



Task Force on Student Discipline Regulations  
April 25, 2019

Maryland State Department of Education  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor – Conference Room 6  
200 W. Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Meeting Minutes

The Task Force on Student Discipline Regulations (Task Force) met on Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup> at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Task Force Members in attendance included: Dr. Vermelle Greene (Task Force Chair), Ms. Cheryl Bost, Ms. Carmen Brown, Ms. Gail Bussell, Mr. Lou D’Ambrosio, Mr. Dwayne Jones, Dr. Andrea Kane, Dr. Sylvia Lawson, Mr. Joshua Omolola, Mr. C. Tolbert Rowe, Mr. Elliott Schoen, and Mr. Michael Sedgwick (on behalf of Ms. Latisha Carey).

MSDE Staff in Attendance: 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 invited speakers to the meeting: Dr. Melinda Johnson, Ms. Portia Parker, Dr. Treesa Elam-Respass, and Ms. Rochelle Savoy. Dr. Greene reminded members of the public that the meeting was an open meeting but that there would be no public comment. Dr. Greene encouraged members of the public to sign-up to provide public comment during the monthly meetings of the State Board of Education.

Dr. Greene notified the Task Force members that Pastor Gavin Brown and Mr. Jon Carrier were unable to attend the meeting, and that Ms. Rachel Spangler had left her position at the MSDE. Ms. Carmen Brown, Branch Chief of the Interagency and Collaboration Branch in the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, will replace Ms. Spangler. Dr. Greene has asked Mr. Carrier to serve as chair of the Subcommittee on Best Practices (formerly held by Ms. Spangle), and he has accepted.

**Restorative Practices and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

Ms. Parker, Dr. Elam-Respass, and Ms. Savoy facilitated a presentation on PBIS in Charles County Public Schools. The facilitators discussed the goals and objectives of the presentation, and engaged Task Force members in an introductory exercise.

The facilitators provided a technical definition of PBIS as a framework for improving and teaching positive, socially acceptable behavior and maximizing academic achievement. They explained that PBIS is rooted in restorative practices, and aims to develop community and manage conflict. The facilitators discussed the slogan emphasized at St. Charles High School, and the activities and incentives offered to students to facilitate positive behavior and interactions amongst students and staff. Activities included: “Spartan Bucks” for students to spend in the cafeteria, monthly drawings for prizes, restorative circles, and quarterly character education lessons. Ms. Parker shared with the members that her school, Benjamin Stoddert Middle School, which serves as a feeder school for St. Charles High School, utilizes several of the same restorative practices and activities with their students, specifically restorative circles.

Ms. Savoy and Dr. Elam-Respass shared the goals that staff at St. Charles High School hoped to accomplish through restorative practices, which included:

- Decreasing the overall amount of office driven referrals due to:
  - Class cutting;
  - Disruptions;
  - Disrespect
- Increasing recognition of positive behaviors.

Ms. Parker opened the floor to discussion and questions from Task Force members. Ms. Bost asked the facilitators what needs they see for training on PBIS and restorative practices. Ms. Savoy stated that principals need to see the value in training, and that if principals are on-board then staff will be more likely to attend. Dr. Lawson asked the presenters how they supplement the incentives provided to students. Ms. Savoy stated they have performed fundraisers at local establishments, but that in the absence of fundraising there are extended free-time activities, such as extended gym hours.

Dr. Lawson asked the facilitators what steps are taken to secure teacher buy-in. Dr. Elam-Respass stated that staff are recognized for attending restorative practice sessions, and that staff enjoy small gestures of recognition and appreciation. Dr. Elam-Respass shared that the principal at St. Charles High School established a community of practice to allow for staff collaboration. Ms. Savoy emphasized that implementing PBIS and restorative practices is an on-going process that requires time and perspective to implement effectively.

Dr. Lawson asked the facilitators what steps are taken for students that are not responsive to restorative practices and require additional services. Ms. Parker discussed some of the activities and practices utilized at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School. Ms. Savoy shared that St. Charles High School provides a monthly community mentorship program where outside groups meet with students and provide guidance and services to students.

Ms. Bussell asked the facilitators if they view restorative practices as a temporary solution, or fad, and how it can be a long-term solution. Ms. Parker stated that during training an emphasis is placed on helping the teachers see that they are the restorative practice, and how the techniques and information is implemented falls on them.

Dr. Greene thanked Ms. Parker, Dr. Elam-Respass, and Ms. Savoy for their time and presentation of information.

### **Legislative Update Regarding HB 725 – Public Schools – Student Discipline – Restorative Approaches**

Dr. Greene welcomed Ms. Tiffany Clark, MSDE Director of Governmental Relations, to provide a brief update to the Task Force on House Bill (HB) 725-*Public Schools-Student Discipline-Restorative Approaches*, which was introduced and recently passed during the 2019 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session. Ms. Clark shared that HB 725 was cross-filed as Senate Bill (SB) 766, but that SB 766 did not pass the General Assembly. Ms. Clark shared the purpose of HB 725, which includes requiring the State Board of Education to provide technical assistance and training to county boards of education regarding the use of restorative practices and the circumstances under which these practices may be utilized. Ms. Bost shared that HB 725 came out of the school-to-prison pipeline issue, and shared her concern that the legislation will cause local systems to throw out previous training and practices to accommodate the implementation of restorative practices. Dr. Greene thanked Ms. Clark for discussing HB 725 with the task force members.

### **Character Education: Teaching Respect and Responsibility**

Dr. Greene welcomed and introduced Dr. Melinda Johnson, Director of Teacher and Scholar Effectiveness at the Marion P. Thomas Charter School in Newark, NJ. Dr. Johnson provided an overview of the topics that would be discussed and shared her background and teaching experience.

Dr. Johnson discussed the importance of character education and shared the six pillars of character that comprise the framework: Trustworthiness; Respect; Responsibility; Fairness; Caring; Citizenship. Dr. Johnson shared that each pillar is color coded for students with an explanation of the reason for each color, and a description of each pillar. Dr. Johnson shared that teacher led planning sessions were held to develop grade level appropriate activities and lesson plans, which were followed by discourse with students to facilitate buy-in. Dr. Johnson shared some of the outcomes reached through dialogue with students, which included establishment of a character pledge, development of a family handbook, and a monthly awards program.

Dr. Johnson discussed some of the stakeholders in the process of implementing character education, including board members, parent and teacher community organizations, staff, and students. Dr. Johnson shared that meeting with multiple stakeholders helped establish buy-in to character education.

Dr. Johnson discussed some of the challenges and limitations of character education, and stated that sustainability and tracking the impact are the greatest challenges faced. Additional challenges include on-boarding with new scholars, teachers and staff, and families, establishing a common mindset, and challenges created by social media. Dr.

Johnson shared some of the benefits of character education, including high satisfactory ratings on climate survey, maintained suspension rate, and developing a common language amongst teachers, scholars, and parents through parent-teacher conferences.

Dr. Greene thanked Dr. Johnson and opened the floor to questions from the Task Force members. Mr. Omolola asked how students with mental health and emotional needs are addressed through character education. Dr. Johnson stated that making parents aware of the resources available for students is paramount to addressing mental and emotional needs. Mr. Jones asked how the pillars of character are balanced within the social and political climate of today, where many aspects of the pillars of character do not exist. Dr. Johnson stated that having critical conversations about events taking place in the world are important and cannot be ignored.

The meeting was recessed for break at 10:36 a.m. The meeting was recalled to order at 10:46 a.m.

### **Learning Styles and Behavior (Video)**

Dr. Greene introduced and provided background on the video presentation facilitated by Dr. Michael Gurian, Author and Co-Founder of the Gurian Institute. Dr. Greene shared that Dr. Gurian could not attend in-person or via conference call, but was willing to prepare a presentation based on the discussion questions submitted by Task Force members. Dr. Greene encouraged the members to write down questions during the video presentation that could be sent to Dr. Gurian and discussed during future Task Force meetings.

Dr. Gurian shared that through his research several factors have been identified as contributing to the learning and development differences between males and females, including nature, nurture, and culture. Dr. Gurian stated that all children need encouragement, but that males tend to be more skeptical of praise without action, whereas females tend to be more accepting of verbal praise. Dr. Gurian discussed the benefits and limitations of single-gender academies compared to co-educational academies. Dr. Gurian stated that he has no argument for or against one type of academy versus another, but that from his research there can be benefits to single-gender academies and that certain issues can be limited or removed in a single-gender environment if implemented properly.

Dr. Gurian discussed the discrepancies in the gender achievement gap. Dr. Gurian shared that research shows that males are underperforming across the board, and that the system itself is mismatched to the learning functions of the male brain. Dr. Gurian stated that the one intervention that he would recommend to address gender and racial disparities would be to get staff trained in male and female brain differences. Dr. Gurian invited Task Force members to reach out to him with further questions.

Dr. Greene encouraged the members to contact Dr. Miya Simpson if they would like a link to the video presentation, and welcomed comments and feedback from the members. Mr. Omolola expressed an interest in the task force working with Dr. Gurian further, and shared some of his experiences as a student in classes where students are grouped by

gender and the positive outcomes of gender-based class arrangements. Dr. Johnson stated they have collaborated with Dr. Gurien and expressed that the methods utilized within her school provided some benefits.

Ms. Bost expressed that the differences in brain development in males and females needs to be incorporated more in teacher preparation and training/professional development opportunities because it is not presently emphasized as strongly as it should be. Dr. Kane concurred with Ms. Bost. Ms. Bussell stated that securing parent buy-in needs to remain a priority.

### **Discussion and Next Steps**

Dr. Greene reiterated to the members the purpose and charge of the task force. Dr. Greene shared the proposed meeting schedule and outline with the members, and summarized some of the speakers that have presented and other information shared to this point. Dr. Greene asked the members where the task force should go from this point, and who the members would still like to hear from.

Mr. Omolola expressed to the members the need to identify a program or policy that will be sustainable and applicable across the State. Ms. Bost stated there is a disconnect amongst local leaders and stakeholders about what is actually in the student discipline regulations, and that there are several unfunded mandates within the regulations, and provided some examples. Mr. D'Ambrosio stated that the State Board of Education needs to look at the regulations that mandate the amount of teaching time for restorative practices. Mr. Jones stated no model has been presented on alternative options, such as alternative schools, because resources are not always available at one school for students.

Dr. Greene expressed her thanks to the Task Force members for their feedback and comments. Dr. Greene announced the next task force meeting will be May 9, 2019, and encouraged the members to submit questions for the students and parents panel that will be held to Mr. Carrier or Ms. Bussell by May 3, 2019.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.