

BOARDROOM CHATTER

PUBLICATION PREPARED BY ACPS PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

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Mr. Jeff Blank, Superintendent
Ms. Carley Clise, SMOB

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Moment of Silence

The school board asked for a moment of silence for Mrs. Nil Grove, ACPS Chief Information Technology Officer, who passed away earlier this month. Mrs. Grove had been employed by the school system for more than 15 years and was a tremendous asset to ACPS staff and students.

School Safety Employee

Mr. Anthony Rumgay, ACPS Assistant Supervisor of Student Support Services and School Safety, provided the school board with an update on School Safety Employees. ACPS previously employed five full-time School Security Employees (SSE) and five School Resource Officers (SRO), and according to Mr. Rumgay, ACPS now currently employs fourteen SSEs and six SROs.

SSEs have many years of training in law enforcement and bring with them a unique skill set from their prior employment. Many SSEs come from a diverse background, ranging from former SWAT team members, detectives, undercover agents and SROs. SSEs are certified special police commissioned officers. In order to obtain certification, SSEs must retire in good standing from their previous employer; complete 80 hours of a training course; attend 80 hours of SRO school; and complete active shooter training.

ACPS has a law enforcement presence in all schools on a daily basis. Placement of officers is based upon school population, location, and scheduled special events. Mr. Rumgay also noted that there are also several other officers working overtime at schools regularly.

Restraint and Seclusion

Mrs. Debbie Metheny, ACPS Director of Special Education and Student Services, updated the school board on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools. Restraint means "a personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of an individual to move their arms, legs, torso, or head freely." It can only be implemented by a staff member who has had all elements of the training as required by COMAR. Physical restraint does not include the following:

- Briefly holding a student in order to calm or comfort them
- Holding a student's hand or arm to escort the student from one area to another
- Moving a disruptive student who is unwilling to leave the area when other methods, such as counseling, have been unsuccessful
- Breaking up a fight in the school building or on school grounds

Seclusion means "the confinement of a student alone in a room, an enclosure, or any other space from which the student is physically prevented from leaving." Seclusion does not mean a behavior intervention plan of separating a student by placing them in an unlocked room from which the student is allowed to leave, or within a separate location in a classroom from which they are not physically prevented from leaving.

Currently, there are 94 open DOJ investigations for discrimination based on restraint and seclusion in elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. There are open investigations in 31 states and Washington, D.C. A recent investigation conducted in 2021 by the DOJ found that Frederick County Public Schools in Maryland discriminated against students with disabilities in pervasive noncompliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

MSDE announced a "top to bottom" review of seclusion and restraint policies to include a full review of its policies and procedures; taking active measures to prevent illegal and discriminatory use of restraint and seclusion; ensuring that students are in a safe school environment to learn and thrive;

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve minutes for meeting held on August 9, 2022.
2. Approve routine personnel actions for the period of August 1-31, 2022.
3. Receive school construction/maintenance report for the period of August 1-31, 2022
4. Receive monthly financial report.
5. Approval of LAC re-appointments for 3-year term
6. Receive bids for operations

and all students, including students with disabilities and students of color, are treated fairly and equitably throughout the state.

According to a report from MSDE on restraint and seclusion, there were 19,713 reported physical restraints during the 18-19 school year and only 1,834 in 2020-2021. Additionally, there were 9,532 reported seclusions in 2018-2019 and only 1,071 in 2020-2021.

Students with autism and emotional disabilities were, by far, the groups that were restrained and secluded the most, and many more boys were restrained and secluded than girls. Middle and high school had the highest incidence of restraint, and elementary and high schools had the highest incidence of seclusion.

In Allegany County, the data for 2021-2022 for Restraint is as follows:

- 25 total physical restraints
- 12 total students restrained
- All 25 instances were male
- 10 were two or more races
- 15 were white
- 19 receive special ed services

- 13 had a code of Autism
- 13 were in a self-contained special education environment

ACPS ended the practice of seclusion on January 1, 2022; however, prior to that, there were 38 total instances of seclusion and a total of four students that were secluded.

During the 2022 legislative session, HB 1255/SB 705 passed in the House 41-0 and in the Senate 133-0. This bill states that “physical restraint remains legal when deemed necessary to protect against imminent serious physical harm and when other interventions have failed or have been deemed inappropriate.” Seclusion is banned in public schools. Additionally, if a student is physically restrained ten times or more in a school year, the public school shall provide notice to MSDE no more than four business days after the student’s 10th incident of restraint. In ACPS, the central office will review the student’s case, including the circumstance of each incident and assess the school’s pattern of behavioral interventions to evaluate whether less restrictive interventions could have been used. ACPS will also share their recommendations with MSDE.

Mental Health Update

Mrs. Metheny also provided an update on mental health in ACPS. At the end of last year, ACPS employed a total of ten mental health specialists, which included certified social workers and licensed professional counselors. The school system wanted to add one additional position this year; however, there were three candidates that met the necessary and desired criteria, so the school board approved the addition of three positions for a total of thirteen mental health specialists. One of those individuals also specializes in addictions. None of these specialists serve more than two schools, drastically reducing the caseloads. Finally, ACPS also added, on a pilot basis, three more school counseling positions.

NEW BUSINESS

Consider Regulation Review of Attendance Policy (File: JED)

The school board reviewed the regulations to the above policy, whose purpose is “to define the school system student attendance policy.” The policy states, “Regular school attendance is expected of all students in ACPS. School attendance is directly related to school achievement. In order to maximize academic achievement, there must be a unified effort by all school staff, parents, students, and the community to improve overall school attendance. School administrators, teachers, and support staff are expected to make all reasonable attempts to assist students and parents in addressing those factors which cause students to be absent from school.”

Consider First Reading of Volunteer Policy (File: IJOC)

The school board approved the first reading of the above policy, whose purpose is “to state the Board’s policy for providing background checks on certain volunteers.” The policy states, “The BOE encourages volunteers to assist with curricular and extracurricular activities. Chaperones for “overnight field trips” or “foreign travel”, as defined in Policy IHOA or any other school sanctioned overnight activities, may not begin service with ACPS until after they have successfully passed a background check. Chaperones are not required to pass a background check when assisting with “day field trips” or “extended-day field trips”, as those terms are defined in Policy IHOA. Background checks shall be administered by the Department of Human Resources. Supervised volunteers are not required to undergo a background check.”

Vote to Meet in Executive Session October 11, 2022, as Necessary

The school board voted to meet in Executive Session on Tuesday, October 11, 2022, pending any note that there will not be a public meeting in July.

STUDENT BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS AND UPDATES

Ms. Carley Clise, SMOB

Carley is a senior at Mountain Ridge High School. She is a member of the soccer and softball teams, and also runs track. Carley hopes to pursue a career in medicine after graduation, and she is excited to be the new Student Member of the Board to represent her fellow students. Additionally, Carley told the school board that this year ACASC will resume the student council picnic, which is scheduled for September 22nd. ACASC is currently working to organize activities at the picnic to incentivize students to participate.