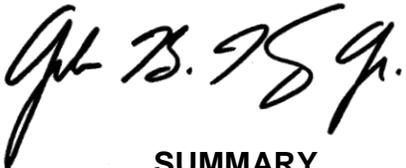




THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

TO: P-12 Education Committee
FROM: Ken Slentz 
SUBJECT: Safe Schools Task Force Update
DATE: June 16, 2014
AUTHORIZATION(S): 

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

This is a follow up discussion item from the October 2013 Board of Regents meeting in which staff presented the action plan for the NYS Safe Schools Task Force for School Year 2014-15.

Reason(s) for Consideration

Follow up discussion.

Proposed Handling

This issue will come before the Regents P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the June 2014 meeting.

Background Information

In January 2013, in response to the Newtown, CT school shooting incident, the Board of Regents directed the Department to re-establish the Safe Schools Task Force to be chaired by the Vice Chancellor and Commissioner King. In March of 2013, Department staff presented information to the Board on the current state of school safety in New York State. A kick-off meeting of the NYS Safe Schools Task Force was held on May 8, 2013 that included presentations from three school districts that had made strong progress in creating a safe and healthy school climate. In addition, Workgroups were established to move this important work forward.

The next meeting of the Task Force was held on November 14, 2013 in which representatives of the New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force presented recommendations from a report released in May 2013 entitled *Keeping Kids In School and Out of Courts*. Although the report focuses on New York City, it helped set the stage for the work to be accomplished by the NYS Safe Schools Task Force and better ensured coordination of statewide efforts.

At the November 14, 2013 meeting, the NYS Safe Schools Task Force members broke into Workgroups to focus more narrowly on specific policies and to work toward the development of concrete, measurable recommendations for the Board's consideration. The Workgroups continued to meet regularly throughout the next several months and were primarily facilitated by various Department staff members located in the Office of Student Support Services. The goal was for each Workgroup to formulate a set of recommendations for the full Task Force to review and provide comments prior to presenting the full Task Force report to the Board.

In addition, on February 20, 2014, to ensure that student voice was included in our work, thirty-four students representing districts throughout New York State participated in a Safe Schools Student Forum in Albany, as part of the NYS Safe Schools Task Force. The agenda included a welcoming of the day by the P-12 Education Deputy Commissioner and the Student Support Services Assistant Commissioner; an introduction by all of the students; a Social Barometer Activity as an ice-breaker; a lively presentation on the Dignity for All Students Act; and a break-out session in which students worked on specific components of safe schools and compiled recommendations for the Board to review. A summary of the day was compiled that reflects the students' feedback throughout the day and a set of recommendations from the students are articulated later in this item.

Lastly, on June 6, 2014, the full Safe Schools Task Force came together to review and finalize all of the recommendations which were presented by Workgroup members. These recommendations will be included in a final draft report for review by the Board of Regents. The meeting was structured as a way in which to prioritize the recommendations that each individual Workgroup had developed, and to unify the findings of each Workgroup into ultimately one report entitled, *The New York State Safe Schools Task Force Report: Blueprint for Action*. The Department staff will have the full report ready for review by the Board at the September meeting.

The following is a list of the top 9 recommendations from the June 6, 2014 Task Force meeting in which members voted on what they believe should be the Department's top priorities for implementation:

1. Advocate for investment in and expansion of support staff in schools, including school social workers, psychologists, counselors, nurses and school attendance staff; support increased funding for these positions through the legislative budget process; and to obtain additional resources from federal, state, and private resources.

2. Re-examine current professional development requirements, including the courses for Child Abuse/Neglect Identification, School Violence Prevention/Intervention, and DASA to determine needed changes to pre-service and in-service certification requirements.
3. Support implementation of theoretically grounded and evidence-based multi-tiered frameworks such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that are designed to:
 - Enhance the learning environment for all students while providing targeted and individualized supports for students who have greater social, emotional, and behavioral needs;
 - Improve overall school climate and safety; and
 - Support students' improved academic achievement.
4. Examine all current federal and state data reporting requirements to develop a single comprehensive model data reporting system that incorporates already required reporting and includes, but is not limited to, data regarding school suspension and arrest; positive interventions; school climate indicators, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, etc. Additionally, be sure that the Department is available for on-going technical assistance and that all data collected by the Department is done so cohesively.
5. Develop a new system to capture data related to school climate such as a School Climate Index to develop a positive rather than the current punitive process. This would include re-defining the persistently dangerous designation system and develop a professional development plan to train school administrators, teachers and other school personnel. This train the trainer method would train school personnel how to use the new data system and to effectively use and document incidents as well as analyze discipline data. Also, be sure that all data is available to schools in real time.
6. Expand School Safety Plans to include protocols for school busses/transporters and locations outside the school building such as athletic events, field trips, special events, and student clubs and organizations as well as to include outside of "school day" programs, such as prekindergarten programs and after school programs.
7. Develop uniform training, which should include restorative justice practices as well as child psychology and qualification requirements for School Resource Officers (Rest of State) and School Safety Agents (NYC), to be sure that School Resource Officers and School Safety Agents complete the annual professional development related to school climate, health, and DASA.

8. Revise Education Law Section 807 to include lockdown drills, shelter and place drills, armed intruder drills, and other drills as part of the twelve annual fire drills currently mandated. One suggestion: to eliminate two of the currently twelve required fire drills due to loss of classroom time, and require one lock-down drill.
9. Form an interagency policy Workgroup that includes youth and student representatives to examine student suspension policies and make recommendations for change that incorporate restorative justice practices and that enhance interagency coordination and communication.

In addition, the following six recommendations were the result of the Safe Schools Student Forum held on February 20, 2014:

1. Allow students or a student representative to participate in district governing bodies.
2. School districts should pursue Alternatives to Suspension (ATS) procedures and better incorporate them into disciplinary codes.
3. Integrate school rules, code of conduct, and school climate into school curriculum so that it is better understood by students and parents.
4. The Dignity Act Coordinator (DAC) and the DAC's role should be better identified to the students.
5. Annual orientations should include information on the DAC and school climate, start as early as middle school.
6. There should be an increased number of school counselors to help promote a positive school climate and address issues of concern to students.

Next Steps

The Board will review and discuss the NYS Safe Schools Task Force work during the 2014-15 school year and provide feedback to the Department on the Task Force draft recommendations being presented at the June 2014 meeting. Department staff will present a final set of recommendations with a final Task Force report for the Board's review at the September 2014 meeting.