****

**Disparities in Educational Outcomes Task Force**

**August 25, 2015**

**Notes Summary**

**Welcome**

* Review of reason for task force.
* Need to understand the problem before we can solve the problem (how disproportionate suspension numbers can impact the academic progress).

**Review of Packet**

* Proposed DEO Task Force Work Plan (dates of future meetings and discussion topic for each meeting).
* DEO Task Force: Action Plan -- An action plan will be developed concurrently throughout the year to address the Task Force recommendations for each Focus Area.
* Progress Update (Knox County Schools’ academics and discipline).

**Review of Academic Progress / Closing Achievement Gaps**

* Academics: Performance trends are moving in a positive direction.
	+ KCS students showed strong gains in achievement as well as value added growth.
	+ Change in % Proficient/Advanced – improved in 22 of 28 grade/subject areas.
	+ Fourth grade reading is still a challenge area but is still moving upward.
	+ No state assessment in Social Studies.
* Four major tests for accountability under two major categories:
	+ **Achievement** – **goal met**.
		- KCS met all eleven of its state academic targets or AMO’s (Annual Measurable Objectives).
* Subject aggregate improvement – **goal met**. KCS experienced academic improvement in 9 of the 11 grade/subject categories. That is great progress overall.
	+ **Gap Closure** – **goal met**. (The gap closure category is pertinent to the work of this task force.)
		- Much to be proud of in terms of progress in closing achievement gaps
		- Nine of sixteen categories met state goal for reducing achievement gap, and closed gaps in 11 of 16 sub-group / subject combinations.
		- Even though some gaps are still significant, the district is making strides and progress.
	+ Sub-group Improvement Test – **goal met**. Academic improvement seen in nine our of nine sub-groups. (More than half of the categories have to meet the goal. Some subgroups do not have enough students to constitute a subgroup.)
* Knox County Schools earned the designation of **EXEMPLARY**! The system is the first large district in the state to achieve exemplary status.
	+ Result of concentrated focus work in classrooms every day.
	+ Six Reward schools – based on performance and/or progress.
	+ Four Priority schools (Green, Lonsdale, Sarah Moore Greene, Vine Middle). These schools stay on the state list for three years. All four posted significant growth (Level 4 or 5) making them ineligible for takeover by the Achievement School District. Lonsdale earned Priority School Improving status.
	+ Nine Focus schools. These schools are also on the state list for three years. Hardin Valley Elementary exited from the state list. South-Doyle High and Fountain City Elementary are improving their gap closure.
* The school system appears to be moving in the right direction with regard to achievement and gap closure, but there is much more work to be done.
* Reading
	+ Area for focus and improvement, both for Knox County Schools and state-wide.
	+ High priority for KCS.
	+ Many resources target reading, including early literacy
	+ Student performance on TCAP may reflect long reading passages. Seventy minutes for the reading assessment is a long time.
	+ Should the state split reading assessment? Struggling readers have a hard time with long tests.
	+ KCS did see Level 5 TVAAS growth (highest level attainable) in literacy
* Priorities for the 2015-16 school year
	+ Higher standards, higher expectations.
	+ Focus on high quality instruction.
	+ Professional development for teachers.
	+ Focused efforts and targeted resources to high needs schools.
	+ Great leadership, great faculties, great teachers.
	+ Addressing outside factors that impact schools/students.

**Discipline**

* Presented figures on suspensions by level, school, race, gender, disability, etc.

(PLEASE SEE ATTACHMENTS)

* High School – increase in incidence of out of school suspension (OSS).
* Middle School – Slight increase in OSS.
* High School – Decreasing number of long term suspensions.
* Infractions data -- Each child is only counted one time.
* Zero tolerance – State law dictates 180 days suspension.
* Elementary – Suspensions are minimal because of PAC (Personal Accountability Class).
* Some members of subgroups show greater rates of suspensions.
* Some of the numbers regarding suspensions are shocking and unacceptable.
* Is there a correlation between discipline and absenteeism?
* Mandated school attendance vs. suspension.
	+ All long-term students are offered an alternative educational placement, and almost all parents take advantage of alternative education for their child.
	+ Students could not be going to alternative schools as parents can select to not send students to alternative schools. Exception is judicial orders.
	+ Are there state legislative solutions to be explored?
	+ Transportation can be a major problem.
	+ Any special education students must be provided transportation if sent to an alternative placement.
* In each secondary school there is a school-wide support team.
* Title I money is used to hire behavior support person liaisons at:
	+ Fulton High
	+ South-Doyle High
	+ Vine Middle
	+ Bearden Middle
* Need for purposeful training with school staff.
* Students with disabilities – everyone suspended is assigned an educational option.
* Subgroups:
	+ Must have thirty (30) members to constitute a subgroup.
	+ Biggest common denominator is poverty.
	+ As many as one-third of African-American students living in poverty are suspended. Must be addressed.
	+ ELL students (English Language Learners)
		- Language barrier. UT is a source of interpreters.
		- Some ELL students have never been in school.
		- Very different backgrounds and experiences
		- Some refugees are sponsored by religious organizations.
		- Other factors contributing to discipline issues: religion, emotional disabilities, language, culture.
* There are community resources for dealing with mental health but transportation can be an issue for some students.
* ASPEN system can generate reports. The teacher can input disciplinary referral to the administrator. This system will be piloted at two schools (one middle and one high school) and we can see how effectively this will work.
* In Wilson County Schools the suspensions have been greatly reduced. Their alternative schools operate on a system where the number of days suspended is defined by the student and he/she has to earn his/her way back to the zone school. KCS alternative schools personnel and supervisors will visit Wilson County’s program.
* School Wide Positive Behavioral Supports.
* Behavior Liaisons are assigned district-wide to 8-12 schools. These behavior liaisons will work with identified students, do multi-setting observations, and will help the school team to develop an individual plan for each student. Several schools have elected to use their Title I funds to have a school-wide behavior liaison to oversee school-wide positive behavior support, work side by side with teachers, may teach classroom management expectations, and will work with individual students on social skills, anger management, or whatever that school might need.
* Important role of the whole community and how we partner with each other.
* Arrests in schools – Is there a racial gap among those students arrested in the schools? Why are the students arrested?
* Is it a double consequence when students are both suspended and arrested? Are there more arrests since there are more police now assigned in the schools? Any arrest does not change what the school would do regarding suspension.
* Insubordination offenses – may be subjective by the authority and can be seen differently according to culture.
* Teachers –
	+ Are some teachers struggling with behavior?
	+ Might some teachers be inadvertently provoking and/or escalating behavior, or just don’t have the skills to manage certain behaviors?
	+ How are teachers dealing with changing populations?

**Community Forum**

* Topic would be “What are we doing?” and potential solutions to the challenges that have been identified. What would the community forum look like? Where? Town hall concept or small groups?
	+ There must be community and teacher contribution/buy-in to solve problems.
	+ The community needs to have multiple input opportunities.
	+ May have one large group and then small discussion groups.
	+ Suggestion: a session for ELL families.
	+ Forum should have a base line of information and then small group work.
	+ Too much structure may indicate “a done deal.” It is a tough balance.
	+ Community forum planners must think about stakeholders and must get ownership from “those in the trenches.”
	+ Parents, teachers, principals, and students should be represented in each group at community forum.
	+ Target date for community forum is September 24, but date can be changed.
* Opportunity for Save Our Sons Task Force to intersect with the DEO. The Save Our Sons Task Force also wants students to be empowered in the schools.
	+ Student feedback from the SOS Sons Summit indicates participating students want an opportunity to communicate regarding teachers who bully or otherwise discriminate and should have input into the evaluation of teachers.
	+ Consensus we should continue to ensure that diversity of teacher workforce is a priority, and in particular more teachers who are men of color.
	+ Structured interaction with teachers, students, and families should be scheduled.

**Other Concerns**

* Cultural competency / diversity training and professional development probably should be mandated for all educators and not just offered as optional.
* Teachers must have buy-in about how to address cultural diversity in the classroom.
* Problems arising from cultural competency, authority, and insubordination lead to intimation and insecurity.

**Affinity Groups/Committee Work**

* Four focus areas:
	+ Practices
	+ Programs
	+ Training
	+ Personnel
* How to address each focus area, both from community perspective and from school perspective.
* Task Force Members need to identify an affinity group to work on developing action plan steps.