

DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION TASK FORCE

In December 2015, Dr. Jim McIntyre, Superintendent of the Knox County Schools, and the members of the DEO Task Force invited students, families, educators, and community members to participate in a community meeting to share opinions, triumphs, and challenges with regard to their observations and personal experiences with disparities in discipline and education as they might be connected with race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, language, gender, and/or disability. The recommendations presented below were drafted using the input, suggestions, and opinions of those who attended that meeting.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

All students. Behavioral disparities exist in the Knox County Schools in several forms—race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, language, gender, and/or disability.

WHY IT MATTERS?

There is a significant correlation between academic achievement and suspension. If children are not in school regularly, they miss out on fundamental skill building and the chance to develop good habits that will carry them into college and career.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We can better prepare our students for a bright future when we effectively utilize the talents, resources, and supports that exist within our schools and in the broader community. By engaging families and the community, and deliberately seeking to reduce disciplinary infractions and suspensions, we can continue to close achievement gaps.

OVERARCHING GOALS

- 1. Redesign discipline policies and practices to:**
 - Eliminate systemic disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, income, language, disability, zip code or other categories for potential discrimination;
 - Include and emphasize Restorative Practices/alternatives to suspension and expulsion;
 - Incorporate Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) in every classroom/school; and
 - Cultivate a positive environment of mutual responsibility and self-advocacy
- 2. Enhance capacity of educators to provide high quality instruction and respond to classroom behavioral challenges**
- 3. Utilize the criminal justice system only when necessary (for criminal activity)**
- 4. Ensure academic growth and achievement for all students, particularly for those furthest behind**

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Our students each have individual learning styles and diverse needs, some of which are influenced by factors outside of school. The vision of the DEO Task Force is to ensure a school environment where teachers can teach effectively, all students can learn and succeed, and our entire community can excel.

Training

Provide ongoing Cultural Competency Training for all KCS staff (certified and classified); offer ongoing professional development on effective Classroom Management Strategies and cultural competency supports; ongoing professional development to support high quality, differentiated core instruction; School Resource Officer (SRO) training to effectively deal with the social, emotional, and mental health issues of students; utilize monthly arrest/discipline reports to identify areas of need for ongoing training

Programs

Implement Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) in all KCS schools; expand community, behavioral, and mental health supports through the Community Schools initiative and other community partnerships; implement "Handle with Care" program (school notification by law enforcement of traumatic incidents to provide appropriate student supports); develop and implement a Student Advisory Council to engage students in developing solutions (solicit student input, peer mediation/jury/student council); develop and implement student mentoring programs in middle and high schools

Procedures

Review/propose revisions to Discipline Policies & Procedures that reflect suspension alternatives and Restorative Practices, implemented at all schools; eliminate "conduct prejudicial to good order" as a reason for suspension; track and report discipline/academic data for schools individually; establish a Stakeholder Bill of Rights inclusive of students, parents, teachers, and administrators; reduce juvenile arrests at school; recognize that "disorderly conduct" arrests should be made only as a last resort, and based on consistent criteria; consistently track and review KCSO/KPD on-campus arrest figures; conduct bi-monthly SRO/principal meetings; provide culturally-responsive instruction; provide appropriate academic supports/learning opportunities based on individual student needs; match students with caring adults; enhance family/community engagement and parent/student advocacy by promoting mutual responsibility/support; make school/district information available to non-English speaking families

Personnel

Enhance minority recruiting efforts; develop community promotion activities to attract/retain minority educators; establish minority professional mentoring and networking activities; increase the number of male teachers, particularly in elementary schools; ensure that struggling students have access to highly effective teachers; increase the number of school counselors, social workers, behavior liaisons, and other support personnel in schools

HOW WILL WE COMMUNICATE?

Develop a plan that allows regular reporting of progress; provides regular and ongoing opportunities for engaging community dialogue; engages the community in various aspects of the work; and ensures access to school/district information for non-English speakers.



HOW DO WE STAY ACCOUNTABLE?

The DEO Task Force will transition into a Steering and Oversight Committee to ensure effective implementation, communicate progress, refine efforts, and engage others. A clear and strategic implementation plan with detailed timelines, specific expected outcomes, and milestone reports will be developed, and an Ombudsman role will be created to help KCS families navigate school and community organizations/systems, serve as a liaison in the implementation of the Task Force Recommendations, report directly to the Superintendent, and make quarterly presentations to the Board of Education.



**If you have additional ideas to share, please contact us at educationtaskforce@knoxschools.org
Your voice is important in this conversation and we want to hear what you have to say.**