



Task Force on Student Discipline Regulations
May 9, 2019

Maryland State Department of Education
8th Floor Conference Room, Room 6
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Meeting Minutes

The Task Force on Student Discipline Regulations (Task Force) met on Thursday, May 9th at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Task Force Members in attendance included: Dr. Vermelle Greene (Task Force Chair), Ms. Cheryl Bost, Ms. Gail Bussell, Mr. Jon Carrier, Mr. Lou D'Ambrosio, Mr. Dwayne Jones, Dr. Andrea Kane, Dr. Sylvia Lawson, Mr. C. Tolbert Rowe, Mr. Michael Sedgwick (on behalf of Ms. Latisha Carey)

MSDE staff in attendance included: Ms. Kimberly Buckheit, Ms. Mary Gable, Mr. Shane J. McCormick, Mr. Walter Sallee, and Dr. Miya Simpson

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

Opening Remarks and Updates

Dr. Vermelle Greene, Task Force Chair, welcomed the Task Force members and members of the public. Dr. Greene acknowledged and welcomed parents and students in attendance to participate in the panel discussion. Dr. Greene provided insight to the parents and students about the purpose and mission of the Task Force and the previous panels that the members had received information from. Dr. Greene stated that the Task Force has been adamant about hearing from parents and students about the impact of discipline regulations.

Dr. Greene reminded members of the public that the Task Force and subcommittee meetings are open meetings but there would be no time for public comment. Dr. Greene encouraged members of the public to submit comments and/or questions to Dr. Miya Simpson, Executive Director to the State Board of Education, and to register to make public comment during the monthly meetings of the State Board.

Dr. Greene acknowledged Mr. Jon Carrier as the new chair of the subcommittee on best practices, and Ms. Gail Bussell as chair of the subcommittee on regulations and guidelines. Dr. Greene announced that Ms. Mary Gable, Assistant State Superintendent, would attend the regulations and guidelines subcommittee meeting, and Dr. Sylvia Lawson, Deputy State Superintendent for School Effectiveness, would attend the best practices subcommittee meeting. Dr. Greene explained the purpose and mission of the subcommittees to the parent and student panelists. Dr. Greene invited the parents and students to attend and participate in the subcommittee meetings at the conclusion of the full Task Force meeting.

Dr. Greene stated that the Task Force would adjourn following the conclusion of the subcommittee meetings and encouraged the subcommittee chairs to conclude their meetings by noon. Dr. Greene encouraged the subcommittees to refer to the guiding questions provided during the first Task Force meeting in January 2019. Dr. Greene reminded members of the Task Force and shared with the parents and students in attendance that the Task Force will present its recommendations at the State Board of Education meeting on June 25, 2019. Dr. Greene announced that the May 23, 2019, Task Force meeting will focus on preparing the draft of its recommendations.

Panel Discussion: Parents and Students

Dr. Greene introduced the parent and student panelists to the Task Force members. Dr. Greene announced to the Task Force members that questions would be facilitated by Ms. Bussell and Mr. Carrier, but that additional questions may be asked if time allowed. One of the panelists asked about the list of questions for parents and students and whether students could answer questions directed towards parents and vice versa. Dr. Greene encouraged parents and students to answer any questions they feel appropriate. Ms. Bost asked if the Task Force members could provide introductions to the panelists; the Task Force members introduced themselves to the parents and students.

Ms. Bussell asked the panelists what they considered to be the top three discipline issues within their school or school district. The panelists expressed there is an issue with students refusing to do work, which stems from a lack of respect for authority within the school and encourages other students to also not complete work. The panelists expressed that the issues are not just in the actions of students but how schools and school systems process discipline issues. Several panelists also expressed they receive no communication from their children's school about school-wide discipline issues. The panelists expressed that class-cutting, fighting, bullying, and cell phone usage were common discipline issues.

Mr. Carrier asked the panelists how administrators make classes safer and more orderly. The panelists stated that some teachers are focused more on redirecting student's attention but not getting to the root cause of why students are being disruptive. Some of the parent panelists expressed that administrative red-tape and restrictions within the student code of conduct limit what administrators can do, and that in other instances administrators are disinterested in addressing issues.

Ms. Bussell asked the panelists how disruptions in the classroom have affected students emotionally and physically. The panelists expressed that disruptions are stressful and are impactful and that it partly stems from the inconsistency of discipline from case to case. Panelists described physical and emotional issues such as anxiety, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, nightmares, and other manifestations. Mr. Carrier asked one of the students to define discipline and what discipline looks like in their school based on a statement they made addressing one of the previous questions. The student stated that administrators will make statements trying to dissuade disruptive behavior, but that things must escalate to a high degree in order for the school resource officer to be involved.

Mr. Carrier asked the panelists if parents should be held more accountable for their child's behavior and if so, how it should be done. The panelists unanimously agreed that parents need to be held accountable. Panelists emphatically agreed that discipline starts at home and that teachers should not have to bear the responsibility of disciplining students in the absence of parents. Mr. Carrier asked a follow-up question about how the local school systems and the State can help address the problem. The panelists expressed community engagement and development involving wrap-around services are crucial to addressing the problem. The panelists expressed that addressing the issue requires collaboration among multiple state and local agencies, including the Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Mental Health, and others. The panelists expressed the lack of counseling and mental health staff available within the local school systems and in their counties eliminates resources that could provide assistance to both students and parents.

Ms. Bussell asked the student panelists how much instruction time during a given class period their instructors lose to address classroom disruptions. The student panelists expressed that their teachers do not have total control over the classroom. The duration of time lost ranged from fifteen minutes to forty-five minutes total within a given class period. The student panelists expressed that the amount of class time lost depends on the classroom sizes, and that larger classes tend to result in more time being spent addressing disruptions.

Dr. Greene asked for the panelists to indicate by a show of hands how they would rate the preparedness of their teachers to address discipline issues. The majority of panelists indicated that teachers were either unprepared or very unprepared to address discipline issues.

Mr. Carrier asked what alternative programs, such as PBIS or restorative circles, are being used in their schools and to rate their effectiveness. Some panelists expressed that such practices are being used in their schools but that there are limitations to their effectiveness.

Ms. Bussell asked the parent panelists if they are a PTSA member and if they discuss discipline issues during their meetings. Panelists strongly expressed that getting parents to attend monthly meetings is extremely difficult. One of the panelists expressed that some parents have been made to feel uncomfortable or excluded at PTSA meetings and thereby choose not to attend.

Mr. Carrier asked the student panelists if they know of students that have received out-of-school suspensions and whether it helped in changing their behavior. The student panelists expressed that out-of-school suspension was not effective in changing behavior because being sent home allows for students to do leisurely activities such as playing video games and not receiving an education. Some of the student panelists expressed they knew other students who posted about their activities during out-of-school suspension on social media such as Facebook.

The parents expressed that out-of-school suspensions can be effective for some students if the parents reinforce discipline and expectations at home while the student is out of school.

The parents expressed that there is a difference between punishment and correcting the behavior, and that suspension has to be more than a punishment in order to be effective.

Dr. Greene described a legislative bill that did not pass the Maryland General Assembly that would have required a parent to spend a day with their child within an in-school suspension room and to provide their feedback on the legislation. The panelists were split on their approval of such legislation, with some expressing that such legislation reflected a macro-level solution that may not fit on a micro-level, while others expressing from personal experiences that having a parent attend a suspension with them proved effective.

Mr. Carrier asked the parent panelists if they were able to access student discipline policies. The panelists stated that policies are made public but that some policies are vague and that many parents are not going to understand what the policies and code of conduct entail.

Dr. Greene thanked the parents and students for attending and participating in the panel discussion. Dr. Greene reiterated to the panelists that they were welcome to attend and participate in the subcommittee meetings.

The meeting recessed at 10:45 a.m. for members to transition to subgroup meetings. The subcommittees convened at 10:55 a.m. and adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

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Subcommittee 1: MSDE Regulations and Guidelines

Minutes

Members Present: *Gail Bussell (chairperson); Lou D'Ambrosio; C. Tolbert Rowe; Michael Sedgwick (Representing Latisha Corey); Cheryl Bost;*

MSDE Staff: *Mary Gable (MSDE Support); Walter Sallee (MSDE Support and note taker); Dr. Miya T. Simpson*

Committee Discussion

- A committee member suggested a review of the Maryland Guidelines for a State Code of Discipline to identify areas that may need additional clarification. For example, it may not be clear to some local school systems that the Guidelines are based on the 2014 changes to student discipline regulations and are not meant to be prescriptive. Local school systems have discretion and flexibility in implementing local codes of discipline. Language in the Guidelines should reflect this. The subcommittee will review the regulations and guidelines to determine where they are sufficient and what may need to be clarified.
- The subcommittee reached consensus that the focus should be on mental health, funding, and a thorough review of the student discipline regulations. With regard to the regulations, the subcommittee should review to see where “unfunded mandates” may exist and other areas that may need clarification.
- One committee member suggested a four-pronged approach to reviewing the current student discipline regulations to make sure that they are sufficient. Upon review, determine: 1) where clarity may be needed; 2) alignment with the regulations; 3) whether implementation is consistent with the regulations and guidance; and 4) what professional development needs may exist.
- There was some discussion of the implementation of evidence-based programs with fidelity. Fidelity measures vary across programs and factors such as teacher turnover may impact training and fidelity.
- MSDE staff will send copies of the student discipline regulations to subcommittee members for review and comment based on the group discussion.

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Subcommittee 2: Best Practices

Minutes

Members Present: Jon Carrier (chairperson), Dr. Sylvia Lawson, Dwayne Jones

MSDE Staff: Kimberly Buckheit (MSDE support and note taker)

Committee Discussion:

- Mr. Carrier reviewed the initial charge of the subcommittee with everyone present and recalled that the group had previously determined it important to create a differentiated menu of practices and programs (toolkit) from which schools can choose as not every school has the same needs.
- The committee agreed that restorative approaches as defined in House Bill 725 – *Student Discipline – Restorative Approaches* should be included on the menu of possible best practices. It was suggested that the School to Prison Pipeline report could be referenced in the recommendations of the Task Force. The group also agreed that the school system must commit to the fidelity of implementation for selected programs to address student discipline. Adequate funding should be allocated to ensure the program can be implemented successfully.
- The committee discussed the need for mental health related personnel to be part of recommended practices. School counselors need to be available to do more counseling instead of other tasks, including scheduling. The group recommended a holistic approach to mental health through engagement with many partners related to student discipline similar to community schools. Health suites were discussed and it was recognized that not every community and school has one. It was acknowledged by a student guest that the only time they are told a school psychologist is available is when something traumatic occurs.
- A committee member shared the need for administrative procedures for how to deal with more extreme student discipline. This will likely be within implementation of the behavior threat assessment model.
- The committee agreed that implementation of character education programs is important. Members shared that character education could be embedded within the curriculum and that implementation of character education programs may be different for each grade span.

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) should be part of the menu of best practices. The committee agreed that PBIS and other selected programs should be implemented at the discretion of local school systems and schools based on their unique needs. Selected programs should be implemented with fidelity and with adequate resources to ensure success.
- The committee reviewed teacher education recommendations for the university level and continuing education credits. It was clarified that the committee cannot make recommendations to higher education but can recommend professional development to systems. Understanding the development of children at all levels was important and cultural competency should also be required.
- A guest member shared her belief that substance abuse prevention should be recommended as a best practice. Local school systems should be proactive with regard to substance abuse prevention through engagement with community partners to provide education programs in middle and high schools. Adequate resources to fund substance abuse programs should be allocated.
- Suggestions for new programs were solicited and the following thoughts were shared by guest members:
 - Training on implicit bias should be provided for staff and students. A Yale University research study on implicit bias was recommended as a possible resource.
 - Local school systems should review policies regarding the use of technology and ensure that there is a proper balance between technology and hands-on learning.
 - Local school systems should explore ways to positively and appropriately integrate social media programs such as “Common Sense” into the school day.