



Disparities in Educational Outcomes Task Force January 26, 2016

Notes Summary

Welcome and reminders

- The notes for each meeting are posted on the Knox County Schools' website.
- Introduction of new Task Force members: Coral Getino (parent), Tomma Battle (parent), Maurice Chunn (student)
- Guest for this meeting: Sydney Gabrielson, BOE student representative
- Reminder of future DEO Task Force meeting dates

Comments about the Community Forum, December 1, 2015:

- Will use the information/comments/ideas from the Community Forum to develop an action plan.
- The majority of the DEO Task Force attended the Community Forum.
- All comments from small group sessions, comment cards, and emails were transcribed exactly as written and posted to the Knox County Schools' website.
- Task Force members' observations:
 - Important to have resources for Spanish speakers.
 - Possibly an advocate for Spanish speakers in each school.
 - Spanish community cares about education, what is happening in the schools and about students, but language is a barrier.
 - Need more translators.
 - Suggestion to develop a Newcomers' Academy to orient and support newcomer students.
 - Robocalls from schools and Central Office are all in English. This can be both a communication problem and a safety problem, ex. info about snow days and early dismissal.
- Community Forum responses revealed the complex and multi-faceted issues presented by the participants. We must be very intentional to address the issues identified and expressed.

General comments from DEO Task Force members:

- Principals shared their thoughts and perspectives at a principals' meeting in October 2015. Their comments are available on KCS website.
- Principals are “on board” with the work of the DEO Task Force. They will be the ones who have to carry out the recommendations. Need to include them in the process.
- A principal must have hard rules to ensure peace and harmony in the school.
- Administrators want change. Schools are different in size and composition that will impact how changes are made.
- Community schools are having a positive impact in the communities that they serve.
- Is discipline data consistently reported from all elementary schools?
- Punitive discipline measures should be a last resort.
- Perception that there is a lack of implementation of the recommendations in the 2007 task force report.
- Some see a need for greater transparency in how we fund schools. There must be equity in funding in the schools. (Note: KCS provides greater levels of general fund resources to schools with higher levels of poverty)
- Cultural sensitivity vs. cultural competency
- Some believe teachers' voices/concerns have not been heard. Will set up forums for teachers to be scheduled after school hours.
- Principals' comments:
 - October Principals' Meeting – only head principals attended.
 - Head principal usually not involved in discipline.
 - Assistant principal's perspective will be different than head principal.
 - Teachers' perspectives will be different from principal and assistant principal.
 - Lots of layers to bring about change.
- Reality vs. perception. Must use data to help make decisions. Get input from principals, teachers, and students. Should not make decisions based on perception.
- The community expects to see results from this Task Force and from the community forum. “We are on the clock.”
- One voice must be the students. Students live the experience every day.
- Some students are very articulate and are concerned about how they are perceived by adults in the school. They do want to succeed. The curriculum may not be aligned with where the students are “coming from.”
- We are “on the clock.” We will have meetings in the future and another community forum where we will make recommendations to the community. The recommendations will be made to the Board of Education before Dr. McIntyre leaves in July.

- DEO Task Force members should make an effort to attend the future task force meetings. If the planned dates are not agreeable, please email one of the co-chairs of this Task Force.

Themes/Work Plan:

- Four themes: Practices, Programs, Training, Personnel
- For each theme the Task Force will map out actions, timelines, person(s) responsible, resources, and measure(s) of success. This work will be done during future Task Force meetings.
- Perception must be changed. Need to change biases and cultural misperceptions.
- Cultural Competency:
 - Need to define what kind of culture you want to create and then programs will fall into place.
 - Need to define culture and include all groups
- Tolerance training:
 - If one knows about biases, then he/she can proceed in another direction.
 - Bias affects expectations.
 - Do not prejudge.
- Need to build relationships.
- Must be accepting of all.
- Dangerous to treat all students the same.
- Need to acknowledge differences.
- Cultural Competency training:
 - Other large school systems have cultural competency training.
 - Who would be trained:
 - Everyone who works with students and children needs to be trained, to some degree, depending on their jobs and how they interact with students.
 - There needs to be a youth component.
 - Cultural competency affects how you work with your school team.
 - Parents need to be trained.
 - Relationships must be built on respect.
 - Being aware of how I am relating to a student at the moment.
 - Preconceived notions
 - Training needs to be deep, not superficial.
 - Adults need to know students' backgrounds and recognize and value students.
 - Cultural competency programs in other cities:
 - Metro Nashville Schools require employees to have competency training.
 - New York City
 - Los Angeles, CA. The superintendent there has had positive results.

- DEO Task Force action plans:
 - What is our recommendation and to what level of detail?
 - Detailed enough to be measureable and accountable.
 - Can track and lead to an outcome.
 - Milestones and accountability should be in place.
 - All employees trained by a date?
 - Fewer suspensions as a result of training?
 - Cultural competency reflected on evaluation?
 - Should talk to systems that have conducted competency training.
 - Training needs to vary according to each individual's role in the school. There is some commonality among all roles but teachers need to have the tools to vary the curriculum to honor the various cultures represented in the classroom.
 - Teachers need to make the curriculum relevant to the students and teach courses in which the students are interested. The courses must be multi-cultural and inclusive.
 - Some colleges and universities have a cultural competency component embedded in their teacher preparation programs. Maybe we can piggyback off those programs and use some of the ideas from the local colleges and universities. Are there teachers in our system now who have had the training in college? If so, how are they doing in the classroom? Is there disproportion in discipline in their classrooms?
 - Must have community buy-in with cultural competency training. The facts must be concrete to support the idea of this training. We must achieve some success and then build on that success.
 - Response from community at forum was "at least you are trying to do something."
 - Must be careful and intentional about the words that we use.
 - Need short term wins to get some momentum.
 - Training will come with some costs, especially for a school system with approximately 8,000 employees.
 - The task force can put together a package of recommendations and steps to accomplish the recommendations. There also has to be a measure of success for all recommendations that we put in place.
 - Some perceive that with the 2007 recommendations there was no community involvement, but that was not the case.
 - How can we keep this task force involved in the future?
 - Who does training for cultural competency? Is it done at the school level or is it initiated from KCS Human Resources department?
 - There should be a community review committee which meets to see if recommendations are being carried out.

- What do we want to see changed: arrests, suspensions, expulsions, etc.?
- Please send your individual thoughts and perspectives by email. What are the recommendations we want to put in place?
- Funding for programs will have to go before the Board of Education and then to County Commission.
- The KCS budget is aligned to the school system's priorities.
- The school board makes policy.
- The 2007 recommendations should be reviewed, as several of the most important recommendations were implemented, but others were not.
- For the next meeting please come prepared with specific action steps for each of the focus areas.

Proposed School Board resolution (presented by Sydney Gabrielson and Amber Rountree):

- This proposed resolution is about the disparities in the enforcement of discipline and the recommendation that cultural competency training be for teachers, administration, and school security officers “to empower them to work effectively with a multiracial, multicultural student body.”
- Ms. Rountree notes the resolution is not intended to circumvent the work of the DEO Task Force.
- Adam Hasan (2014-2015 student representative on the Board of Education) started the draft of this resolution at the end of his term.
- The resolution is to ask the Board to formally support students and will also support the work of this task force.
- Ms. Gabeielson notes the resolution is an attempt to make a positive change and be supportive of the student voice.
- The resolution is about a variety of topics, some with fiscal impact.
- Task Force comments:
 - Competes with work of the Task Force.
 - Worry some would think that multi-cultural competency training would solve discipline problems.
 - Do not want to give the impression that the problem of discipline is narrow.
 - Board needs to acknowledge the disparities in the enforcement of discipline policies in the school.
 - Latino population seems to be excluded in the resolution while the Latino population is growing the most.
 - Adults should be accountable.
 - Makes the Board responsible.
 - Assumes that the staff is inadequately trained.

- Is this resolution for African-American students or all students of color?
- This resolution lets students know that they do have a voice at the BOE table.
- Resolution needs to be more encompassing.
- Resolution could be helpful if it expressed support for the work and forthcoming recommendations of the Task Force.
- Thank you to BOE student representative for bringing this resolution to the Task Force for suggestions.

Adjournment