**District-Wide PTO Meeting Minutes**

**Asheville City Schools Training Room 03-28-19**

**Present**:

Dr. Eric Howard, Director of Student Services; Marta Alcala-Williams, Copland Rudolph, ACSF; Adrienne Bernardi, Vance; Molly Russell, Claxton; Linda Wilkerson, AHS; Stacy Claude, APS; Jessica deBettencourt, APS; Cate Justen, AMS: Vicki Catalano, HFE; M. Smitka, IDES: Matt Menne, IDES; Kate Shem, IBJ: Amy Smith, MNS.

**TOPIC OF BULLYING:**

Dr. Howard introduced himself and encouraged participants to take down his cell phone number 828-747-8023 and contact him with questions or comments. He presented “The Four Agreements” by don Miguel Ruiz and then led discussion on ACS behavior policies and procedures, includes the 1710P Gender Support Guidelines, created recently in partnership with the Campaign for Southern Policy and including parent input.

**Question:** How is gender language being addressed in the classrooms? **Answer:** ACS cannot specifically change the language officially yet, but support staff has already done through (sensitivity) trining and the next level of this training will be with administrative teams over the 2019 summer. ACS is still trying to figure out when and how to train the teachers, which would also have to include trauma training. Parent input is welcome. One suggestion was to include in the training “personal pronoun usage.”

**Question:** Is there training for substitute teachers? **Answer:** No, but that is a good suggestion. Another suggestion offered was to incorporate this training into the volunteer training sessions.

Dr. Howard briefly reviewed with us the ACS Code of Conduct and asked people to please note in the language where there is a distinction between “MAY do” items versus “MUST do” items.

**Question:** What is the policy for when a student reports an incident of bullying? **Answer:** The principals have discretion to an extent, depending on the nature of the complaint. If it is an incident of sexual misconduct or some other crime-related incident, then the Resource Officer should automatically be involved and possibly the Asheville Police Department. If it is an incident of “kid on kid” violence, then DSS should be involved. The *expected* protocol within ACS is that the school Vice Principal should interview the students involved in the incident, as well as any witnesses, document the incident in writing, call in the parents of the alleged child antagonist for a meeting with the school counselor, and then follow up with parents by providing written documentation of what action was taken.

**Action Item:** ACS Student Services department intends to publish more specific language with regard to how to better follow this protocol.

**Suggestion:** Parents need to talk to their kids about sexting and how harmful this can be.

**Suggestion:** What should parents do? They should attempt to contact the principal first if there is a concern that no action has been taken regarding an incident of bullying and also copy the school counselor before escalating to Ms. McGowen, the ACS Safety Officer.

Dr. Howard asserted the difference between a minor incident and a major incident and that all major incidents are supposedly required to be documented and recorded in the system. He then posed the question “How do we (as parents) want to see the issue of bullying addressed?

* Meet with counselors and have counselors address specific issues with teachers in productive conversations with the entire classrooms. Counselors are a KEY party of the Student Support Services Team, which meets every week.
* Improve the slow response time from busy principals to parents with concerns. This might be accomplished by including counselors and Vice Principals in all correspondence
* Parents should remain calm whenever there is a potential school-wide threat. Set an example for other parents and for kids that panicking will not help any situation. Find out facts before freaking out. Do not burden administrators or tie up resources that need to be dedicated to dealing with the situation by asking questions. Follow administrator instructions and trust that they will communicate as soon as there is something to be communicated.
* Understand that it is not possible to make ALL of the schools 100% safe ALL of the time, but they are confident that they have a good team in place as well as good systems to ensure the safety of staff and students as best as possible.

**Parents are strongly encouraged to** advocate to their County Commissioners for full-time social workers at every school! There is a difference between “mental health” and “behavioral health.” BOTH need to be managed at all schools with the appropriately trained staff, which includes counselors and social workers.

Dr. Howard recently conducted a trial by strategically placing social workers in different schools and moving them around to collect data for a needs-based assessment. As a result, he created a $1.5 million plan to create a Mental Health Department for ACS to get more accurate and timely assessments for kids. This plan includes working with Mountain Child Advocacy Centers, which is a great resource; however, they are just as overwhelmed with cases as is DSS. Additionally, teachers are getting worn out and need help; therefore, Dr. Howard has requested 17 support assistants for ACS.

**Parents are strongly encouraged to** contact the head of DHHS to request more cooperation with schools to promote child and family meetings, in part to ensure that schools don’t re-traumatize kids already experiencing trauma at home.

Dr. Howard distributed funds from a $50,000 grant received for programming about trauma within all Pre-K through 8th grade classes. This programming resulted in each school receiving $3,000. The program should, ideally, take a whole school approach to training, including cafeteria staff and custodial staff.

**Parents are encouraged to** take the A.C.E.S. test.

**Action Item:** Marta has been asked to create a living document for all of us to share. Parents in this group will need to take ownership of this document once it has been created.

**TOPIC OF PTO RECRUITMENT:**

Marta has created a recruitment tool that she will send to all PTO leaders. She has access to a master contact list for distributing the recruitment tool to families. Some schools grant access to PTO leaders, but some schools do not. IDES currently uses a great recruitment tool that they created themselves.

Recruitment for next year should be happening now to ensure that each school has a stable PTO leadership.

* Some schools, such as HFE, are currently going through a nomination process for vacant positions.
* Some schools, such as AMS, have no process in place nor do they have any nominations for next year’s PTO, which appears to have 100% vacant positions.
* IDES and MNSA will have vacant positions, but the former leadership will still be on hand at school next year to assist the new leadership.
* AHS will have vacant positions, but they are in the process of filling them and feel confident they will have a strong leadership in place.
* APS will have vacant positions next year, but current leadership will be on hand to assist and will consider the possibility of continuing to fill those vacant positions next year.

The Retreat has been scheduled to take place from 9:00am – 12:00pm on Saturday, May 11, 2019 at Asheville City Schools in the Board Room. A light breakfast will be provided, but no lunch. The goals of the retreat are as follows:

1. Identify the role of the PTO in the various schools and determine what changes need to be made to these roles in order to be more effective.
2. Examine the structure of the various PTO entities and determine what changes need to be made in order for the entities to attract more participants.
3. Consider what ways the PTO entities can better support teachers and not just students.
4. Share best and worst practices from each school.
5. Develop a plan for better communication among the schools, as well as between the schools and the district, and between the schools and the families themselves.
6. Fundraising! What can all of the PTO entities do to come together as one unit to support all of the students in ACS? Share funds for field trips so that all students have an equitable field trip experience.