

Discipline Equity/Advisory Task Force Work Day
October 1, 2013
9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Present:

Katie Ahsell, Jefferson	Katharine Fettig, Central
April Harris, Mellon	Melissa Kneller, Garden Hills
Cathy Mannen, CFT/Bottenfield	Suzanne Meislahn, FIC
Davina Stewart, Jefferson	Tomeka Whitfield, Edison
Bryan Yacko, Central	Laura Taylor, Mellon
Jill Johnson, Admin. Intern	Jeanne Smith, Recorder, Mellon
Orlando Thomas, Chair, Mellon	

Guest Speakers:

Maria Rodriguez, NYU	Nyla Bell, 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 were introduced by Orlando Thomas. He explained that they had been invited to consult with the DEA Task Force in an effort to reduce the disparity that exists between African-American students and White students in the area of discipline. The morning session was spent in small groups reviewing the Code of Conduct in order to answer two main questions: 1) Who are the students your district serves? 2) Does your student code of conduct support your district in serving all students effectively? As groups reviewed the Code, they were asked to look for answers to the following guiding questions:

- 1) Is it positive or negative?
- 2) Is it proactive or reactive?
- 3) Does it provide a range of consequences?
- 4) Is it rehabilitative and corrective?
- 5) Is it culturally responsive?
- 6) Does it support all students?
- 7) Does it promote teaching and learning?
- 8) Does it engage parents?
- 9) Is it clear or vague?
- 10) Who are the stakeholders that can benefit from school code?

Orlando explained that a small number of students (3%) get suspended 3+ times a year. He also noted that suspensions have been on a downward trend at middle and high school, he believes, in part, due to myriad interventions and the opportunity for alternative placement. Alternative placement at the elementary level is non-existent and even in-school suspension is difficult at some campuses due to lack of space and supervision. READY; Novak Academy; and ACTIONS, the District's new K-12 alternative suspension program, were discussed.

Guiding Questions (#1, #2, #5, #7)

As small groups discussed whether the Code was positive and proactive or punitive and reactive and which students are being disciplined, one group asked, for purposes of this exercise, how discipline is being defined. This led to a discussion of semantics and interpretation of the word “discipline.” One task force member gave the example that some “honors” type students might consider redirection, e.g., “Stop talking,” as discipline, whereas other students would not. Maria then referenced page 1 of the Code which states: “We, the members of the Champaign Unit 4 Schools community—teachers, students, administrators, and community members—will seek *to use discipline as an intervention strategy* to improve student behavior and academic performance.” Maria pointed out that discipline is not an intervention. There seemed to be unanimous agreement that discipline is not an intervention, but how discipline should be categorized, if not as an intervention, was not answered.

Many task force members reported that there are a variety of interventions listed in the Code (p. 8 elementary and p. 19 secondary) and in use in the district (e.g., Essential Social Curriculum, Nurtured Heart, instruction of PBIS universals, etc.) but, except for a few exceptions, they are not listed in the “Recommended Range of Consequences;” therefore, the Code is more punitive and reactive than positive and proactive. An administrator asked what the consequence for a severe misbehavior would be if it wasn’t discipline. Maria indicated re-teaching should be the consequence. She asked if the District utilizes re-teaching. Orlando indicated that a review of a school’s SWIS data would show the behaviors that need re-teaching and that re-teaching occurs to different extents with different teachers and students.

A task force member stated that for African-American students with repeat suspensions, it’s more than just the Code that’s not working.

An administrator pointed out that although expectations are taught and modeled, the rationale for the expectation may not be clear, particularly to African-American students. Another task force member reported that code switching is important and that not all *teachers* are able to do this. Nyla Bell asked to what extent schools should adapt to students and vice versa. Nyla advised that schools take an “inquiry stance” by studying and understanding student behavior in order to adapt the school to the student.

An administrator mentioned Donna Ford’s teaching that different behaviors come with different cultures. Although this administrator concurred with this sentiment, she said she didn’t know if it would be “viable” to consider this relative to a student code of conduct. A task force member asked how we would prepare young African-American males (our highest target population for purposes of reducing disparity in the area of discipline) for society if we set different expectations for different cultures. Nyla’s response was that a culturally responsive code does not mean lowering behavioral expectations; it means meeting the needs of the students so that they can be successful. Several task force members grappled with how the District could develop a code of conduct that is culturally responsive while simultaneously maintaining behavioral expectations and school safety. Maria’s answer was that it be done through “actions, procedures, and intrinsically motivating practices.” She said in order to motivate students, we

need their input on development of the Code. (It was noted that secondary students participated on the development of the Code last year.)

The question was raised by a task force member whether the Code is “fair and consistent.” This led to a discussion of “fairness” versus “equity” and to which concept the Code should be aimed. This question was not resolved.

A task force member referenced some reading she had been doing on the topic of reading and brain science. She reported that some scientists believe that a segment of the population will never learn to read. If this is true, and academic success and behavior are inherently linked, how would students who are doomed to be academically unsuccessful learn appropriate behavior? Maria responded by saying it was her understanding that the District does not have an elementary reading curriculum. Some of the elementary teachers on the task force took exception to this statement and clarified that the District has a reading curriculum, but that it offers a “menu” of offerings that emphasize phonics, phonemic awareness, and balanced literacy. A task force member stated that, in recent years, reading instruction has suffered from a lack of professional development, changing priorities at the central office level, and increasing time demands on teachers. Another task force member paraphrased a central office administrator who reportedly said, “It’s not about the stuff; it’s a menu.”

A task force member asked Maria what her findings were at the middle school level in regard to reading instruction. Maria indicated reading proficiency gaps were exacerbated at middle school, reading interventions were not coordinated and inter-related, and teachers were not well trained. Another task force member reported that the professional development component is being addressed.

Maria noted that the Code offers a range of consequences but “severe” misbehavior is open to interpretation (**Guiding Questions #3 and #9**). Later in the day, one of the discussions centered on whether having a range of consequences is positive or negative. Having a range can be a positive in that it affords each situation and student to be dealt with individually and allows administrators professional discretion as they consider the six factors (p. 8, p. 18 of the Code) prior to determining a consequence. Maria stated that a range of consequences also results in more gray and less black and white decisions and, hence, more subjectivity. A task force member reported that for the past 10 years, this committee has discussed the quandary of ranges versus finite consequences and although both have pros and cons, the most recent consensus was to allow a range of consequences. Another task force member reported that she has worked in districts that used ranges and in districts that used finite consequences and in her experience, she feels ranges are fairer.

The question was raised as to the purpose of a code of conduct and whether it should be a document that includes in-depth information and explanation of interventions and proactive measures, or merely be a list of consequences for specific types of defined misbehavior, an “if, then” kind of document. Maria said not much mention is made in the Code to explain what type of instruction/support is offered proactively to students prior to meting out a punitive/reactive consequence. The following purposes were mentioned:

- 1) To provide punitive consequences.
- 2) To provide written documentation for determining disciplinary consequences, important if challenged legally.
- 3) To provide students and parents with written, Board-approved behavioral expectations and consequences.

Orlando shared a copy of Urbana's Teacher Help Manual, Classroom Leadership and Support System (C.L.A.S.S.), with the group. This document "is a living document created by staff, deans, and administrators to provide information about the structures and supports in the building to assist the UHS community in meeting our School Climate Goals. It includes supportive suggestions and observations from the stakeholders in the school, and is no way an all-inclusive set of directions for addressing issues we face." He asked if Unit 4 might want to create a manual like this as a supplement to the Code. A task force member indicated that some buildings are already doing this but it is not done district-wide.

Maria asked if the Code supports all students (**Guiding Question 4**). It was noted that for 93% of students the Code appears to be working because these students do not experience suspension at all. For the other 7%, however, it appears the Code may not be working and of those 7%, three percent are suspended three or more times. Our data also shows that approximately 70% of all district suspensions involve African-American students; therefore, the Code may not be working for a segment of our African-American enrollment. Nyla said some kids are taught ways/behaviors that complement the Code and others are not.

Orlando discussed an idea he had three years ago when he first became the Director of Achievement and Student Services. He wanted to hold a picnic/book bag giveaway at Douglass Park at the beginning of the school year and invite parents (targeting African-American parents) to an explanation of the Code of Conduct so that information could be shared personally in a familiar environment. Response to this idea, at the time, was divided with some people thinking targeting a particular demographic was smart and others thinking targeting a particular demographic was racist. A task force member reported that it is not uncommon for parents to tell her, "This is the first I'm hearing of...[a particular consequence for a behavior]", so she would favor families having an opportunity to learn about the Code some way besides mailing it to their homes. Nyla and Maria suggested that all parents be invited to a town hall type of get-together/meeting to discuss "whether the Code is great or not great," prior to the Code's annual revision process. Maria said it would have to be made clear that safety and learning are non-negotiables. Orlando reported that parents are included on the task force; they just were not in attendance at this meeting.

The afternoon session commenced with Maria suggesting that the following key questions be used as the group continues to review the Code for patterns and themes:

- 1) What is discipline?
- 2) Why do we discipline?
- 3) What is the purpose of the Student Code of Conduct?

Maria asked if teachers go directly to the Code in response to student misbehavior or whether they consider other rehabilitative or corrective measures (**Guiding Question #4**). Nyla asked how the District knows if Tier I strategies are being implemented equitably/fairly. As an example, one task force member asked if the presenters would support an alternative placement for a chronic fighter. A second task force member followed up with: “What would be a culturally responsive solution to deal with this type of behavior?”

Nyla’s response was that administrators need to understand the context of the situation—no black and white answers. One of the task force members pressed for a more definitive answer saying something to the effect of, “Aggressive behavior compromises student safety. There have to be some consequences.” Nyla stated that current interventions need to be reviewed and improved upon if they’re not being implemented with fidelity.

One task force member mentioned that students wearing hats is an example of an offense that often escalates into something more serious. The presenters asked why the District forbids students from wearing hats. Members explained that hat wearing is often connected with gang affiliation, so hats are not permitted. When asked what other schools the presenters work with do in this particular situation, they answered that hats are allowed. A task force member asked if there is “gang banging” going on in those schools. The presenters said, “Yes.”

Maria underscored the need to understand the root cause of the students’ behavior. Towards that end, she posed the following guiding questions and directed members to critically review the alignment of the Student Code of Conduct with District discipline referrals, Level 1 forms, and behavioral quality indicators (pages 21-28 of Behavioral Support Root Cause Analysis Workbook):

- 1) Does language in the Code impact behavior?
- 2) How is the Code aligned with discipline referrals and interventions?
- 3) How is the Code aligned with behavioral indicators?

At this juncture, task force members began asking for more specific guidance and examples from other Districts with whom the NYU group had worked to reduce the racial disparity in the area of discipline. Maria responded that before that can happen, the root cause for the behavior has to be identified and in order to do that, the critical analysis discussed above needs to occur. She said she understood the group’s desire to accelerate the process but reiterated the need to respect the process. She said she realizes it feels like “the house is on fire and you’re telling me to go buy milk.”

Everyone worked in their groups to answer multiple-part questions related to aligning discipline referrals, Level 1 forms, and the Code to the behavioral indicators in the workbook. Several groups noted that it was difficult to provide a clear yes or no answer to the questions posed because many of them contained “all or nothing” wording and honest answers were typically, “some or sometimes.”

Feedback from small group work included:

- 1) Set evaluations (PBIS) clearly measure whether students and staff know expectations and other PBIS tools and data provide insight into whether a school's behavior program is being implemented with fidelity.
- 2) One task force member would like more opportunity for collegial discussions with administrators from the middle school level to learn whether her disciplinary consequences are consistent with others'. Orlando reported that more time will be devoted at AP/AP meetings for this purpose.
- 3) A task force member asked if a culturally relevant question could be added to the DR that asks something about the impact of the student's home environment on behavior.
- 4) A task force member discussed adding teacher interventions to the Level 1 forms. She said there is a continuum of interventions at high school but these are not listed on the DR. She gave the example of a student who continually falls asleep in class. She said this is a behavior that is not tracked but screams for an intervention, not a punitive consequence.
- 5) A task force member reported that PBIS celebrations should be school-wide and all inclusive. If a behavioral goal is set and reached, all students should be allowed to participate in the celebration. This was news to some on the committee because it was their understanding that only the students who met the goal should be allowed to participate.
- 6) Revise philosophy statement (p. 1 of Code) to include verbiage which demonstrates a commitment to cultural responsiveness and providing a nurturing environment.
- 7) Orlando reported that a climate survey was done at the end of the 2011-12 school year in each of the secondary schools to see if the improved discipline data were felt/perceived by students and staff.
- 8) A task force member reported that some interventions are based on a "wait to fail" model because a student cannot progress to the next level of intervention until he/she fails at the current level.

Since time ran out before all of the agenda items could be completed, task force members asked whether Maria and Nyla would be returning or what next steps would be. Maria said she would be sending a summary of today's meeting to Orlando and the central office executive team. She and Nyla also plan to make campus visits between now and February. They said they would assist in making and implementing action plans focused on reducing the racial disparity in discipline. A task force member asked what the action plans would be based on. Maria said, "Data." Maria also stated she would provide information about other schools they've assisted.

:jes