

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting Roundtable

September 11, 2012

Called for 6:00 PM in the School Committee Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge for the purpose of a roundtable to hear from school-based administrators on the topic of the discipline policy and a discussion on the Student Handbook.

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Mr. McGovern, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, Ms. Turkel, Mayor Davis

Also Present: Jeff Young, Superintendent; Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent; Damon Smith, Principal, CRLS; Joe Dolan, Principal, HSEP; Robert Tynes, Assistant Principal, CRLS; Manuel Fernandez, Principal, Cambridge Street Upper School; Mirko Chardin, Principal, Putnam Avenue Upper School; Ralph Watson, Principal, Rindge Avenue Upper School; Jamel Adkins-Sharif, Principal, Vassal Lane Upper School; Nicholas Leonardo, Principal, Baldwin School; Jennifer Ford, Principal, Peabody School; Darrell Williams, Principal, King Open School; James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer; Maryann MacDonald, Executive Director of SAA; Maureen MacFarlane, Legal Counsel; Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer; Dean Blase, Coordinator, Community-School Partnership; Chris Colbath-Hess, President, CEA John Silva, Director, Safety & Security

Mayor Davis in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

The Chair turned the meeting over to the Superintendent. The Superintendent referenced the Approval of the Review to the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook presented to the Committee on June 5, 2012.

Dr. Young said there appears to be a disconnect between the written policy language and the ways in which people may have perceived the implementation. This also is an opportunity for principals and vice-principals to discuss the array of services available to students. The hope is that the School Committee will develop policy language that supports the school leaders.

Dr. Young turned the meeting over to Dr. Turk. Dr. Turk made a brief opening statement and introduced the members of the task force: Nick Leonardo, Jennifer Ford, Ralph Watson, Manuel Fernandez, Damon Smith, Joe Dolan, Darrell Williams, and Bobby Tynes.

Dr. Young introduced John Silva, Safety and Security. At the request of the Mayor, the School Committee Members introduced themselves.

Dr. Turk asked Mr. Leonardo and Mr. Smith for their comments:

Mr. Leonardo:

- ✓ Supports are in place that make Cambridge an outstanding community
- ✓ Responsive classroom training provides schools a venue to form the kind of schools we want for kids
- ✓ There is social conferencing for kids struggling to create a positive classroom climate

- ✓ Support groups, counseling staff, behavior consultants help teachers and staff with disciplinary issues and problem solving
- ✓ Cambridge does a great job at problem solving with the use of reference forms to help kids needing more support
- ✓ We are proactive, rather than reactive
- ✓ Principals and Assistant Principals are not isolated in making decisions

Mr. Smith:

Principal Smith discussed some of the policies and practices at CRLS. There is a focus on procedures and consequences that is environmentally conducive to learning and student achievement. Mr. Smith addressed three areas of importance:

Procedures and consequences conducive to learning:

- ✓ Emphasize and prioritize direction of relationships
- ✓ Expulsions/suspensions
- ✓ Promote positive behavior

These are areas that are used to promote a safe environment for students. Mr. Smith gave a brief background of the measures taken to support student behavior: detention, safety, guidance, Safety Net Program, strong emphasis on relationship development, partnership with community, e-mail between student and teachers, HSEP, expulsion, suspension, drug/alcohol counseling, dating violence and intervention programs, unsung heroes program, positive relationship development, and mentoring programs.

The Members presented some of their questions and concerns:

- I would like to hear from the Administration the highlights of the changes of the discipline policy
- Did the task force review the changes to the policy
- Need clarity on “presence” of students in the company of a student committing an offense
- Kids are going to make mistakes
- There is a lot of the same black and brown kids getting suspended often; this is a fact
- Glad to learn there have been no recent 1-year suspensions
- Is RTI fully implemented across the board
- Need commentary around how discipline differs from school to school

Attorney MacFarlane was heard re the new law recently signed into effect by Governor Patrick that addresses discipline.

- We should look at benchmarks from other districts for comparison
- I would like to see a complete moratorium on out-of-school suspensions
- We need to send the message that we will never give up on a child
- How do we judge success of programs in/out of district
- I don't hear too many complaints about discipline
- Suspensions don't work
- How do we deal with non-conforming students
- This must result in a reduction of the Achievement Gap
- Discipline must be consistent
- Is there a plan to deliver positive as well as negative news to parents
- Parenting culture has changed
- Suspensions usually do not change the negative behavior
- Our district does better than other districts
- Define horseplay
- It's not about blame; it's about what can be done to inspire students to want to achieve
- How do we teach kids the skills they need to be successful

- What is the goal of our policies
- I would like a better understanding of pathway from K-12
- What are students' rights re searches
- What is the difference between possession and distribution of drugs
- Ensure that teachers understand value of student-teacher relationships
- Are there any study requirements for suspended students
- How far do we want to go, as a community, to encourage witnesses to come forward
- I have confidence that school leaders will make appropriate decisions, case by case
- Sometimes separation is necessary
- Drop the term expulsion
- Are we making comments to send the policy back to the Administration
- Are we ready to vote the policy, we need to move forward
- Is the policy being used fairly
- Not happy with some of the mandatory language
- How can we usefully discuss re-entry
- According to the Teen Health Survey, who is getting in trouble for drug/alcohol abuse
- Get suspensions down to the lowest number of days
- We need a policy that goes across the District in conjunction with school-based policies
- I would like to see no expulsions, no suspensions
- Can we get to a place where we can vote, with amendments
- I would like to see clear language re what we are doing before we get to suspension
- Is the policy as it is presented something that can be applied consistently
- Do you like the flexibility that is in it, or would you rather not have that flexibility
- Is it something what would lead to fairness
- This is a legal document; it should have a goal statement
- Is this the right tool
- Tell us if this helps or not

The Principals responded to some of the questions and concerns:

- This is a usable tool
- I like the flexibility
- There are times when suspension is inevitable (safety of students/staff)
- Suspensions impact learning, the community and the way kids are seen by others
- Most times there is a re-entry meeting
- Depending on the circumstances, suspensions may be in-house or at the program at the FMA
- Horseplay category is not necessary
- Some suspensions help a child grow
- Suspensions are the very last resort
- Children of color are disciplined disproportionately across the country
- We have done development design for the best foundation for staff and community
- We use diversity to access our learning
- We do not assume that any teacher is intentionally targeting any child
- We want children in school
- I'm not big on rules; I am big on guidelines
- There is a tremendous amount of time interpreting the policies
- Kids know when we are being real with them
- We need to look at "in the presence of..."

Further discussion will be at the next Regular Meeting.

The Chair thanked the participants.

Adjourned (8:40 PM)

Respectfully submitted
Patricia A. Berry
Executive Secretary to the School Committee