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Report on Visits to Iowa City Schools

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Background For the Technical Assistance Process

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) State Training and Technical Assistance Center (STTAC) provide direct training and technical assistance (TTA) to states and local jurisdictions nationally. This TTA is intended to further the mission of OJJDP and to support the work within states and jurisdictions to improve compliance with the four core requirements of **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act**. Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) is one core requirement of the JJDP Act, requiring states to develop and implement plans to reduce the proportion of minority youth detained or confined in secure detention facilities, secure correctional facilities, jails, and lockups if they exceeded the percentage of minority youth in the general population (OJJDP, 2012) Research on DMC suggest that it is a product of challenges that students experience across multiple social domains (families, school, and community) and across multiple systems (health, including behavioral health; child welfare, juvenile justice, housing, and economic development). Schools play a key role here. And just as interventions in other domains and systems can reduce the pipeline to prison so can interventions in schools. Because leadership in the Iowa City School District and in the Iowa Bureau of Justice Assistance were concerned with discipline disparities in Iowa School Schools, OJJDP's State Technical Assistance Center was asked to support the current consultation. Preparation for the consultation had four components: (1) preliminary meetings with Dave Kuker, Joan Vandenberg, Ron Mir, and Joyce Burrell; (2) reviewing disciplinary and suspension data as well as a survey of attitudes regarding school discipline; (3) meetings with the district cabinet and leadership of all the high schools district leadership on June 16-17, 2013; (4) site visits to the districts high schools and alternative schools on October 3, 2013; (5) meetings with education staff and community representatives who had attended the Georgetown University Program on DMC and are working on a group project to reduce DMC. I did not meet with parents or students or review data from these stakeholders; listening to school representatives during workshops on June 17 and October 4, 2013.

Major Observations

During the visits and workshops I was observed many strengths at the schools as also identified opportunities to strengthen the district's work. For clarity's purposes these strength and opportunities will be presented as bullets:

Strengths

There are strengths at a state, district, community, and school level. They include:

- *A Desire to Address the Issues.* My meetings with state Education and Justice Officials, the Superintendent and his cabinets, community representatives, school leadership and staff members indicate that they are aware of the problem, want to address it, and understand that change needs to be data driven and systematic.
 - In the fall of 2013 the district implemented goals to reduce suspensions for “defiance and disrespect” by 50% and office referrals for “tardy” by 75%. These goals are significant policy statements that reflect the seriousness with which district is approaching this issue. The district is to be commended for its noteworthy effort to affect change.
- *Good data and support for data analysis.* The data were good and analyses provided were well done. The data and analyses provided by Ron Mir were helpful in identifying problems (e.g., disparities) and provide a baseline for measuring change. The use of relative ratio’s and Pareto analyses were useful.
- *Community-School Collaboration.* There is both a desire to make change among key stakeholders including the juvenile judge as well as an understanding that this should be done in a collaborative manner that must balance urgency with the need to move forward deliberately.
- *Promising Examples at Individual Schools.* I observed strengths at each school. Examples include: Saturday school with an enhanced academic component and staffing by a school counselor (Northwest Junior High); the student advisory center that addresses both academic and behavioral issues (West High; Tate High School, City High School, South East); the use of art therapeutic approaches, dual enrollment, and support for transitions (TREC); what may be the effective use of PBIS (Tate, Northwest, South East and North Central); individualized attention, emotional support, and student study team (Tate High); after school mentoring, student success center, and family and student advocate (Southeast); focus on student connection, home visits, hip-hop dance club, and the effective use of setting building goals to reduce disciplinary referrals, and welcome center (City High).
- *A readiness to face the issues.* Everyone whom I met with was candid, non-defensive, desirous of new tools. I detected a motivation to change.

Opportunities for Improvement

There are opportunities for improvement, many of which were identified by district and school staff and confirmed by my observations.

- *Address Discipline Disparities.* The quantitative data examined suggest that there are high levels of discipline disparities that should be addressed and that the relative rate of the disparity increases with level response from disciplinary referral to suspension to expulsion.
- *Address the extent to which judgmental violations and tardys lead to office referrals.* The Pareto analysis suggests that these are over 80 per cent of the referrals. These data are about diminished opportunities for learning and the inefficient use administrate resources as individuals deal with unnecessary referrals.. *Clarify*

definitions and policies. School administrators talked about the “grey areas” and how this can contribute to excessive suspension. Clear definitions of offenses such as defiance and disrespect can reduce disparities as they can reduce the role played by implicit bias. However, definitions alone may not be sufficient to sufficiently reduce disparities. It may be necessary to develop protocols and policies that aim at reducing referrals and prevent school removal for violations that can be better addressed without removing students from learning and school.

- *Focus on prevention.* School staff often find themselves downstream where it is harder (although not impossible) to prevent disparities and excessive school removal. Intensive interventions also are resource intensive. By focusing on prevention, Iowa City and its schools can prevent issues upstream and help minimize exclusionary discipline.
- *Employ a tiered approach to prevention to use resources efficiently.* Best practice usually has three tiers that combine universal promotion of protective assets, prevention of problem behaviors and graduated levels of intervention. The tiers include:
 - a supportive foundation that promotes self-discipline, connection, and academic engagement while reducing problematic behaviors. Promotion includes social emotional learning, efforts to enhance student feelings of connectedness, cultural competence training and creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students and families, and strong conditions for learning where students feel physically and emotionally safe, supported, and challenged. Prevention includes positive behavioral interventions and supports.
 - early intervention for students who are at risk as evidenced by their behavior, performance or have or are experiencing something that places them at risk
 - intensive interventions that may involve the appropriate use of mental health services.

Use police for safety, not discipline. Police should only be used for safety. The misuse of police and security resources, may prevent them from focusing on safety while at the same time contributing to criminogenic effects as young people get caught in the juvenile justice system. School staff, who may not be aware of these effects and on the burden it creates on the judiciary, may benefit from learning about these effects. Denver, Colorado has developed a policy in this area, which may serve as a model. It was discussed in a webinar that can be reviewed at <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/ssd-webinar-series-event-guiding-principle-1-climate-and-prevention>

- *Collect and analyze data to assess conditions of learning and discipline patterns and use this data for planning and monitoring.* Conditions of learning include emotional and physical safety, the experience of connectedness and support, and academic engagement, relevance, and support. It is important to understand how different groups of students experience conditions for learning and school disciplinary practices. This can be done efficiently by using surveys such as those developed for the Iowa S3 grant along with disciplinary data or others such as the freely available

Conditions for Learning Survey. The surveys should be anonymous, and all the data collected such be disaggregated. These data can then be used to identify strengths and needs, and to develop interventions to address the needs.

- *Address girl and girl aggression.* Staff are particularly concerned about the increase in girl on girl aggression, which will need to be addressed in a manner that is both gender sensitive and culturally competent. This should be done in a manner that addresses the impact of trauma, which may contribute to this aggression. In addition, attention should be paid to disciplinary disparities as national research by the Discipline Disparities Research Collaborative, suggests that black girls are three times more likely to be suspended.

Resources

There are many resources that Iowa City can leverage as it addresses these recommendations.

Many are at AIR. They include:

- OJJDP's State Technical Assistance Center;
- The National Center on Supportive School Environments (NCSSE) (<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/>);
- The National Clearing House on Supportive School Discipline (<http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/>);
- The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Students Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk (<http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/>);
- The AIR Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at AIR (<http://www.gtlcenter.org/>);
- The College and Career Readiness and Success Center (CCRSC) (<http://www.ccrscenter.org/>);
- The Midwest Regional Education Laboratory (<http://www.relmidwest.org/>), and
- The National Resource Center on Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention.

In addition, the Discipline Disparities Research Collaborative released on March 13 a series of briefs and papers, which will soon be available online. They include:

- A focused review of the evidence does not support the commonly held belief that racial disparities in school discipline are due to more serious or severe behavior on the part of black students.
- A review is of efforts to explore “implicit bias,” the subtle and often unconscious beliefs and stereotypes concerning race and difference that may contribute to disparities in school discipline.
- A review of common myths regarding the over-representation of students of color in school discipline and the facts that call these common beliefs into question.

Important findings include the fact that there is no evidence to support the premise that “bad kids” should be removed from the classroom in order to ensure that “good kids” can learn. Links to these briefs will be provided at The National Clearing House on Supportive School Discipline <http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org> .

Finally, the Federal Website Findyouthinfo.gov has many

Specific Resources include:

- Tiered System of Response – Information about tiered systems of responses can be found at the CCRSC,,NCSSE, the TA Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and the website of the former National Center on Progress Monitoring (<http://www.rti4success.org/>) They are also described in http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/actguide/action_guide.pdf
- Connectedness/Inclusiveness—ASCD ([ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)) provides good resources on student connectedness. Two research based programs universal that build connectedness are The Responsive Classroom and Caring School Communities. A good example of a tier two program is Check and Connect.. A useful article is <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr05/vol62/num07/A-Case-for-School-Connectedness.aspx>
- Positive Behavioral Interventions.- Excellent information on PBIS can be found at the TA Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (<http://www.pbs.org/>). The specific use of this for safe schools was discussed a webinar that is available at <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/events/webinar/ssd-webinar-series-event-guiding-principle-1-climate-and-prevention>
- Social Emotional Learning.- Excellent information on SEL can be found on the website of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (casel.org). This site has a resource to identify effective SEL programs. A useful article in combining SEL, PBIS, and academic engagement can be found at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.269.2667&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

- Teacher Social and Emotional Competency- The AIR Center on Great Teachers and Leaders is about to release a tool that teachers can use to assess their own social and emotional competence. This will be found at <http://www.gtlcenter.org/>
- Cultural Competency-There is a section on cultural competence on the website of The National Clearing House on Supportive School Discipline A useful article is <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept05/vol63/num01/Creating-Culturally-Responsive-Schools.aspx> Another one is http://cecp.air.org/cultural/Q_integrated.htm . A useful guide on combining cultural competency and family driven approaches is http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/ClosingTheGap_FamilyDrivenCare.pdf . There is a section on cultural competency at <http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/>

Strength-Based Models- Examples of asset based approaches can be found at <http://findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development> as well as at the [Search Institute](http://www.search-institute.org) <http://www.search-institute.org>

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- Home Visits- A useful article on home visiting can be found at <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol5/521-ferlazzo.aspx>
- Restorative Models- There is a section on restorative practice on the website of The National Clearing House on Supportive School Discipline <http://supportiveschooldiscipline.org/>
- Threat Assessments- A useful document on threat assessment is <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>
- Adverse Childhood Experience Training. Information on addressing adverse childhood experiences can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/ace/> Approaches to addressing it in education can be found at http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_innovation/2013/08/fortified_environments_can_turnaround_the_adverse_impacts_of_poverty.html and <http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/TeachTraumatizedKids.pdf>
- Teachers as Mentors/Coaches- The Center for Great Teachers and Leaders has a useful tool on how teachers can support the whole child. <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf>
- Alliances and Supports – A good link to organizations that are addressing discipline disparities is the Advancement Project <http://www.advancementproject.org/>

Ripple Effects- The website for Ripple Effects is <http://rippleeffects.com/>

Recommendations

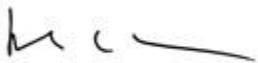
Excessive exclusionary discipline and discipline disparities are issues that Iowa City schools should address. Fortunately Iowa City has resources to build upon which include the commitment of senior leadership, interest on the part of school leadership, examples of promising approaches in its schools, and support in the collection and analysis of data. Iowa City also has state support and can leverage a Georgetown University project.

Iowa City schools can address these problems in a manner that improves attendance and academic performance. The best approach should include a data-driven tiered approach that includes preventing problem behavior as well as developing alternative ways for dealing with these behaviors when they occur. This approach should include

- Using Social and Emotional Learning to build the social and emotional skills of students and adults and align with efforts at overall school improvement.(e.g., realizing the goals of the common core)
- Using targeted interventions for students who are at greater levels of needs (e.g., mentoring, more intensive social and emotional learning that addresses how to deal with anger and perceived threats; mental health counseling and treatment.)
- Revising the code of conduct in a manner that is consistent with the Federal Guidance Issued in January (eliminating or dramatically prescribing the removal of students from school for non-violent offenses; using restorative practices)
- Providing all staff with ongoing professional development and support so that they can support student social and emotional learning, handle the stress of teaching, address implicit bias, and teach in a manner that is emotionally supportive and academically engaging for all students.

This work will not be easy. It can, however, be done and external support can be useful in helping the district do this hard work. Some can come from the Center's listed above. With authorization, AIR and this consultant will also be available to help.

Sincerely submitted,



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The Health and Social Development Program