

## **Disproportionate Discipline Task Force**

*January 23, 2024, 9:00 am - 2:30 pm*

MindSpark  
455 S Pierce St.  
Lakewood, CO 80226  
(Colorado East Room)

To join by Zoom, please email Tricia Walz (walz\_T@cde.state.co.us)

### **Meeting Objectives**

- Identify opportunities for task force member participation and engagement
- Profile successful programs, research and practice currently succeeding with alternatives approaches to discipline
- Profile existing programs using promising strategies for public engagement
- Learn about resources for public engagement in a local school district board of education's discussions of discipline data
- Discuss systemic barriers and infrastructural challenges contributing to disproportionate discipline practices

### **Agenda**

**8:30 am: Breakfast, networking**

**9:00 am: Welcome**

- *Quorum*
- *Approval of Agenda & Minutes*
- *Announcements*

**9:25 am: Public Comment**

**9:35 am: Breakout Discussion**

**10:00 am: Panel: What Works In Districts**

*Kirk Henwood – Superintendent South Routt School District*

*Lori Bailey – Director of Student Engagement Initiatives, Adams 12 School District*

*Gretchen Carter – Director of Student Discipline, Jefferson County Public Schools*

**11:00 am: Focusing on Implementation District-Wide**

*Erika Tunson, Principal, Monterey Elementary School*

*Pete Vargas, Principal, Harrison High School*

*Student, TBD*

*Student, TBD*

**12:00 pm: Lunch - Eat and Network**

**1:00 pm: Understanding Barriers to Systemic Change and Potential Alternatives to Discipline Practice**

*Omar Reyes, Project DIVERT | DIVERT Coalition*

*Dr. Kathryn Wiley, Howard University*

*Bill de la Cruz, De La Cruz Solutions*

**2:20 pm: Public Comment**

**2:25 pm: Next Steps**

**2:30 pm: Adjourn**

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**Attendees:** Zoe O'Donell, Chair, Elie Zweibel, Co-Chair, Sara Pielsticker, Angelina Sandoval, Mike Claudio, Lisa Humberd, Sierra Agens, Anne Keke, Dawn Fritz, Michelle Murphy, Floyd Cobb, Laura McArthur

**Staff/Public Attendees:** Johann Liljengren, Jewel Sale, Tricia Walz, Jennifer Gallegos, Amber Minogue, Andrea Wilkins, Omar Reyes, Kathryn Wiley

**Opening & Welcome** - overview of meeting objectives, introduction of breakout group discussion – Amber Minogue, Allied Agenda

**Breakout Group Discussion:**

What are the themes or throughlines you are seeing in the responses and ideas provided in the jamboards during last meeting? How do these themes relate to task force duties? Do they form the basis of any corresponding recommendations?

- Define what is suspendable vs expellable behavior
- Statutory language is very old – needs review and updates. Includes very few definitions – may want to consider whether various terms in statute need definition.
- Expulsion does not have to be 365 days – could be shorter (but what distinguishes it from suspension?)
- Behavior agreements as an alternative to suspension? If so, they cannot conflict with IEPs and it must be something that the student can actually comply with – otherwise they will be alienated and act out again. Good agreements should involve parents but in practice, it is rare that they do. (Often parents don't have the ability to weigh in on this in an informed way or to support their student in complying – this is when other resources need to come into play.)
- Recommend this group continues to meet for another year?

### **Meeting Minutes**

Chair O'Donnell calls meeting to order, verifies presence of quorum

Approval of Jan. 9 Meeting Minutes – motion from Elie Zweibel, 2<sup>nd</sup> from Dawn Fritz, vote approved

Approval of Jan. 23 Agenda – motion from Angelina Sandoval, 2<sup>nd</sup> from Sara Pielsticker, vote approved

**Public Comment:** None

**Panel: What Works District-Wide** - Johann Liljengren & Jennifer Gallegos, CDE

Panelists: Kirk Henwood, South Routt School District, Lori Bailey, Adams 12 School District, Gretchen Carter, Jefferson County Public Schools

- CDE beginning to compile information on discipline best practices. Recommendations of this group will help shape this information.
- Working on expulsion hearing officer training coming out later this year.
- Discipline practices: create positive climate and focus on prevention, develop clear, appropriate and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors, ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement. Works most

effectively when guided by trauma-informed and social-emotional approaches, implement restorative practices.

- When behavior expectations are not met – reflective, restorative, instructional
- Reduce classroom disruptions – engage students, set up procedures and structures, build community.

Panelist Discussion:

**Kirk Henwood, Superintendent, South Routt School Districts**

- More than 100 small rural districts in CO – we need to think about how we provide resources here. In these districts, staff wear many hats. In small, rural districts, disproportionality means something different here (South Routt has no Black students in his district). Disproportionality here is white male students.
- District approach is focused on educating the whole child – including social-emotional needs. This is a baseline for their behavior management. Developing a handbook for student behavior available to staff, students and parents. Implementation of restorative practices, consistent systems throughout districts.
- Accurate reporting of discipline incidents is important so that issues can be addressed and progress can be measured.
- Identify what behavior codes need to be aligned with state system – assistant principals throughout state can provide input here because they deal with behavior incidents most consistently.
- Discipline matrix used also includes guidance on age/developmentally appropriate resolutions.
- Best opportunity to teach and promote better behavior is when kids remain in school, but schools also have a duty to keep all students safe. It is problematic if a student is let back in and harm occurs to others as a result. Behavior plan - Need to make sure kids have an “out” to keep things from escalating. In extreme situations short term suspensions come into play. When student returns, restorative practices are implemented. Goal is to ensure that student can successfully return to their classroom.
- To what extent is suspension/expulsion helpful as a deterrent or helpful in promoting a positive school environment? Varies student. Some of them want to be

out of school environment so suspension would not be a deterrent at all. However, it's not realistic to take suspension or expulsion off the table completely. It is sometimes necessary for safety and gives administrators space to develop a plan for moving forward.

**Gretchen Carter, Principal, Director of Student Discipline, Jefferson County Public Schools**

- Focus on creating welcoming culture and environment.
- Goal is data-driven decisions. Data is lacking in some areas, so this is problematic. Working on moving toward consistency in data collection from year to year.
- Shared leadership team within every building. Tasked with looking at data to refine their policies and procedures and better identify disproportionality.
- Free and Reduced Lunch student data is helpful. This helps in creation of “at risk” student profiles and leads to tool development that helps with intervention work.
- Identifying levels of behavior – those that are dealt with within classroom, those that administrators deal with. These standardizations help when there are discipline incidents, so there are less opportunities for bias to come in.
- Prevention and intervention needs to be the foundation from which systems and procedures are developed.
- Alternatives to discipline – default is to look for alternatives to exclusionary practices. Community service, reverse suspension, mentoring in younger student classrooms, meaningful leadership role related to issue, etc. – encourage creative thinking on restorative practices that fits within the building and promotes repair of harmful action.

**Lori Bailey – Director of Student Engagement Initiatives, Adams 12 School District**

- Working to implement data dashboard.
- Brought in team to do equity review in policies and discipline procedures. Developed equity framework.
- Review of disproportionality data illustrates overrepresentation of male students of color with IEP within district as a whole, but there are variations at school level.

- Clarifying language in terms of discipline has been helpful; related professional development and training. Trying to make this consistent from school to school.
- Discipline codes and descriptions used to classify discipline incidents are not always understood by educators. Training here is helpful so data collection is clear. (possible overuse of “other” category for discipline description) Number of behavioral codes used vary by districts, which map to CDE state reportable categories. (16 state codes) Identify common codes that everyone is using? Define classroom disruption vs an administrator-referred incident statewide? More instruction on what codes align with CDE categories to promote consistency from district to district?
- Use of matrix that aligns incident with district behavior code and code for possible resolution. Working on supplemental document to provide guidance with suggestions to educators about additional actions that may be taken in light of other factors associated with student (homelessness, IEP, disability, etc.)
- Working to figure out how to document alternatives to exclusionary discipline. Helpful to think about how we track alternatives in schools throughout state.

**Panel Discussion: Focusing on Implementation District-Wide, Mike Claudio, Facilitator**

- Harrison District is only minority-majority district in Colorado Springs
- Black, brown student graduation rates are higher than state average
- All new staff participate in the new staff institute, which includes implicit bias training.
- District has equity theory, getting ready to publish equity policy.
- District does not make determinations on whether a crime has been committed – district waits for determination of law enforcement/DA. Students charged with a crime are not excluded from participating in RJ process regardless of whether they are involved in court system.

**Ericka Tunson, Principal, Monterey Elementary**

- Exclusionary practices not workable for educators – missed class time results in lost learning and makes classroom instruction more difficult. Decision was to instead rely on alternative practices Goal is to create a positive environment while also being very clear with staff about discipline procedures and implementation policies. Educators are very

clear on when they need to make an office referral for behavior incidents. Collaboration with teachers revealed that most teachers feel they can handle most incidents in the classroom. Typically most extreme punishment is lunch detention, which is intentionally made to be useful. (vaping students spent two weeks on classroom presentation on why they shouldn't be vaping) (similar approach was used with students who were bullying) (food fight resulted in lunch detention helping custodian). This results in few repeat incidents.

- Relationships are key to retaining staff and promoting good student behavior. Staff consistency promotes strong relationships and trust with students. As a result they invest a lot in school culture.
- Implicit bias training for staff helped promote shift from punitive focus to staff willing to embrace restorative practices.
- Parents are not typically involved in lunch detentions and related projects unless it is a health and safety issue or something involving illegal activity. (did not notify parents of food fight, did notify of vaping) Second offenses will involve parents.

#### **Mindy \_\_\_\_\_ Harrison High School?**

- Ambassador program combined with restorative practices. Program focuses on older students working with younger students; houses connection circles, use of peer mediators, honor council. Student success center.
- What resources are needed to create and sustain this program? District has been a resource – provides lesson series and staff that pairs with teacher that does RJ program and leads students who operate program. Having good models – Reinventing the Secondary School – very useful conference.
- Program has been in operation for about 5 years.
- 70% students complete their intended outcomes.
- Families/parents are not involved with this honor council program – it gives students a chance to talk and develop strategies to repair damage without influence of parents. Parents do participate in RJ program.

#### **Students: Rosario?, Chris**

- RJ program – focus is on learning and how to help impacted students move on. Need to equalize power to avoid re-traumatizing anyone. To work, the student must be willing to participate in RJ process – it can't be forced on anyone. RJ used for more serious issues and/or student-staff conflicts.
- Peer mediation – used for more minor issues. Utilizes pre-conferences – individual meetings with each impacted student. Use of student peer mentors is disarming.
- Provides opportunity for students to feel heard and share their larger experiences that impact their behavior.

### **Understanding Barriers to Systemic Change and Potential Alternatives to Discipline Practice**

#### **Omar Reyes, Project DIVERT Coalition**

- Community input is essential to reforming schools in a way that works for everyone. Students need to help define what success means.
- DIVERT receives CDPHE grant funding.
- DPS has resolved to be a trauma-informed, equity-focused district. Resolution is useful in the sense that it directs priorities and resource investments. Putting policies in place to make these things happen. Yet even after years of doing so we are still seeing unacceptable racial disparities. Somewhere between the superintendent and school board and what happens at the school level, there is a disconnect. (disconnect in leadership goals to training to practices at school level). Policy and practices (implementation) should follow science, best practices and evidence-based solutions. This can help overcome educator/administrator bias and lack of consistency in practice from school to school and district to district.
- In times of crisis, priorities change and DPS rolled back its school discipline reform measures. (return of SROs). Motivations or root causes for student behavior don't change one way or another however. Political will to use evidence-based resources for improving student behavior and curbing violence by students needs to be in place for improvements to occur. Lack of political will is a huge barrier. If it doesn't exist, it doesn't matter how many resources you have access to.
- DPS uses BESS - Behavior & EMotional Screening System – attempts to reveal behavioral and emotional signifiers for students, can disaggregate by teacher, principal, school. This allows assessment of which teachers have problematic/racist interactions

with students. We need to consider educator intervention opportunities more. Focus should be on allowing professional growth.

- We need to figure out how to talk about racism effectively.

### **Kathryn Wiley, Howard University**

- Discipline disparities can be traced back to school integration where bias was very obvious.
- We now have enough information on how to reduce bias and reduce disparities. School leader is the fulcrum to implementing this information because they set the tone, make training decisions, and make discipline decisions in their schools.
- Lack of accountability for educators and administrators in terms of implementation is a problem.
- Link student level discipline data to their academic coursework data, to teacher data. We know that most behavior referrals come from new teachers in the first three years so this provides insight into an intervention point.
- Need to promote efforts at state level to diversify educator workforce because it is a protective factor for black and brown students and provides benefits for all students.
- State/CDE needs to think about how to responsibly use discipline data. What schools chose to report and lack of consistency in data reporting can skew what is really going on. Plus schools that are higher income and have more stable families have lower discipline issues – but it doesn't necessarily mean that educators or administrators are doing something wrong in districts with more challenging student populations.

### **Bill de la Cruz, De La Cruz Solutions**

- Programmatic changes are not sufficient – need systemic change to promote equity
- We don't adequately prepare educators and administrators to be trauma informed and to positively impact disparities. Need relational leadership. Need more professional development here.
- Lack of relationships and time for educator collaboration leads to a poorer school environment, which impacts students as well as adults. We need to shift professional development model to make it more relational. Right now vast majority of PD is

focused on assessments and common core. Leaves no time for other training or to build relationships. Without relationships none of this is possible.

- Consistency in behavioral expectations and discipline practices is key – much improvement needed here. Need collaboration that creates consistency but still leaves room for autonomy.
- Need to shift from school-centric schools to community-centric schools. Schools cannot operate in an insular fashion. Need to understand community in order to effectively meet needs of students.

#### **Public Comment:**

- **Joanna Signs** – delivered comments on behalf of an Adams 12 parent, **Rosa Mierea?** who felt she and her son were targeted by administration. Untrue allegations resulted in son's arrest. Has been traumatic for whole family. Son is more aggressive now than in past. Feels he will be unfairly targeted again in the future. Joanna worked in school's refocus room. Would be helpful to implement in other schools.
- Lack of accountability of educators is a problem.

#### **Possible Recommendations:**

1. Identify what behavior codes need to be aligned with state system – assistant principals throughout state can provide input here because they deal with behavior incidents most consistently.
2. Identify common discipline codes that everyone is using? Define classroom disruption vs an administrator-referred incident statewide? More instruction on what codes align with CDE categories to promote consistency from district to district?
3. Policy and practices (implementation) should follow science, best practices and evidence-based solutions. This can help overcome educator/administrator bias and lack of consistency in practice from school to school and district to district.
4. Link student level discipline data to their academic coursework data, to teacher data. We know that most behavior referrals come from new teachers in the first three years so this provides insight into an intervention point.
5. Require statewide use of BESS (as used in DPS)?

6. We don't adequately prepare educators and administrators to be trauma informed and to positively impact disparities. Need relational leadership. Need more professional development here.
7. Define what is suspendable vs expellable behavior
8. Statutory language is very old – needs review and updates. Includes very few definitions – may want to consider whether various terms in statute need definition.
9. Behavior agreements as an alternative to suspension? If so, they cannot conflict with IEPs and it must be something that the student can actually comply with – otherwise they will be alienated and act out again. Good agreements should involve parents but in practice, it is rare that they do. (Often parents don't have the ability to weigh in on this in an informed way or to support their student in complying – this is when other resources need to come into play.)
10. Recommend Task Force continues to meet for another year?