



Superintendent Staff Chats: Behavior and School Climate

Superintendent Haws held 7 Staff Chats around the District in December, one in each elementary cluster, one for middle schools and two at high schools. About 200 teachers and staff attended these after school open-ended sessions. Kristin Latus, Director of School Climate and Student Support, along with different members of her team, joined Dr. Haws at all sessions. Chief of Schools, Dr. Eric Gallien, and Katie Hoss, Director of Special Education, joined the sessions as their calendars permitted.

Topics were asked in an open-ended manner to seek input about school climate and student behavior from the teachers' perspectives. Questions on what was working or improving and what issues or problems remain to be addressed were discussed. The time and input of teachers and staff who came to offer their thoughts in this collaborative effort to continue to improve the school climate and diminish challenging behaviors that interfere with learning and a positive school environment, as well as staff morale, was greatly appreciated. The two sections below summarize the responses from staff.

Summary of What's Working or What's Improving:

1. Schools are implementing PBIS. Those schools that are implementing it with the highest fidelity to the framework's goals and strategies are seeing the most improvement in school climate and student behavior.
2. Behavior problems and climate issues are better overall compared to last year. What was viewed as 'school-wide' concerns is more typically described now as 'severe or extreme challenging behaviors' from individual students.
3. The cluster model for assigning specific support staff to a group of schools is working. Teachers know who to contact and generally have easier access to support staff such as special education supervisors and behavior support specialists. These individuals are school-based and spend most of their time in schools and in classrooms supporting teachers with classroom management and behavior concerns.
4. The Student Rights and Responsibilities Code Book is being used District-wide. Principals and school-based administrators are receiving one-on-one guidance and support to use the new procedures with discipline cases as they arise. Kristin Latus spends much of her time coaching principals and administrators with discipline cases to ensure quality processes, equitable and clear decisions, and due process for students.
5. Staff are pleased to know about the two school-based mental health pilot programs coming, but also are concerned that most schools need that level of support for students right now. There is concern about the pace of implementation.

Summary of Continuing Concerns from teachers:

1. De-escalation Strategies Training: All teachers and educational assistants, as well as hall monitors, need imminent training and support for de-escalation strategies when dealing with challenging students.

Response:

- The Office of School Climate is working with the Office of Professional Development to plan and schedule training for staff.
- Additional training sessions will be offered during the 2015-16 school year for staff to attend.
- Plans for similar training for substitute teachers are also being considered and will occur if fiscally possible.





2. In-depth De-escalation Training for Special Education Teachers: Because of their role with students who may have more frequent challenging behaviors, additional training is needed for special education staff.
Response: Plans are in process for de-escalation and trauma-informed care training for special education teachers.
3. Staff Training for Severe Behaviors Due to Stress and Mental Health Issues: Teachers and other staff need training to understand and address these types of behaviors and issues with students.
Response: An opportunity to attend Trauma-Informed Care Training for staff will be offered this spring semester and next fall, 2015. Teachers and staff will have multiple opportunities to attend after-school training for strategies in teaching students who have behaviors and mental health issues due to trauma at home or in life.
4. Training for Police and Hall Monitors: SRO's, hall monitors and administrators need more proactive strategies and training to be most effective.
Response: With likely approval, a grant currently being written will offer in-depth training for administrators, school resource officers and police as well as hall monitors working in the schools. Topics will include de-escalation strategies, trauma-informed care, juvenile brain development, understanding the juvenile justice system, and proactive strategies to intervene before issues become violent or destructive.
5. Student and Staff Input on the Student Rights and Responsibilities Code Book: In this first year of implementation with experiences in use of the new Code Book, input from administration and students is needed. During development, students and staff had extensive input on the Student Rights and Responsibilities Manual. That involvement has dropped off, especially among students.
Response:
 - The agenda for the March and April meetings of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council will be to ask student members to thoroughly review and offer feedback on the Student Rights Code Book.
 - Additional training and practice with case studies and understanding of the new Code Book will occur for all assistant principals and deans of students in the summer.
6. Special Education Continuum of Services: Current programming for students with challenging behaviors does not adequately address student needs. Staffing alignment is not always effective.
Response: The Office of Special Education is currently reviewing and assessing the continuum of services available for behavior-challenged students. Adjustments in program offerings and staffing is under consideration and effectiveness of those adjustments will be closely monitored to ensure continuous improvement.
7. Violence Free Zone (VFZ) Program at Middle Schools: This year, 3 middle schools (McKinley, Starbuck and Mitchell) have found VFZ to be highly effective in reducing significant behavior incidents among students. This program needs to be funded to expand to at least one more middle school.
Response: A priority is to add VFZ staff to ensure this program is expanded to Gilmore Middle School next fall and is sustained at the other three schools.
8. Restorative Justice Model for High Schools: This model for establishing student-led sessions for significant misbehaviors among peers is widely effective in other districts. It is important to implement the model at the three comprehensive high schools and all of the middle schools.
Response: The Safe and Healthy Schools Grant, as well as Safe and Supportive Schools Grant, along with School Climate staff will continue to support this model and will assist our schools in developing and implementing Restorative Justice.