

**2015 Student Data Symposium
Washoe County School District**

Attendee Feedback Summary

*Prepared by the Office of Accountability
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The Washoe County School District's (WCSD) Office of Accountability and members of the Student Advisory Board teamed to host the first annual *Student Data Symposium* on March 27, 2015 at Truckee Meadows Community College. The half-day event brought together student leaders and several educators to engage in discussion about educational issues in the WCSD. The purpose of the event was to support students' awareness of information about school performance so that they can more fully exercise their leadership in school improvement issues. During the event participants were introduced to select school performance indicators and engaged in discussion with other students about possible contributors to school performance. Attendees were encouraged to use the information to advocate for further discussion at their schools.

Forty-one students and 23 district staff members attended the event. Participants were assigned to one of three groups of 15-20 people each. Groups rotated across three 30 minute facilitated discussion sessions. The topics of the sessions were (1) high school pathway and achievement gap, (2) school climate and safety, and (3) discipline. A fourth session was held for students and educators to reflect on the morning's discussions and to prioritize issues to share with students and school administrators at their individual schools. The day culminated in an administrator panel discussion in which student attendees were provided the opportunity to hear from educators about the value they place on partnering with students to affect school improvement.

Questions and comments were captured in each session by note-takers and an evaluation form was provided to collect feedback about the event experience. Discussion and evaluation points are summarized under the session headings below.

High School Pathway and Achievement Gap

Students examined indicators of the high school pathway including graduation rates, core credit attainment, proficiency rates on the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE), and remedial college placement and enrollment. Conversations about the high school pathway focused on two areas, including the relationship between core classes and future academic performance, and gender differences in core credit attainment.

- It was observed that a lower percentage of students are passing the HSPE than are passing core credits. Students believe there is a perception that core classes are easy to

pass and suggested that learning does not occur in core classes at a level that is needed to pass the HSPE, which also contributes to the need for remediation in college.

- Students attributed gaps between male and female students in core credit attainment to females being more mature than males, males having a greater emphasis on sports applied by both internally (self) and externally (adults and peers), and males are preparing for more hands-on positions that do not require much post-secondary education.

Students also commented on the need to include adjusted diplomas as a valid measure of high school completion (adjusted diplomas were not included in the presented data), the perception that the HSPE is an inaccurate reflection of learning that occurs in the classroom, and the notion that some teachers teach to the test.

School Climate and Safety

Students observed a declining perception of school climate across climate indicators as students transitioned from elementary school, to middle school, to high school. Participants attributed the decline to increased exposure to aspects of school life that follows adolescence, including introduction to new and different types of friends, experience with unique situations, increased stress, and exposure to drugs and alcohol. Students also described a change in their relationships with adults at school as a potential contributing factor to their experience of school climate: Participants noted that as high school students, they have more interaction with adults and less time in those interactions (as opposed to having the same teacher for the full day), and that the change in the quality of those interactions might be contributing to a belief that teachers do not care about them as much as their elementary or middle school teachers did.

Students noted the importance of recognizing emotional safety, such as judgment by peers and peer pressure, in addition to physical safety. They also theorized about a possible relationship between the safety of the neighborhood surrounding the school and the sense of safety at school, and suggested neighborhood safety may influence some students to bring weapons to school. When describing attendance and drug use, students were surprised that there was not an obvious relationship between the two. To positively affect safety and school climate, students recommended that school administrators solicit student solutions by providing anonymous paper surveys and hosting student-led focus groups without adults present. Additionally, students provided several suggestions on how to improve the climate survey, which focused on privacy, timing of survey administration, and survey format:

- *Privacy* Increase the sense of privacy when completing the survey by asking teachers to refrain from looking over students' shoulders at their responses and to seat students far apart from one another.
- *Timing of administration* Administer the survey in the fall semester before seniors begin to "check out".
- *Survey format* Offer a paper version of the survey. Paper surveys are perceived as more secure to some students than online surveys.

“We want to believe in a society that doesn’t discriminate...but we do.”

Student Attendee

Discipline

Indicators of discipline that were examined included suspensions and major discipline events, proportionality of suspensions across population groups, and the relationship between suspensions and on-time graduation.

Students noted disproportionality in suspension rates between white students and minority student groups.

Possible reasons for disproportionality included the likelihood of discrimination. One student commented “We want to believe in a society that doesn’t discriminate...but we do.” Parents were recognized as influencing discipline outcomes for students, where it was speculated that students whose parents have a bigger voice are less likely to be suspended for similar infractions. Students mentioned several suggestions for reducing the need for suspension, including:

- *Increase communication between students and adults.* Improved communication between students and teachers would influence the disproportionality of suspensions by allowing students to be more comfortable confiding in their teachers.
- *Enlist students to be proactive in supporting their friends in time of social, emotional, and/or physical need.* Students suggested they have a responsibility to prevent their friends from engaging in destructive behavior and suggested that peer support would reduce the likelihood of their friends acting out.
- *Investigate the root causes that lead students to engage in destructive behavior.* Behavior that leads to discipline is likely a symptom of something else going on within that student’s life. Teachers and other school staff members can investigate by talking with the student and his or her family before the need for suspension arises.

Highlights and Suggestions for Future Events

Thirty-nine attendees provided feedback about their experiences at the Student Data Symposium in a five question survey that was provided at the end of the event. Every person commented on at least one positive aspect of the day and offered suggestions to improve the event in the future. Comments and suggestions converged on four points. In general, attendees:

- *Wanted more time for discussion.* A possible solution to accommodate the request for more time is to extend the event to full day and provide lunch.
- *Found the workshop session extremely valuable.* Attendees would like more time dedicated to students and school staff working together in small groups to share perspectives and develop solutions.
- *Noticed adults slowly moved into the conversation during the sessions.* Some participants appreciated the adult input while others suggested they should have remained silent.
- *Appreciated the exposure to district-level information and the discussion with their peers.* In particular, students appreciated hearing from each other about the different experiences across schools.