



Disparities in Educational Outcomes Task Force

Urban League Conference Room

May 28, 2015

4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Notes Summary

Student Panel Q&A

- Four Knox County Schools students (3 high school students and 1 middle school student) were asked to think about how their school manages student discipline and share what they liked most and least:
 - Some of the suspension days are okay, but some people don't want to hear your story and they think they already know most of it.
 - At my school it was good that teachers actually talk to you about what is going on, but did not that like that officers were there arresting students.
 - At my school they listen to your story, but they don't really do anything about it, not really caring what you say.
- Students were asked, "What would help you not make more bad decisions and what would have made it a better experience?":
 - Work sent home
 - Communication about what they are doing and where you stand like with work.
 - They could have sent work when I was suspended for 180 days and they never sent any work.
 - If a kid did something bad not just a teacher decides the punishment, but other people who don't know you should help decide discipline
 - At the beginning of the school year they go through orientation really quick and don't break it down. They just do the orientation because they have to do it.
 - Sometimes when you get sent to principal's office they just go along with what teacher says
 - As soon as you do something they don't like they send you to the office

- In ISS, how can they make a child sit in a chair for 8 hours and not expect them to get their energy out and be comfortable? They need time to stretch out, take a break.
- In ISS they just make you sit in there, asked them to check my work, and they are always on a computer.
- Use PC for bell ringer, get to watch videos instead of hearing the teacher talk, studying by using games, take notes on it.
- Students were asked to share their experiences with black students as opposed to white students at school:
 - Other students think you get more attention because you play football. Have been told the only reason they want you here is because you are black and you can play football.
 - I did not really care, but sometimes it pops up in your head. Random students, sitting behind you saying things, try to brush it off because it is nothing but words, but sometimes gets to you.
 - A teacher told the principal I was harassing another student, but they would not allow the other student to join discussion. They claimed the other student would be intimidated and change their story. I learned to not listen to teacher, because it does not matter what I say.
 - Over the top I play like I am listening and going to do what he says, but really I am just doing what I need to do to stay in school.
 - To me the teachers sometimes are in a bad mood have or if they a hard day you better watch out, but I think they are supposed to be professional. Sometimes it should not be just us students who need to be good, but the teachers should have correct emotions.
- Students were asked to rate their teachers on a scale of 1 to 10 if they felt they could trust them to do the right thing on a daily basis:
 - At both of my schools, I would rate 10.
 - Some were 10 and some would be like, “Oh well.”
 - My freshman year, my teacher got my mother’s number and stayed on me to help me.
- Students were asked, “When it comes to offenses that would get students suspended or arrested have you seen white students get more or less or the same discipline?”:
 - At my school you get the same. If you get in a fight or come to school with tobacco or weed, it is equal from what I have seen
 - I just went to school because that is what I had to do
 - Give them a chance, if you did sports well they work with you.
 - To make it better they should actually listen to us or it won’t work at all, it feels like it is unfair.
- Students explained their disciplinary experience:
 - Before I got in fight, I went to head principal for help because he knew my attitude and was understanding, but he was out sick. I went to female principal, left notes with guidance counselor, tried again, no response. The officer was trying to break us up and I hit him and got

put in juvenile. My mom was never contacted and I was out of school for 2 months with no school work.

- I was pushed and pushed back. The principal was there and waited until the end. I got 4 days OSS. They did not send any work. I had to ask for work when I got back and they told me to do work in ISS.
- I just did not think before I did anything.
- Students were asked, “Do you think those discipline infractions have interfered with your ability to succeed and graduate?”:
 - You get labeled and they will be watching me.
 - If I walk through hallways they will be all up on me, whatever I do. The principals, the officer asking me where is your note and not asking other students.
 - Even when I didn’t really do it, they don’t want to listen to me because of my past.
 - We learn at church the past is the past, and you have a second chance and they should be like that in school.
- Students were asked, “When someone gets in trouble do you think there should be a mentor or coach before they get suspended?”:
 - Yes, if the guidance counselor or principal had sat us down and talk to me then I probably would still be at my zoned school and not even here.
 - Yes, my coaches helped me stop to think before I act.
 - Students were asked, “Do you have someone you feel you can go to?”
 - My math teacher is straight and has to have evidence to back it up. He never sends kids out of class. He doesn’t just say, “I am fed up with you.” He has things under the control.
 - There was a problem with substitute who would not help us and just put work on board. The sub would not let us get up to even sharpen pencil. Then she got mad and was even cursing, the math teacher came back and talked to whole class to find out what happened and he listened to us.
 - If you are fed up with children, why are you a teacher?
 - Always told to stay in your lane, but how can I stay in my lane if you are wrecking my car? If you want to suspend them for something they didn’t do and you want them to learn then you should listen.
- Students were asked, “How do we do a better job to make sure students feel like they can tell their side of the story and the adult is listening?”:
 - Open forum so students can talk about all the things that happen and the consequences.
- Students were asked if they would trust other students to help decide:
 - I would trust a committee of teachers because they have more experience.
 - Not teachers who are biased against you
- Students were asked how we get rid of the bias:
 - They need to learn better ways to handle behavior. If you have a run in with the teacher they are against you and you are against them.

- There needs to be an “It is a new day today” mindset. If teacher holds a grudge and is still mad at you, then you don’t change.
- Students were asked, “Do you feel like you have at least one or two teachers that really care about you and you can trust?”:
 - At my current school yes, all of them.
 - I have some teachers who are just trying to be too cool with students and some really care about doing their job.
 - I had a freshman principal telling my junior principal what to do with me and I don t like that.
 - I did have some teachers that really stayed with me, multiple teachers that I can go to and tell what is going on.
 - My science teacher is really against me and two faced. When the parent is there she is nice but not nice when it is just kids. I tell her what is going on and she does not listen.
 - Outside of school, I would pick my case worker and therapist because they know me. We sit down every Friday at 11am.
 - I would pick my mom or my mentor, they know me.
- Students were asked, “What gets you up and motivates you?”:
 - Making money and showing everybody that doubted me that I can make it in high school.
 - Proving people wrong when people say I cannot do something.
 - My future and I want to be with everybody else at school.
 - There are some teachers who are afraid of students. They feel threatened and find a way to get those students suspended to get things to settle down.
 - It is different with female teachers versus male teachers.
 - One parent of student on panel shared that as a mom, she would like to see a path implemented before suspension. The school called and I was able to go at the time which probably helped keep my child from suspension. However, some parents cannot get off work and come so a 24 hour window might help so parents can come be a part of discussion.
 - Teachers need to hear what is on a kids mind and know about them as a person; find out what motivates them and excites them.
- Task force member asked if we teach conflict resolution for the students:
 - We get one class at beginning of year with 60 black and white slides. They go through it very fast.
 - Melissa Massie said we do have some pilot schools we are training school-wide positive behavioral supports with staff and students. At Sarah Moore Greene the SMG suspension rate and academic outcomes are much lower.
- Task force expressed appreciation for students taking time to join discussion and willingness to share thoughts and experiences
 - These students are an inspiration, especially because they expressed dismay over not getting work when you were suspended from school.

Task Force Members Reflection and Discussion

- Staff needs guidance for problem resolution, but also need guidance with people skills.
- Don't bring what happened at home to work, (i.e. bad day, fight with husband).
- Take time to know what is going on with kid and get to core of problem; don't just jump to suspension.
- Listen and find out why it got to that point, have courage to call the adult in and say this is what needs to no longer happen; if staff cannot have relationship with students they need to go.
- Kids need to know there is an open door you can walk through and someone will listen.
- Comes down to people who are willing to form relationships with students and allowing students to be heard.
- It did not feel like the students got due process; like they are already guilty.
- If there was one person caring in the building, it made a difference.
- Students seemed to feel that the teachers are always right and the students will be over-ruled.
- It sounded as if the students felt bullied when adults didn't listen.
- The suspension timeline is often too short for parent to come in to the school.
- Communication! Listen, communicate expectations, and follow up.
 - Continuous communication about policies and consequences.
- Concerned with some educators labeling kids and telling other teachers to watch out for that kid.
- Students need a second chance. They need a clean slate and not have labels carried with them.
- Don't make disciplinary decisions when you are angry.
- Students felt followed and talked about, labeled.
- Self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Consider the flip side with a habitual class skipper, as a teacher you feel obligated to ask about why the student is not in class because you care and they need to be in class.
- Address with cultural competency.
- The system needs to be more responsible up front.
- Providing young people with options.
- Let's not even get to that point.
 - When it already escalated, not very helpful to say, "Oh, why did this happen?"
- Developmentally appropriate instruction.
 - Can kids sit for 8 hours?
- Most people escalate problems and don't stop to think, "Maybe I need to do something different."
- Need to help them understand where kids are coming from.
- Rapidly changing demographics

- Need for teacher training
- Students need to have open forum
- Communication of policies and expectations in a student friendly format
- Rather than one person, have a committee of teachers or a combination of teachers and students to be like a jury
- Leaders need to identify those who can and cannot; those who cannot need to not be in schools
 - How many would it be who need to go?
 - The officers in the schools should also be able to build relationships.
 - If you put supports in place and still don't have the will, they need to go
 - Not something you deal with at end of year, have courage to have those conversations.
 - Not a decision Principals make lightly and we should do everything we can to help them improve.
- Programs & Structures in place to allow students to be heard and fair treatment to happen, consistently
- Before we had officers in the school, we had much less students with disorderly conduct.
 - Some officers have the mindset that you are going to know my authority.
 - Some officers don't know how to deal with kids in school versus the street.
- This cannot come out of the blue.
 - Need to engage principals because they are going to be the ones to carry this out.
 - Identifying teachers who are skilled in classroom management and engaging kids; we need to go to them and find out what they do
 - Engage parents and community get their ideas
- Would like to review summary from the school push out meeting
- Summary of potential action steps to explore, categorized into four areas:

Training	Programs	Personnel	Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Competency-teachers and principals • Officer training-school setting • Developmentally appropriate instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mediation • School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports/ Interventions (SWPBS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring practices • Caring adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options for discipline/alternatives to suspension • Caring adult for every student • Communication • Dialogue to establish trust & solve problems