



JJPOC Meeting Minutes

April 20, 2023

LOB- 300 Capitol Ave Hartford, Room 2E

Virtual Option Available

Attendance:

Marc Pelka	Talitha Coggins	Keryn Felder	TYJI Staff
Maurice Reaves	Stacy Schulman	Cathy Foley-Geib	Bill Carbone
Christina Quaranta	Veron Beaulieu	Meleney Scudder	Sue Cusano
Erica Bromley	Derrick Gordon	Patricia Nunez	Erika Nowakowski
Macklin Roman	Steven Abbagnaro	Kathryn Meyer	Brittany LaMarr
Hector Glynn	Gwendolyn Samuel	Marisa Halm	Danielle Cooper
Elizabeth Bozzuto	Sarah Eagan	Glen Worthy	Donna Pfrommer
Dawn Westbrook	Brian Hill	Ajit Gopalakrishnan	Hunter Clark
Gary Roberge	Kim Traverso		Shauntaye Monroe
Tais Ericson	Fran Rabinowitz		Sydney de Lannoy
Michael Pierce	Michael Williams		Paul Klee
John Frassinelli	William Mulligan		
Amy Marracino	Tasha Hunt		
Lisa Sementilli	Sharmese Walcott		

Welcome and Overview

Undersecretary Mark Pelka welcomed everyone to the meeting. Erika Nowakowski introduced the Connecticut State Department of Education, who will be presenting their annual report on school discipline in public schools, and Department of Corrections, who will be presenting a continuation of their previous presentation from late 2022 reporting out of PA 19-187.

Acceptance of JJPOC Meeting Minutes

Undersecretary Marc Pelka asked for a motion to accept the March 16, 2023, meeting minutes. The motion was moved, seconded, and passed. The Department of Labor abstained.

Connecticut State Department of Education: School Discipline

This report on student discipline is an annual report, as required by statute, and was presented at the State Board of Education earlier this month. The data is primarily comparing pre-pandemic data to post-pandemic data, since this is essentially the first full year of students being in-person for the entire year. Data collected during the pandemic is not fully representative of potential trends regarding exclusionary discipline, since large amounts of students were virtual.

Notable language that should be clarified for the report is language about removal- although it is not directly used in this report-, in school suspension (ISS), out of school suspension (OSS), and expulsion. Although removal is not used in this report, it is removal from the classroom environment that does not



extend beyond 90 minutes. If this removal lasts beyond 90 minutes, it constitutes suspension or expulsion. In school suspension is exclusion from that classroom but not from school, out of school suspension is exclusion from school and transportation privileges- but not for more than a 10-day period. Expulsion is exclusion from school and transportation privileges, like out of school suspension, but is for a period of longer than 10 days. Schools are required to report to CSDE for suspension, expulsion, 'serious incidents' (as defined by statutes), or any incidents using drugs, alcohol, weapons, or bullying- even if these incidents do not result in a suspension or expulsion.

Over the past decade, Connecticut has made major strides in reducing exclusionary discipline, although some disparities remain. For this report, the suspension rate is defined as the percentage of students in a certain group, or as a whole, that receive at least one suspension (either in school suspension or out of school suspension). In Connecticut in the 2021-2022 school year, over 34,600 – or one out of every 15 students- received a suspension or expulsion, equaling approximately a 6.5-7% suspension rate statewide, although this rate has declined over the years. Rates for all student populations are trending on the decline, but there are still notable disparities between disabled students compared to nondisabled students, and African American/Black students, Latino/a/x students, and their white counterparts. These students are 2-3x more likely than white students to be suspended or expelled. The likelihood of higher suspension for students of color compared to white students has slightly declined over the years, but CSDE is still aiming to continue to reduce these disparities. In the 2021-2022 school year, populations that are disproportionately suspended have seen a decrease in suspension incidents- with rates dropping anywhere from 2-4% of their 2015-2016 suspension rate levels. The largest disparity in the 2021-2022 school year is between Black or African American students (12.5% suspension rate) and white students (4% suspension rate). The ability to collect this data and notice the disparities in different student populations allows CSDE to target interventions for districts who may have severe disparities. If a district or a school is showing high disproportionality, this may result in being tiered higher by the state, which leads to more interventions and oversight by CSDE. In the system of support plans by CSDE, they want to unpack disproportionality and examine factors that impact behavior.

From 2018-2019 school year to 2021-2022 school year (pre-pandemic to post-pandemic), the total number of in school suspensions decreased by 20%, while out of school suspensions increased by 5.8%. After hearing from multiple organizations, the 2021-2022 school year presented unique challenges due to coming back in person, which may account for the increase in out of school suspensions. Regarding expulsions, they were higher than in previous years by approximately 15%. CSDE was also able to look at incidents data. Some incident categories showed substantial declines from 2012-2019 school year- including school policy violations, sexually related behaviors, and theft related behaviors. School policy violations accounted for approximately 41% of all incidents, which is down from 46% in 2018-2019, 48% in 2017-2018, and 56% in 2015-2016. School policy violations include several things, frequently referred to as "The Four D's": disrespect, disorderly conduct, disruptive behavior, and disobedience. We are seeing that fewer students are being sent out for instances that do not necessarily cause harm, such as "The Four D's", which is the cause of many of the disparities typically seen, through implicit bias and/or misinterpretation of words and actions. However, there were other categories of incidents that showed a substantial increase in frequency, including property damage and weapons incidents. There has been an increased violence in Connecticut schools, much of which is generated outside of school grounds but is



ultimately transferring to school grounds. School resources need to be diverted to address these concerns. While looking at students in PreK-2nd grade, the number of suspensions has declined by 48% from the 2018-2019 school year to the 2021-2022 school year, with less than .5% receiving at least one suspension. The total number of suspensions declined from over 5,000 prior to PA15-96 to 1,926 pre-pandemic, to 994 post pandemic.

In the 2021-2022 school year, there were 962 school-based arrests, where there were over 1,500 in the 2018-2019 school year, and over 1,600 the year prior. The number of students who received school-based arrests has declined, but, like suspension and expulsion, disparities remained. Males, Black/African American, and Hispanic populations were disproportionately represented among school-based arrests. Over the past 3 years, incidents involving fighting and battery are the most common reason a student would receive a school-based arrest. The numbers are decreasing- with post-pandemic levels lower than pre-pandemic. All the above trends were evaluated without regard to the pandemic data because it seemed unfair to add into the data set due to the nature of online learning and the different environment.

CSDE suggested a focus area for school discipline in the following areas: CT school discipline collaborative, Grades Prek-2, socioemotional learning, behavioral health, alternative education, charter school, tiers for disproportionate school discipline, positive school climate, and indicators 4A and B, which are a part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, related to suspensions (4A is greater than 2% of students with disabilities in a district suspended or expelled out of school for any incident for greater than 10 days in a school year; 4B includes a race and ethnicity lens). It is important for CSDE to convene within community practices by having conversations about what is and is not working, as well as discussing how they can help to support the districts. CSDE hopes to be able to reach districts and schools at early warning signs, where there is opportunity for quick improvement, rather than allowing the time for it to become a trend. CSDE aims to create systems of support, targeting those with the highest needs, intensify continuum of integrated tiered supports for identified districts to address needs, bolster guidance, professional learning, and coaching. They also wish to scale up a comprehensive system approach to identify and support districts with high suspension rates. Cross-sector collaboration with schools allows schools to be involved in the process of creating a plan that is the best fit for that individual school and their needs, rather than attempting to implement a 'one size fits all' program. Professional learning will be conducted in a three-part series, beginning in Fall of 2023 for schools with notable outliers. CSDE has maintained many partners that have been working closely in collaboration, such as DCF, CT Center for Childrens Advocacy, CT Parent Advocacy Coalition, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, and Center for School Safety and Crisis Intervention.

CSDE recently received a \$183 million dollar grant for investment and implementation of socioemotional learning, behavioral and mental health of students, and RESTS. RESTS are being supported by CSDE through a \$1.2 million dollar grant to support trauma informed specialists and trauma informed care in the districts. There are a variety of grants that are targeted at funding positions and programs that help support student mental health care. Some programs collaborate with teachers and create a space to identify what is going well, it also allows for self-report among high school students who can write their own plans that help growth in socioemotional learning. Behavioral health pilot is



being used to identify the best overall practices for further utilization throughout the state. This acts as a part of a holistic approach to creating safe environments in our schools, while also creating a positive relationship between students and staff. Ultimately, the purpose of the school discipline collaborative has an overarching goal to advise the Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education on strategies for transforming school discipline in Connecticut schools, with an outcome of reducing the overall and disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline in Connecticut schools. Within the school discipline collaborate, there are available family guides with information about suspension and expulsion (these guides are also available in electronic copies on the CSDE website). Through a partnership with the Office of Early Childhood, tip sheets are developed with ways teachers and other adults in the building can understand what behavior is, what types of behaviors are developmentally appropriate, and ways to best support children. This helps to ensure interventions are targeted with consideration for different age groups and the different levels of development. We have seen youths not having the ability to learn from their peers due to isolation by COVID restrictions, as well as the natural transition struggles that occur from 8th grade to high school. It is important to acknowledge that routines may have been disrupted and encourage acclimating to new environments with both students and staff. Through all these practices, CSDE hopes to create confidence in districts to continue to lower disparities and lower the usage of exclusionary discipline.

Department of Corrections Report on Remaining Sections of PA19-187

This section of the presentation began with discussion on how mental health is addressed in Manson Youth Institute. There has been an increase of 6 additional mental health staff; this increase in staff has led to an increase in mental health group programming, more out of cell time for the youths. While looking directly at the youths' mental health in MYI, the data is assessed by a mental health score and other incidents- such as suicide risk assessment or treatment (inpatient or outpatient). Youths under the age of 18 are given a mental health score, which breaks down into the following: Mental Health 1- no active services and does not show current need for mental health services, Mental Health 2- may have received services in the past but does not show a current need, Mental Health 3- youth is receiving outpatient treatment, Mental Health 4- youth is receiving medication for treatment of mental health needs, and Mental Health 5- inpatient treatment needed, usually for a brief amount of time. 69% of youths had mental health scores over 2, which leads to a mental health clinician being assigned to them- as well as participating in group therapy. For Mental Health 1's and 2's, they are still able to access group programming but do not necessarily have a specific assigned clinician- but they are able to write a request for one and scores may be changed to showcase needs. There were no youth suicide attempts during CY 2022, but there were suicide risk assessments and mental health infirmary admissions every month during this period. MYI attempts to identify those most at risk and provide services for their needs prior to any suicide attempts.

Use of force is occasionally used in facilities but is tracked by the facilities. Force is any time someone puts their hands on a youth and can be anything from applying restraints or breaking up altercations between youths; grouping of use of force incidents by MYI are classified as physical assault/altercation, acutely disruptive, or 'other'. Most instances of altercations at MYI are fights and issues brought in from the 'outside', where youths may have prior issues that are then brought into the facility. If an incident is



considered ‘acutely disruptive’, the offender is non-compliant but non-aggressive. Individual exposures to use of force incidents is also broken down by type of force utilized, including in conjunction with in-cell restraints, chemical agent, or therapeutic restraints. There was no usage of therapeutic restraints in the 2022 year.

Climate and culture building has been a target for MYI, where they focus on things such as transition and counseling groups, programming, school teams, community and culture, best practices and program fidelity, and technology. Utilizing a variety of programs and ensuring they are best practices for the youth creates a better climate and culture for the youths in which growth and rehabilitation can occur. One area of interest is job and career readiness that is offered to the youths at MYI, in addition to their educational programs. All minor (18 and under) students are in a high school program and two vocational programs. Progress in academics is still monitored, with multiple youths being noted as having academic progression and outstanding achievements. A variety of educational pathways were used in the 2022 year, with youths either being enrolled in the high school program to earn a diploma (128 youths), continued enrollment in the high school program from date of entry (53 youths), transitioned to adult basic education program to earn a diploma (24 youths), exiting prior to obtaining credit requirements (46 youths), or entered into MYI as a graduate (2 youths). During the 2022 year, 52 students 17 and under participated in two career and technical education programs. Students participated in both Auto Body and Automotive Technology. These students also participated in a STEM elective entitled Technological Applications in Science, where they learned about digital literacy. The new barbering program provided students more vocational opportunities within the facility. Students also had the ability to participate in a dual enrollment program in Environmental Science, based on a collaboration with the University of Connecticut Early College Experience program. There is also discussion for a potential partnership with the University of Bridgeport for a dual enrollment program in Financial Literacy.

It is important in these situations to partner with a variety of people in the school team to create an environment that prioritizes the youth and their learning and growth opportunities. The community and culture is also being built by the utilization of Positive Behavior Incentive System (PBIS). Administration and faculty are adding activities under the PBIS based on student recommendations. Students’ achievements such as A’s and B’s on report cards were highlighted, and student success was celebrated and rewarded by visiting the barbershop, as a part of the barbering program, for personalized treatment. Although there is a gap in partnerships with employers for transitions due to COVID, there are remaining partnerships with vocational providers and other people and organizations that are entering into the facility. Within the next two weeks, OSHA certifications will be available for construction vocational training.

It is important to look at the data from our youths to create programming that is designed around what the youth’s needs are and the services that are currently delivered. Staff at MYI continue to receive training in restorative practices that can be implemented within the classroom to improve culture and climate along with improving academic and social successes.

Announcements:



Undersecretary Marc Pelka had a series of announcements before adjourning the meeting. The equity dashboard is now live on <https://data.ct.gov/stories/s/efuz-5jhe>. This dashboard is collected and managed by the Judicial Branch and OPM Criminal Justice Division. The delinquent referrals tab is now live, providing multiple years of data by town; the website is highly interactive and provides compelling visuals to explore the data. The first tab is now live but will continue to expand and modules will continue to be added. The equity dashboard is highly interdisciplinary and was used with the voices of many organizations and members of the JJPOC. The Title II Federal grant through OJJDP has allowed for an OPM job listing posted for Juvenile Justice Lead Planning Analyst position; this addition will allow for OPM and CT to become a participating state with OJJDP. The Request for Proposal (RFP) is also now live on the DAS website; this is related to a bond allocated to OPM with the aim of restoring community trust in law enforcement through community engagement training. The bond focused on cities in CT of a population 100,000+ and contiguous towns.

Next Meeting:

Hybrid Model Option (In person and available over zoom)

May 18, 2023

2:00-3:30 pm