

Successful Children and Youth Policy Team

April 3, 2019, Meeting Summary

Key decisions and actions are in **bold**.

SCYPT Members in Attendance:

Kimberly Adams, Leslie Atkins, Telaekah Brooks, Karla Bruce, Tisha Deeghan, Alicia Doe, Francisco Durán, Fred Grant, Veronica Harsley-Dean, Kelly Henderson, Cathy Hudgins, Teresa Johnson, Alexis Vaughan Kassim, Tammy Derenak Kaufax, Lori LaBarca (for Ed Roessler), Michelle Leete, Nikki Lehman, Rick Leichtweis, Chris Leonard, Jeff McKay, Megan McLaughlin, Mary Ann Panarelli, Chris Revere (for Gloria Addo-Ayensu), Dave Rohrer, Ivy Tillman (for Bob Birmingham), Douglas Tyson, Daryl Washington

Discussion Item – Student Behavior, Discipline, and Disproportionality

Francisco Durán, Teresa Johnson, and Mary Ann Panarelli shared an update on FCPS's work on disparities in student behavior and discipline. There are three related studies currently underway: an internal review of data; an external review of equity practices; and an external review of programs, systems, and policies to promote a healthy school climate. The studies are examining equity and disparities by race and ethnicity, language, special education, and gender. One key finding is that, while high school out-of-school suspensions have decreased over the last six years, disparities still exist and there is beginning to be an increase in out-of-school suspensions at the elementary and middle school levels.

Complete study results and an equity plan will be presented to the School Board on June 17. Additionally, an online FCPS Equity Profile will be live soon, with disaggregated data on discipline, academic performance, absenteeism, resilience, advanced academics placement, and hiring practices, among other topics.

The presentation also included an overview of numerous initiatives aimed to address disparities. Alicia Doe asked if Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and the other initiatives are implemented at all levels of schools. Dr. Panarelli replied that FCPS is beginning implementation of MTSS at all schools, Restorative Justice is available at all schools, and Systems of Support Advisors are only in high schools. RULER has been implemented at five high schools as part of the Project AWARE grant, and 60 elementary schools will receive RULER training over the next five years as part of a research study with Yale and UVA. The University of California teacher perspective project is in a study phase at middle schools. Ms. Doe recommended that, if the increase in suspensions is happening at the elementary and middle school levels, more resources should be focused there. She stated that parents need to be made aware more about resources that are available; they shouldn't have to go looking for them or wait until the situation is dire to get a referral. She stated that, when a child is struggling, it can be very isolating for a parent who has to dedicate all their time to addressing the issues; she wishes parent groups were available to provide support and guidance.

Leslie Atkins asked if the studies will address family awareness of available services. Ms. Johnson said that it is included in the focus group and survey components of the external reviews.

Kelly Henderson noted that she has heard about inconsistencies in how schools implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Ms. Johnson replied that PBIS has been implemented throughout FCPS, but not consistently, and not always with fidelity. FCPS is working to incorporate PBIS into the MTSS framework to support a more systematic and consistent implementation, and to better enable the central office to support schools implementing PBIS. Dr. Panarelli added that FCPS is creating a comprehensive training plan for MTSS.

Alexis Vaughan Kassim asked what a suspendable offense is at the elementary school level. Dr. Panarelli explained that the FCPS Student Rights and Responsibilities (SR&R) does not include mandatory suspensions at any level. When an elementary school student is suspended, it is usually in response to aggressive behavior that puts the student or others in danger, and that the purpose of the suspension is usually to give staff a day to formulate a plan to address the behavior within school. Suspensions of older elementary students (e.g., sixth graders) are also often due to drugs or weapons. Dr. Panarelli stressed that though suspensions at the high school level have dropped over time, there are still more high school students suspended than elementary students. Though elementary student suspension rates are low in FCPS compared many other divisions in Virginia, it is the increase in suspensions over the last few years that is causing concern.

Jeff McKay asked for information on the process for referring a student to the superintendent, how much discretion is involved in the process, and if there is a process in place for exercising discretion. Dr. Panarelli stated that referrals are used for serious infractions that require a consistent approach for review and consequences. Offenses related to drugs, weapons, assault on a teacher with injury, and sexual assault require a mandatory referral. (At the elementary school level, referrals for the last two offenses are discretionary.) The principal may choose to refer a student to the Superintendent's Hearings Office for any behavior, depending on the individual circumstances of the situation. This may include behaviors like harassment or gang related behavior, for example, where there is no mandate to refer, but the seriousness of some cases may make such a referral appropriate. Chronically disruptive behavior used to be a reason students were sometimes referred to the Superintendent, but there is now an alternative process which is addressed by the Regional Assistant Superintendent. There is not a formal process in place for decision-making regarding discretionary referrals (other than for students with disabilities, for whom there are formal steps to be followed). It is up to the principal to use a variety of data and information sources to come to a decision. Parents are notified "as soon as practicable," and always before a student is asked to write a statement. Parents are given time to respond, and the process is outlined in the notification they receive.

Fred Grant asked how much time typically elapses between an event and a suspension, and how long they tend to last. Dr. Panarelli responded that out of school suspensions typically begin very quickly – generally that day or the following day, depending on the time of day of the precipitating event. For students in third grade and younger, suspension can not be longer than three days, absent "aggravating circumstances." For other students, the SR&R gives principals discretion to suspend a student for up to five days (Virginia code allows 10), or 10 days if the

student is being referred to the superintendent. The decision on in-school or out-of-school suspension is based on the nature of the offense and an “estimation of safety concerns.”

Veronica Harsley-Dean noted that she handles complaints made to the NAACP, and that she has seen students of color treated more harshly than their peers for similar offenses. She stated that parents need to know their rights and how to push back against unfair practices. She emphasized the importance of principals having perspective on the issue, and asked how parents should deal with their concerns. Dr. Durán answered that the principal should be the first line of contact, but that FCPS has a new ombudsman position responsible for helping parents and families navigate processes and situations like these.

Douglas Tyson added that school administrators spend a lot of time discussing and examining facts and student needs as they determine a course of action; most suspensions do not result in a referral. Principals often call the hearings office to discuss a situation with a hearings office in order to get advice before making a decision on a referral. Parents always have an appeals option that is communicated to them in writing in the suspension letter, and principals can amend suspensions based on parental input.

Multiple SCYPT members asked that the final reports include raw numbers, not just percentages. Dr. Durán stated that they will. Members also asked if data related to students with disabilities would be included, and Dr. Durán noted that disparities for students with disabilities are a part of the analysis and will be included in the report. He stated that the biggest disparities appear to be those related to race, disability, and gender.

Multiple SCYPT members expressed that they are glad to see this work being conducted, and that it is important to continue to address this issue.

Discussion Item – Fairfax County Fiscal Map

Victoria Kairys, of Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services, presented a draft version of a fiscal map of County Government investments in programs and services for children and youth. Data is still being finalized, but the draft gives a good overview of how County spending aligns with the community-level outcomes identified by the SCYPT.

Jeff McKay noted that the Fairfax County budget is incredibly transparent, but it is still difficult for people to navigate and for them to “put pieces together.” The fiscal map will help identify both gaps and where services overlap. There is always risk of misinterpretation – lots of disclaimers are needed – but it is a very useful tool. It will help the County market itself, explaining what it does and how much it invests in children, youth, and families.

Mr. McKay emphasized that ongoing maintenance of the tool will be needed. Ms. Kairys explained that a toolkit, including documentation processes and formulas, has been developed to help agencies report data. This will help with maintenance, sustainability, and consistency.

Mr. McKay and Megan McLaughlin each emphasized the SCYPT’s role in aligning County and FCPS programming and asked if FCPS spending will be included. Jesse Ellis agreed that FCPS data is important to understanding the full scope of local investments, and that the plan is to include

schools data. However, staff wanted to get a draft of what is already included to the SCYPT for reaction. It will probably be another year before FCPS data can be fully included.

Karla Bruce noted that other jurisdictions have included a geographic component to their fiscal maps (e.g., showing how much is being spent in each area of the jurisdiction). Ms. Kairys responded that geographic data is not fully available for all spending at this time, but it remains a topic of interest. The County's Health and Human Services data initiatives might provide some insight or the ability to better disaggregate data at a geographic level.

Telaekah Brooks stated that Venture Philanthropy Partners works with nine local jurisdictions, and that no other jurisdiction has come as far as Fairfax in this type of work. The potential is "extraordinary." Tammy Derenak Kaufax agreed that the fiscal map offers a great new way to look at the data.

Chris Revere asked if there is a way to illustrate the linkage between outcomes. For example, academic success and health are very much associated with each other. Ms. Kairys replied that the team compiling the data is interested in these kinds of things and that, overall, such a change requires a culture shift in how we gather and report data and information.

Items and Announcements Presented by SCYPT Members

Anne-Marie Twohie and Betsi Closter, from the Fairfax County Office for Children, and Maura Burke, from FCPS, shared that Fairfax County will be one of 11 Virginia localities participating in a \$9.9 million federal Preschool Development Grant awarded to Virginia. Nearly \$6 million will be awarded to the localities, and nearly \$4 million will provide incentives to early childhood programs and teachers. Funding, which begins immediately and is available through the remainder of the calendar year, will be used to:

1. Work with partners to increase access to and quality of services for children birth to five and at risk;
2. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of access, enrollment, and available resources; and
3. Assess quality elements of existing classrooms.

Public Comment

Norm Hall, of the Fairfax County Special Education PTA (SEPTA), noted that SEPTA is partnering with FCPS and others to address concerns about restraint and seclusion practices in the school system; the SEPTA website has more information. SEPTA is conducting surveys to get feedback and input on the issue.

Mr. Hall also stated that, when the School Board approved its budget, it directed the superintendent to present a plan to study race, special education, and income disproportionality in FCPS discipline outcomes by January 2019, and to present findings and recommendations by June 2019. Mr. Hall expressed that he is not sure that a plan or data for the income and special education disparities will be shared by June. He added that discipline related to special

education depends on students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), but that he has not seen evidence that information on the IEP process will be included in the report.

Mr. Hall asked that disability-related disparities be included in the SCYPT's retreat discussion.

A written version of Mr. Hall's comments, provided by Mr. Hall, is included in the meeting materials.