He believes some professional distance is necessary. He stated parents need to accept their responsibility as parents and not expect schools to raise their children. Gwenetta Posey countered by explaining that to some students she is the only mother they have. She said sometimes she feels more like a mother than a teacher, but “how do we stop” when a student isn’t getting what he/she needs at home? Orlando said parents can’t or don’t assume parental responsibility for a variety of reasons. Educators can’t control what goes on in the home, but they can do their best to meet children’s needs during school hours.

It was noted that all schools have a small number of students who would benefit from social/emotional instruction done via small groups. Unfortunately, Orlando pointed out, these groups would be racially identifiable. Jonathan Westfield commented that the community is segregated, so schools shouldn’t be condemned if services are racially identifiable. He said he would support the concept of having separate classrooms in schools to address the small number of students who have more intense needs.

Katie Ahsell stated that many of the parents of students who have attended ACTIONS a number of times have requested that their children attend some sort of alternative classroom/school where they can receive more individualized attention tailored to their unique needs.

Katherine Fettig noted that one explanation for the racial disparity in discipline data could be that the curriculum is geared toward the dominant culture and not responsive to the needs of African-American students. Orlando discussed the District’s CRE efforts and referenced Eddie Fergus’ initial meeting with all District administrators four years ago as well as the task force meeting with Fergus representatives in 2013-14. He said responses from administrators and task force members indicated they were not in support of a “culturally responsive” Code of Conduct as described by Fergus and his team. Tomeka Whitfield commented that she attended the task force meeting and asked representatives for some data to show that culturally responsive student codes of conduct are effective in improving behavior and decreasing racial disparities. She said she also indicated a willingness to visit school districts using such a code of conduct. She said no data was ever shared and, to date, she had not been invited to visit any school districts where such a code has been implemented.

Katie Ahsell indicated that Elgin School District has a culturally responsive code of conduct that emphasizes restorative justice. She said she will try to bring some information to the group on that district’s efforts at the next meeting.

Next meeting: Thursday, October 8, 2014, 4:00 p.m., Mellon North Conference Room

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