

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the 2018 Interim

July 9, 2018

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 2nd meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education was held on Monday, July 9, 2018, at 12:00 p.m. CDT, at Trigg County High School. Representative John Carney, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Representative John Carney, Co-Chair; Senators Danny Carroll, Jimmy Higdon, Alice Forgy Kerr, Stephen Meredith, Reginald Thomas; Representatives Mark Hart, Phil Moffett, Kimberly Poore Moser, Melinda Gibbons Prunty, Jody Richards, Steve Riley, James Tipton, and Russell Webber.

Guests: Senator Stan Humphries; Christina Weeter, Director, Division of Student Success, Kentucky Department of Education.

LRC Staff: Jo Carole Ellis, Yvette Perry, and Maurya Allen.

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Trigg County High School

Travis Hamby, Superintendent, Trigg County Schools, welcomed members to the Trigg County High School. Additionally, Chairman Carney extended his thanks to the school staff for their assistance in this meeting as well as to Senator Humphries, Representative Imes, and Representative Thomas. Senator Humphries thanked the committee for coming to visit in his district and Senator Higdon introduced a special guest, his grandson, David.

Sources of Strength Program

Shannon Burcham, Principal, Trigg County High School; Laura Shelton, Youth Service Center Director, Trigg County High School; and Cathy Prothro, Suicide Prevention Enhancement Site Coordinator, Division of Behavioral Health, were all present to speak about the Sources of Strength Program being implemented at Trigg County High School. Additionally, Cade Bleidt, Adrionna Phillips, Garret Knight, and Hope Howard, student leaders in the program, were also present to give their insights into the positive effect the program is having on students.

Mr. Burcham began by explaining that there had been a student suicide a few years prior which precipitated a desire to enhance relationships with the students in an effort to

improve the negative atmosphere at the school. The staff looked at several programs and models before choosing the nationally recognized program Sources of Strength. They began with a group of 60 students, representing a tenth of the student population and drawn from diverse backgrounds, to serve as student leaders. In addition, several surveys were performed to get input from students, teachers, and other stakeholder populations. He said this was a proactive approach to reaching emotional and social well-being for all the students and that the program supports all levels of learning. There were additional adult partners both within the school and the community that provide ongoing support to the program. One of these is Ms. Prothro of the Division of Behavioral Health.

Ms. Prothro said that the program was started in Trigg County High School in March, and there are 45 other schools across the state participating in the Sources of Strength Program. In her opinion, however, the students at Trigg County have been some of the most passionate about the program, and she recommends them as a model to other schools looking to adopt Sources of Strength. It is a very adaptable program and allows for the school to customize it to fit their needs and abilities, as well as for the students to take ownership of the program. Funding support for implementation was provided through a youth suicide prevention grant which has been used to establish the program in schools across Kentucky. The cost for the program implementation is \$5,000 per school. To receive funding support from the Division of Behavioral Health, schools perform an online assessment every year to review policies and procedures regarding suicide prevention. This assures that schools and staff remain current in training for early referral and treatment of youth at risk of suicide.

In her words, Sources of Strength is a movement more than a program because it works by changing the mindset of students through improving their attitudes and their lives with the help of positive adult supporters and peer leaders. Strategic messages are used to create positive cultural change and a shared sense of community in the school environment. This kind of approach is referred to as ‘upstream prevention’ because it seeks to prevent youth suicides by addressing negativity before it reaches a breaking point and to steer students who need enhanced levels of support to services as soon as a problem is identified. Treatment and intervention methods will continue to be valuable and essential, but this switches the approach from ‘putting out fires’ to preventing them from ever starting. Through the intentional messaging and networking of students, positivity and support ‘spread like a virus’ causing a net effect of positive change.

The students next defined the mission of Sources of Strength as encouraging hope, help, and strength. They explained that this was achieved through focus on eight components: Family Support, Positive Friends, Mentors, Healthy Activities, Generosity, Spirituality, Medical Access, and Mental Health. They illustrated each of these as a segment of a wheel and further provided individual examples of how each of them had worked on a segment. For example, Mr. Knight explained how the Connection Groups formed at the school had been a source of mentoring for him and others. Ms. Shelton said

that they had worked very hard to customize the wheel for Trigg County Schools, going so far as to even include faces of the students on the illustrative graphics that were distributed and displayed around the school. This made it more personal to the students as they literally could see themselves and their friends reflected in the components.

In concluding their presentation, the students went on to describe other areas where they had implemented and personalized the Sources of Strength program through the use of school activities, social media, art, presentations, events, and audio/visual messaging. They also briefly highlighted planned activities for next school year, including a freshman mentoring program for incoming freshmen planned for the first week of school where upper class mentors will assist freshmen with the sometimes challenging transition to high school.

Chairman Carney said the work the school and students are doing is very encouraging and truly illustrates the power of positive thinking to improve situations.

In response to a question from Senator Thomas, Mr. Knight said that creating an atmosphere of positivity helps to prevent all kinds of violence, including bullying and fighting. Ms. Phillips said that whenever there is a school shooting, there was a person holding the gun. In her mind, this program helps prevent individuals from being motivated to bring guns at all. Ms. Howard added that the program strongly encourages peers to identify those that may be struggling and to inform teachers or other trusted adults so the struggling students can get the support they need before things get out of hand. In an environment of positivity, negative individuals and behaviors tend to stand out more. Mr. Bleidt concluded saying that school shootings do not develop overnight, there are generally always warning signs. By starting with young students and planting positivity early, it is possible to root out bad thoughts and begin needed discussions among troubled students and supportive adults.

Responding to questions from Senator Carroll, Mr. Burcham said that there is obviously a loss of peer trust when a student reports another student to an adult, but they do have a system of anonymous reporting established so students can bring issues directly to the guidance counselor or other trusted adult. Also, they have strongly encouraged the 'if you see something, say something' mentality and that even though a friend may be upset for a short while, they will not likely stay mad for long. Mr. Knight added that students are much more likely to be able to tell if someone is just having a bad day as opposed to having developed a problem. Mr. Bleidt added that because the Sources of Strength peer leaders were picked by the student body, they feel the responsibility to communicate with adult mentors, but they also feel like their peers have placed trust in them to only speak up when the situation warrants it.

In response to a question from Senator Kerr, Ms. Prothro said that the Sources of Strength program has so far only been implemented in middle and high schools, but the

model can certainly be taken to the elementary grades. The training provided from the program is only designed for middle and high schools so it would have to be significantly adapted for use at the lower levels, but it has been implemented in schools of various sizes including alternative schools as small as 35 students. The program can also be implemented by youth community groups such as church groups because it encourages mentoring of students by their peers, regardless of the setting.

Responding to questions from Representative Gibbons Prunty, the panel said that the adult mentors range from teachers to staff, including maintenance workers, who were identified by the students as their preferred trusted adults. There is no restriction against community individuals being mentors, but it helps for the mentors to be individuals who can interact with students on a daily basis. In order to reach ‘wall flowers’ and others who may be on the fringes, the program strongly encourages the peer leaders to reach out to everyone and get outside of their comfort zone. Also, the group of peer leaders is so large and diverse it represents a majority of the pre-existing social groups in the school, so everyone can feel represented and involved.

Responding to Representative Moser, Ms. Shelton said that there are two mental health providers who provide in-house mental health and substance abuse counseling services which includes both individual and group sessions for students in need of substance abuse counseling and treatment. Inclusion of the families of students is left at the discretion of the therapists.

In response to a final question from Senator Meredith, the students provided many answers as to why they participate in this program when there are so many extracurricular activities to choose from. Ms. Howard said she really enjoys the program, it is fun, and helps build her own strengths as well as helping others build theirs. Ms. Phillips said that she felt a great deal of pride in being selected by her peers and wants to live up to that good reputation. Mr. Knight answered that he had held a close friendship with the student who committed suicide as well as another who had attempted suicide. He did not want anyone else to have to endure that kind of loss. Mr. Bleidt said that he especially liked seeing the positive change that a small group could have in just a few hours a week.

Ensuring the Psychological Safety of Our Students

Vestena Robbins, PhD., Executive Advisor, Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities; and Kathryn Tillett, MSSW, CSW, Project Director, Kentucky AWARE, Kentucky Department of Education next gave a presentation regarding the various ways Kentucky is attempting to address the psychological needs of students. Ms. Robbins began by stressing that there is a sense of urgency to address the psychological safety of students in recent years. The key messages she wished to convey were that: physical safety combined with psychological safety result in student safety, psychological safety requires multi-tiered systems of support, and Kentucky already has several best practices in place that can be taken to scale.

Addressing the first key message, she reiterated that students need both the physical security of locked doors as well as the psychological safety of peer and adult support to be safe. It has been shown, as well as discussed at previous legislative meetings, that one of the key safety measures needed in schools is strong, positive relationships. Students need to feel confident and empowered to report concerns as well as have a sense of belonging within their school communities. There is no single program, however, that can do it all.

Kentucky students also face significant adversity. Recent reports have shown that Kentucky students have a higher than average amount of childhood adversity so many students are experiencing significant traumas that they carry with them to school. Studies show that one in five youth from birth to age 18 years has a diagnosable mental disorder, meaning that in a classroom of 30 students, six of them has a diagnosable mental health disorder. However, that is not to say that they have been diagnosed or that they are receiving any treatment to help address their needs. The adversities and traumas impacting students are also significant impacts on their school performance and achievement. Approximately half of all lifetime mental health disorders start by the mid-teens and the onset of all major mental illnesses happen as early as 7 to 11 years of age. Detection of mental health needs at an early age is critical to ensuring not only student learning, but also school safety and positive community engagement as adults.

Ms. Robbins then presented some examples of excellence in action in Kentucky. There are several strategies already being implemented which provide benefit and support to all students. These include Sources of Strength, Olweus bully prevention, Ripple Effects, Restorative Practices, Youth Mental Health First Aid (to be discussed in depth later), and many other relationship building programs and strategies. There are many that are also low to no cost, such as greeting all students by name, increasing positive interactions versus negative ones, and taking advantage of mental health screening tools in the form of private, self-reported questionnaires that allow students to answer without fear of stigma or ridicule.

Targeted strategies available to help at-risk students include the Handle with Care program, Check In/Check Out, and mentoring. Ms. Robbins highlighted the Handle with Care program in which law enforcement give a ‘heads up’ to a school when a child has been identified at the scene of a traumatic event. Police are trained to identify children at the scene, which school they attend, and send a confidential email or fax that simply says to handle the student with care. No details of the event are shared, but it provides the school with some information to help assist the student in the immediate aftermath of a severe trauma. Finally, there are intensive strategies for the most chronic or complex mental health needs. These include individual therapy, wrap-around services from a multi-disciplinary team of professionals and family, and Functional Behavioral Assessment-based behavior intervention plans. Ms. Robbins illustrated all of these interventions using a pyramid diagram of the multi-tiered systems of support model.

Ms. Tillett then presented on the Kentucky AWARE program. AWARE stands for Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education and is part of a five-year award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of the program is to increase student access to mental health services and to make schools safer. Three Local Lab districts were identified: Fayette County Public Schools, Pulaski County Schools, and the Kentucky School for the Deaf. Select activities were designed to benefit those districts, but other programs were designed for statewide use and benefit. There are also other initiatives which consisted of two- to three-year community level grants focused exclusively on providing Youth Mental Health First Aid training. Many of these programs are in their final year of work or already complete. Additionally, the AWARE initiatives will not be re-funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services when the grant period expires in September of 2019.

Youth Mental Health First Aid was defined as the initial help offered to a person developing a mental health or substance abuse problem, or experiencing a mental health crisis. This treatment is provided until appropriate treatment and support are arranged or until the crisis resolves. One of the primary aims of the Kentucky AWARE project has been to increase the knowledge and skills of communities so that more individuals are certified to provide this form of first aid. At the end of March 2018, over 3,000 individuals have been certified in mental health first aid and over 8,000 youth were connected to mental health supports by a first aid certified individual. Specifically within the three local lab districts, 214 licensed mental health professionals were providing school-based mental health and substance abuse services. This helped contribute to a formal process for student access to mental health and other supports.

The process begins with a data-driven identification of student needs, with teacher/school staff identification of students who would benefit from additional supports, or from parent/family/self-identification of a student needing support. The youth and their caregivers are then provided with a pathway to either mental health services through Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs) or to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) intervention initiated by school staff and matched to student needs. Some students may even need both forms of support. Student data is reviewed at least monthly through the school PBIS team which results in one of three situations. If adequate improvements have been made and maintained, the additional interventions are phased out and the student returns to receiving universal supports as were discussed earlier. If there has been improvement, but more maintenance is required, interventions are continued with data monitoring. Finally, if there has been inadequate improvement, steps are taken to ensure adequate participation in the intervention tool or to add to or alter the intervention strategy.

Ms. Robbins stressed that trauma informed practices for educators need to be included in professional development, but currently it is unclear which best practices can be universally agreed upon. Collaboration between agencies, schools, and communities

will need to happen before it can be fully incorporated into professional development. Sustainable and effective change takes time and individual schools will vary in their readiness to implement improvements. She recommended that they be provided the necessary time and resources to develop programs that will be sustainable.

In response to questions from Senator Carroll, Dr. Robbins said that there is a statutory mandate for the state interagency council, which is the governing body for children's mental health care. It meets monthly and is chaired by the Commissioner of Education. It needs to have more focus on mental health. While there have been great strides in increasing interventions and access, there now needs to be a strategic focus on prevention. The task force formed by the council to focus strictly on mental and emotional health meets monthly and will continue to report on what is being implemented statewide.

Senator Wise asked when information regarding students who may be a danger to themselves or others is shared with law enforcement. Dr. Robbins answered that it varies based on school and the degree of the threat. In schools with a school resource officer who does not follow the relationship model, more students get referred to law enforcement instead of mental health services.

Safe Schools Assessments

Jonathan Wosoba, Director of Student Services, Oldham County Schools, and Jill Canuel, Mental Health Consultant, Oldham County Schools presented their model for school threat assessments to the committee. Their presentation covered Personnel, Protocols, Process, and Forms used in performing threat assessments in Oldham County Schools. They feel that several individuals are necessary to approach any potential threats that come into the building. A Threat Assessment Team comprised of at least two individuals, but often more, is assembled comprised of school administrators, guidance counselors, SROs, school psychologists, and/or teachers. The school receives threat information from the safe schools anonymous tip line via text message, email, or voice message. Oldham County received approximately 58 tips last year in this way. They were all investigated by the Threat Assessment Team and ranged from reports of bullying to reports of possible weapons being brought to school. Threat information is also gathered from students who report concerns, including social media posts, to teachers or administrators.

A threat assessment is started any time there are reports or observations containing references to weapons, suicide, lethal violence, severe rage, severe destruction of property, serious or repetitive fighting, or severe depression, anxiety, or other mental health concerns. At that point, the Threat Assessment Team determines if there is or is not an imminent threat from the available information. If there is no imminent threat, they develop an in-school plan which can involve guidance, mental health referrals, parent conference, an intervention plan or some other follow-up procedure. If a threat is found to exist, the team conducts a Safe Schools Assessment which usually includes suspension from school

and a follow-up assessment prior to the student in question being allowed to return to school. Mr. Wosoba emphasized that this was always a collaborative effort involving several individuals who can bring in information from all sources and multiple perspectives in order to have a more complete understanding of the risk and any potential solutions.

Ms. Canuel briefly discussed the specifics of the forms which the Threat Assessment Teams use and which were provided as samples to members of the committee. These forms include a threat assessment form, documentation of action taken, consent forms, a parent contact acknowledgement form, an authorization of use and disclosure of information, school based monitoring forms, and a “pink sheet” which is a tracking form used by the Director of Pupil Personnel and is retained in the school’s permanent files. She said that many times the threats are able to be handled by the school staff through increased supervision and a positive end result is possible that keeps the school and the student safe.

Chairman Carney said that every school should have a threat assessment tool and thanked the presenters for sharing theirs as a model for other schools.

Responding to a question from Representative Gibbons Prunty regarding students getting ‘lost’ in the system, Mr. Wosoba said that because Oldham County Schools is a large system, it is sometimes difficult for any individual to have a sense of the school ‘pulse,’ however, using a team for threat assessments helps to give a more well-rounded perspective on any issues which arise.

In response to a question from Senator Wise, Mr. Wosoba said that the same protocols are followed any time there is a report, regardless of credibility of the reporter, because it is unknown until an investigation is made whether the threat is real or a hoax. He would not be opposed to legislatively increasing the punishments for making false reports.

Proposed Changes to State Academic Standards

Amanda Ellis, Associate Commissioner, Office of Teaching and Learning, Kentucky Department of Education, and Jennifer Fraker, Interim Director, Division of Program Standards, Office of Teaching and Learning, Kentucky Department of Education, gave an overview of the proposed changes to state academic standards for Reading and Writing and Mathematics. According to Senate Bill 1 of the 2017 Regular Session, which created new standards revision requirements, the standards revision to content standards shall focus on critical knowledge, skills, and capacities needed for success in the global economy; result in fewer, but more in-depth, standards to facilitate mastery learning; and communicate expectations more clearly and concisely to parents, students, and citizens.

The Standards and Assessments Review Process is to occur every six years and is composed of 12 major steps. Presentation of the standards to the Interim Joint Committee on Education is the eighth step in that process, and follows the formation of

Review/Development Committees and Advisory Panels, solicitation of public comment, consideration and incorporation of public comment by the Advisory Panels, and the Review/Development Committee reviewing the recommendation of the Advisory Panels and making a proposal to the Commissioner. Next, the Commissioner will report to the Standards/Assessments Process Review Committee who will recommend the proposal to the Kentucky Board of Education if the Committee determines the standards/assessments review process was followed. The Board has final approval of the proposed changes, begins the regulation change process, and new standards will be implemented in all schools no later than the second academic year following the process.

During the public comment period on Reading and Writing Standards, there were responses from 456 individuals, primarily teachers but also including school administrators, students, state education agencies, retired teachers, parents, higher education institutions, business/community members, and others. Roughly 76 percent of all Kentucky counties were represented. Highlights of the draft proposal for Reading and Writing Standards include a reconstructed framework and vision to align the goals and purposes of the standards; 10 interdisciplinary literacy practices, which provide overarching goals for literacy instruction for each student across the state; revised standards for early literacy that denote comprehension strategies, development of schema, and increased analysis; a multidimensional approach highlighting the three dimensions of literacy; and standard K-12 progressions in addition to the grade-level view.

Ms. Ellis next gave an illustration of how these standards will be displayed to better improve their use by educators. Clarity was a primary focus of the Review/Development Committees as public comment had identified ease of use of the framework as a desire by teachers and other interested parties. While this presentation focused on the Reading and Writing Standards throughout, the process was identical for the review of the Mathematics Standards, but discussion of the Mathematics standards was abbreviated due to time constraints. More than 800 individuals participated in the public comment period for the Mathematics Standards with approximately 84 percent of Kentucky counties being represented. Again, the need for a user-friendly framework was identified as well as general clarification. Highlights of the proposed changes to the Mathematics Standards include an architecture structured to emphasize essential ideas or conceptual categories in mathematics; standards which emphasize the importance of mathematical practices, equipping students to use reason and problem solve; connections between content standards and practice standards where applicable; intentional alignment to numeracy trajectories; coherence to indicate the mathematics connections within and across grade levels; and better communication of expectations to teachers, parents, students, and stakeholders through examples and illustrations. While the process for review and revision was the same for all content areas, the final framework of the standards will vary based on the needs of each content area for clarity.

In response to a question from Representative Tipton, Ms. Fraker said that getting more responses during the public comment period will likely be a result of better timing. The comment period for these standards was at the end of the school year when many stakeholders were preoccupied. Business/community leaders were involved more on the development panels. A less cumbersome review tool would also likely result in greater feedback.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m. CDT. Chairman Carney announced that the next meeting will be Monday, August 13, 2018, at the Capitol Annex in Frankfort.