

Gb #8-180 To consider establishing a committee in conjunction with the Administration to reduce school suspensions.

Administrators were asked to volunteer to be on a “Reducing Suspensions Committee”. The superintendent, managers, and building representatives from elementary, middle and high schools form the committee. On August 31, 2018, volunteers were thanked for agreeing to participate and notified that the first meeting would be September 13, 2018. Please see the attached letter. Meetings have been held monthly through the year and are planned to continue.

Additionally, in the monthly principals’ meeting, the district attendance and discipline data is now presented and analyzed by the group for trends and patterns. This is followed by principals receiving their building data to analyze and discuss in small groups, sharing successful action steps and identifying challenges.

Current action steps related to this initiative include:

- Discipline:
 1. The DESE offered training: Rethinking Discipline Professional Development with consulting group Engaging Schools is being attended by district level administrators. These sessions include “Recalibrating Rules, Violations, Consequences and Restorative/Supportive Interventions”. The information will be brought to leaders and staff over time with the district receiving some professional development at no cost from Engaging Schools.
 2. The ongoing work of behavior clinicians supporting students and teachers in classrooms continues in year three. This has led to the development of a district stabilization team with the goal of supporting students while providing strategies and support for staff working with students in crisis. The initiative continues to develop as informed by the work in district’s work on assessment and stabilization and through the HEARS initiative funded by the Health Foundation.

- Implicit Bias Training:

School staff will receive trainings in multiple ways in the coming year. Principals will have a related DESE training on LGBTQ at the May meeting. A coordinated plan is currently under development utilizing the resources brought forward in other trainings to connect and bridge the multiple, inter-related concerns as detailed under the headings in this response.

- Cultural Proficiency Training:
 1. District administrators attended a series of DESE trainings over the summer of 2018 through this spring. The Director of English Learners and her staff continue

to develop and offer professional development in this area including: “Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain”, an online book study, which was offered spring 2019. This work will be expanded to school based trainings this summer with school teams receiving training.

2. Through grant FC 231 *Leading Educational Access (LEAP) Developing Cultural Proficiency (DCP) Incentive* the district is being supported by a state designated vendor Assabet Valley Collaborative in ongoing efforts to meet the needs of all students by systemically strengthening the knowledge and skills of educators in building inclusive environments and delivering culturally responsive instruction. This grant is aligned with the Leading Educational Access Project (LEAP), which was created to support the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) commitment to improving outcomes for all students, especially our most vulnerable students — inclusive of low-income students, ELL students, students of color, and students with disabilities. As a component of LEAP the Developing Cultural Proficiency Institute (DCP) was initiated August 2018 and will continue through the 2018-2019 school year. This grant provides funding to a cohort of 16 Massachusetts district teams currently participating in DCP. DESE has been working collaboratively with these teams to assess why there are gaps in outcomes for student subgroups and how to address this issue through inclusive environments and culturally responsive instruction. WPS has chosen to focus on developing educator skills and techniques for interrupting bias and supporting student achievement and educational equity; increasing engagement of educators in self-exploration and reflection on personal attitudes, beliefs and assumptions regarding cultural proficiency, equity and anti-bias education and improving culturally responsive teaching through lesson design to make content and instruction more responsive and inclusive.
 3. The Managers of Special Education, the Office of Curriculum and Professional Learning, two curriculum liaisons, and a team from North High have attended monthly DESE meetings through the Inclusive Practice Academy. This is a three year academy. The initiative looks at how to include Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies into the classroom. Topics to date have included: Culturally Responsive Teaching; Student Engagement; Learning within the Context of Culture; Student Centered Instruction and How to Maintain Rigor with UDL Practices. North High has begun to incorporate some strands of UDL into their classrooms. Liaisons are incorporating the information and examples in practice into workshops. All instructional coaches will attend professional development with Katie Novick, a UDL expert, on September 17.
- Trauma and Resilience training:
 1. Several administrators are attending the state-wide regional Trauma and Resilience training through the University of Massachusetts Medical School where topics such as toxic stress, trauma reactions, the impact of racial inequalities and racism as a form of trauma, and complex trauma will be discussed along with resources and tools to

increase resiliency. This information will be reviewed and disseminated through staff development

2. The district has contracted with Dr. Stuart Ablon from Massachusetts General Hospital's "Think:Kids" (<http://www.thinkkids.org/>). The website explains: "Think:Kids teaches a revolutionary, evidence-based approach called Collaborative Problem Solving® (CPS) for helping children with behavioral challenges. Through training, support and clinical services, we promote the understanding that challenging kids lack the skill, not the will, to behave well – specifically skills related to problem solving, flexibility and frustration tolerance. Unlike traditional models of discipline, the CPS approach avoids the use of power, control and motivational procedures and instead focuses on building helping relationships and teaching at-risk kids the skills they need to succeed."
Dr. Ablon will present to school teams on August 19, 2019. After an introduction and workshop, school teams will develop a plan of action using their school data. The initiative will follow through in monthly principal meetings where data is analyzed.
3. Worcester Educational Collaborative (WEC) will continue to offer staff training on this topic through a grant from the Danielson Foundation. This is now available to schools outside of the HEARS initiative and provides staff with professional learning points toward their re-certification.



Worcester Public Schools

Worcester, Massachusetts



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August 31, 2018

TO: Reducing Suspensions Committee Members
FROM: Robert Pezzella
RE: Meeting

On behalf of Superintendent Binienda, I want to thank you for volunteering to be on the *Reducing Suspensions Committee*.

Your attendance and input as a Committee Member on this very important school issue is essential to keeping children in school in lieu of suspension. However, we also know that it's equally vital to keeping schools safe and finding alternatives to suspension requires brainstorming and willingness from K - 12 school officials to look at best practices from other sources.

Our first meeting is Thursday, September 13, 2018 at North High School Library, 8:30 AM - 10 AM.

If you have any questions or concerns prior to the meeting, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert F. Pezzella".

Robert F. Pezzella
Director of School Safety

Cc: Maureen Binienda
Sue O'Neil