

**VIBRANT SCHOOLS TACOMA COALITION**  
**SCHOOL BOARD MEETING ONE PAGE BRIEF FOR FEBRUARY 25, 2016:**

**TESTIMONY**

- Alton McDonald testified regarding his concern around mistreatment of black staff members in the district.
- Lucas Smiraldo of Vibrant Schools praised the district for spurring a significant improvement in school liaison participation in the Equity Advisory Committee and expressed his desire to see this impact replicated system wide around similar priorities.

**TOPIC AND ISSUES**

**1. SAFETY**

Dr. Jennifer Kubista, Director of Student Life, presented a report around changes in suspension and expulsion rates among “cohort” groups compared to previous years and noted specific advancements at specific schools.

**VIBRANT SCHOOLS QUESTIONS:**

1. In lieu of long-term suspensions or expulsions, what discipline tactics are being used?
2. Are we seeing fewer incidents of behavior leading to these forms of discipline or are administrators addressing these behaviors differently?
3. How is the term “cohorts” defined here?  
(For example, if a student is expelled from third grade...is s/he included then in her/his fifth grade cohort, or is that student out of the cohort?)

**AN OBSERVATION**

- Vibrant Schools noticed specific schools were highlighted in the report and wondered about other schools and regions not highlighted.

**TOPICS AND ISSUES**

**2. THE MEANING OF “GAP”**

Vibrant Schools welcomed a clarification from Superintendent around the phrase “gap”. The Superintendent clarified that the phrase “gap” should be used when comparing one group of students to another such as report outs by race.

3. Vibrant Schools agreed with the student representative who indicated that while CIHS is a great program, many families may not be able to afford them and for this reason, access could be an equity issue.

**VIBRANT SCHOOLS CALL TO ACTION: NONE AT THIS TIME**

## **SCHOOL BOARD FULL REPORT, FEBRUARY 25, 2016**

School Board Directors Karen Vialle, Debbie Winskill and Scott Heinze and Student Representatives Bernante and Olson were present. School Board Director Catherine Ushka was ill and School Board Director Andrea Cobb was excused. Superintendent Carla Santorno was present but Deputy Superintendent Josh Garcia was not.

### **Recognitions.**

Milgard Windows was recognized for their work with Meeker Middle School (NE Tacoma). The students are helping design new windows.

Also, the Board and Staff offered a thank you to the Whittier/Wainwright Boundary Review Committee.

### **Testimony:**

#### **Members of the Public Wishing to Address the Board:**

- **Aaron Blaisdell**, from APEX Engineering, thanked the District for their focus on STEM/SEAM education.
  
- **Alton McDonald from the New Century Justice Project:**
  1. Expressed concern about mistreatment of staff due to race, especially Black teachers.
  2. Noted that there are no Black principals at the comprehensive high schools.
  3. Stated that racism must be addressed.
  
- **Luke Smiraldo, for Vibrant Schools,**  
**Highlights:**
  1. Noted positive change in participation at the Equity Committee, once Central Office made it clear system-wide, that participation was required.
  2. Expressed the need for a system-wide approach for all schools in terms of addressing equity and creating a culture of equity.
  3. Asked that the public have an opportunity to respond to data offered in school board meetings that may not have been presented in advance.

## **Superintendent's Report.**

### **Highlights**

1. Superintendent Santorno is doing classroom observations about math, focusing on 8<sup>th</sup> grade algebra and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade math.
2. The District is in its 4th year of implementing a new math curriculum. The Superintendent is also visiting (or planning to visit) College in the High School classes.

### **No Policy Matters, The Financial Report is On the Web.**

**Curriculum and Instruction.** The main report concerned the assessment of student learning progress.

### **Highlights:**

1. The district is working to identify a universal screener, part of the academic aspect of The Whole Child Initiative. These will take 30-40 minutes each, three times a year. The tools are diagnostic in nature, identifying where students need additional academic support. More will be offered at the March 17 Study Session.
2. School Board Director Debbie Winskill continued to express concern about the reading texts, both for appropriateness and for challenging advanced readers.

**Report to the Board.** This was the quarterly report on Goal 4, Safety. The Discipline data was tracked here.

Director of Student Life, Jennifer Kubista presented.

The baseline year for discipline was based on the outcomes from 2012 and The Whole Child Initiative started in 2013. The student data was reported in "cohorts" clusters. The data indicates that long-term suspensions are down and expulsions are down.

### **Vibrant Schools Questions:**

#### ***1. How is the term "cohorts" defined here?***

(For example, if a student is expelled from third grade...is s/he included then in her/his fifth grade cohort, or is that student out of the cohort?)

#### ***2. In lieu of long-term suspensions or expulsions, what discipline tactics are being used?***

#### ***3. Are the student behaviors changing (so the behaviors that would have triggered the long-term suspensions or expulsions***

***are fewer) or are the disciplinary responses to the same behaviors changing?***

- 4. A long-term promise of the The Whole Child Initiative (TWCI) was that, ultimately, academic engagement would increase so academic performance would increase. What system-wide data does TPS have to support or refute this promise?**

*The presentation focused on selected schools including McCarver, Manitou, Blix, First Creek, Truman, Stewart.*

**Comments:**

1. Vibrant Schools would like any report presented to the Board to include schools that are exceeding, meeting and not meeting stated targets so that the public can receive a districtwide picture around how Tacoma Schools strategies are playing out in different parts of the district.
2. When system-wide data are not shown, it is impossible to know if the highlighted schools are representative of the district as a whole.

Dr. Kubista:

- Talked about the new climate survey.  
*(Vibrant Schools subsequently got a copy of all of the questions through a public records request.)*
- Indicated said that a local research group provided the new survey. It will be used starting in Spring of 2016.
- Noted some findings from the Healthy Youth Survey including that students are not reporting feeling more safe and that alcohol use (at any time in their lives) is very high.
- Used the word “gap” to describe overall changes in discipline...so she described a reduction in suspensions overall as “closing the gap.”

**A Clarification from the Superintendent**

Superintendent Santorno noted that the word “gap” is defined as a comparison of one group of students to another such as a comparison by race.

**Comment**

Vibrant Schools noticed that there was no comparison among groups, and no disparity data was offered.

### **A Question from Board Member Scott Heinze**

School Board Director Heinze asked a question about comparing Tacoma Public Discipline Data with other Districts. The response was, “We are still high.”

School Board Director Winskill asked about the impact of going to a “no discipline” approach which did not work well in the past. School Board President Vialle expressed positive reaction to the improvement in discipline data.

### **Comments from Board members.**

School Board Director Heinze praised Superintendent Santorno for winning the National Woman Superintendent award.

School Board Director Winskill asked for a report on “high-achievement” classes in the Friday Letter (not included yet).

Student Representative Bersante expressed concerns around a family’s ability to pay fees for College in the High School (CIHS) Credits.

### **Vibrant Schools Comment**

COLLEGE IN THE HIGH SCHOOL (CIHS) are advanced classes that are provided at high schools in conjunction with colleges/universities that student can take for college credit. about how students with limited funds can get access to these classes given the fees for taking them. Vibrant Schools agreed with the student representative who indicated that while CIHS is a great program, many families may not be able to afford them and for this reason, access could be an equity issue. It would be useful to know what the district’s policy is on fees for CIHS classes.

**VIBRANT SCHOOLS CALL TO ACTION:** None at this time