

At-Risk Working Group: Meeting 5 (Task Force Meeting 14)

Date: 5/30/2017

Goals for meeting:

- Finish defining the problems and articulating theories of action for creating cross-sector structures to improve outcomes for off-track secondary students
- Determine next steps

Meeting Summary:

Reiterate goals, vision, and principles and go over a brief recap of the off-cycle May working group meeting (slides 2-5):

Ramin Taheri went over the first few slides showing where the group left off after the previous meeting. He noted that while the slides show 4 different problems for the group to tackle, the highlighted problem (#4: Lack of cross-sector coordination on serving off-track secondary students) came out of RaiseDC and will be where the group is going to focus during tonight's meeting.

Ramin then went over a recap of the group's conversation during the off-cycle working group call in May (slide 6).

Task Force Member Comments/Questions:

- I agree that this is this is where we should focus our energy but we need to start earlier.
 - I think there are tangible policy solutions here that we should grab hold of to make recommendations. There are other possibilities as well.
- I agree that the 9th grade gap is important but we need to start earlier.
- As far as the attendance piece goes, we shouldn't spend much time on this because of Truancy Task Force.
- The Truancy Task Force should be renamed. There are lots of reasons why children are not in school. We don't need to duplicate efforts but we do need to incorporate the Truancy Task Force's work.
- I agree; with attendance, it always feels like we're kicking the can. I don't think we have a citywide approach because there is no momentum. Is there really citywide push?
 - I thought the same way but they are looking at different approaches.
 - I am encouraged that the group is looking at absences of all kinds.
- OSSE is implementing Check & Connect and could report out on it.
- I would like to see this as a recommendation. It could be a policy? Or a suggested program? We're not forcing schools to do anything. It could be opt-in for teachers. What level of suggestion should it be?
- The way I am envisioning the recommendations being most useful is though high-level phrasing. Within that, we could have several more specific recommendations to hand to others to implement. With the mid-year transfer recommendations, we got too specific. Here is a sample recommendation: "ensure students have positive adult relationships in schools". Under that could be the recommendation "track OSSE's progress with Check & Connect".
- I strongly suggest using pilot programs of other evidence-based programs. We should come up with three programs in total, with Check & Connect as one.

- Or, each sector could take one and come back in a year to report back.
- A possible theory of action: With a positive adult relationship, off-track students will graduate in 4-6 years.
 - I have a suggestion for another way to phrase the problem statement: “Too many students are getting off track/disengaging”. Then the theory of action attempts to solve that problem.
- It seems to me we’re saying that students who do well academically have at least one adult in their life that is engaging/positive experience.
 - We should limit it to school (one adult at school). The connection to school is the critical piece. How can we from a systematic cross-sector perspective make sure this happens?
- It depends on the level of investment. Check & Connect might not work for some kids because some kids need more than a check-in. One of the reasons we haven’t had this before is because we’ve never said this is that important and “put a stake in the ground”.
- This working group can put that stake in the ground and several years down the road have evaluated different programs and encourage investment more broadly.
- There could be a recognition program. If school commits, it receives recognition. There could be connections schools. You will have a connection if you come to this school.
- One of the pilots should include PD for teachers. Perhaps there should be an economic incentive attached.
- The process for anchor teachers should be more systematic. There should be a baseline for everyone. There are teachers that do it but it is very ad hoc.
 - We need to be careful how we articulate these more personal relationships between staff members and students. We should focus on families seeking this kind of relationship/mentorship.
- We’re looking at the mentorship relationship. To avoid becoming problematic, we should look at definition of mentorship relationship.
- We can craft recommendations to address the basic issues around having an anchor teacher. It could allow anchor teachers to let someone know what they would like to do and what they need.

Task Force Member Comments/Questions: Schools that are “Beating the Odds”

- What are certain schools doing that others are not? Share and replicate.
- Because of charter autonomy, we can’t force schools to collaborate. The problem is not in the identification of what works but how to get everyone interested.
- If there is a promising practice, I imagine there would be good deal of interest in seeing if another school could implement it.
- Schools could do a PD once per week or build partnerships with schools with similar demographics. Or, they could share PD once per month. However, there would most likely be logistical issues. That being said, having administrators and educators in same room talking about these issues and brainstorming ways to resolve them would be great.
- Is our recommendation going to be around a process or an issue or both?
- The biggest issue will be how you implement it and expand it—people are willing to share.
- What about this as a high level promise statement? “The city pledges that off-track secondary students are provided with most up-to-date, proven strategies.” Where is the recommendation here?
- If it were just me writing a report, it would be something like, “The city needs to ensure that evidence based practices are being shared and replicated at all schools”.

- I think we can agree that we have this responsibility. However, it is difficult to define “beating the odds”. I’m concerned that people won’t think the strategies are replicable.
- We could use what’s in the GradPathways report a way to define what it means to “beat the odds”.
 - We can go back to GradPathways and look at how they identified schools. However, what would we expect a high level recommendation to look like?
- We could restate that every school will have access to the latest and best practices in closing the achievement gap every academic quarter in DC or two times an academic year. Is that where we’re going?
- We talked previously about expanding the data bridge to other transition grades. Students at key transition points will go into new school with the school prepared to serve them. Right now, there is a focus on the 8th to 9th transition.
- It is promising. The question is, as soon as you make the info available, what do we do with that now that we have it? Before we rush to expand, we need a better sense of what schools will do with the data. Middle schools could ask for data reporting on how their former 8th graders fare in 9th grade. I think we should see how that plays out a little. One other thing that is not limited to off-track secondary students: we’ve been working on trying to make the first few days of school go more smoothly. And trying to figure out a way to transfer IEP info from MSDC (and not wait for SIS in SLED). DCPS has access through Qlick. We have a plan for particular training, staff, curricular info, etc. and more generalized supports.
- All of this feeds to a general recommendation about sharing information and not just transition grades.
- It’s about sharing and using data.
- You would think schools would know what to do but you have to spell it out to them.
- We need to better understand how schools are using information.
- This information sharing doesn’t have to be cross-LEA. Attendance data is an example. We can use data and information earlier to better support students.
- Should there be a more citywide approach?
 - There should be both: some sharing from the LEAs and some from the city. Truancy Task Force put this info out to parents.
- Is there different info that needs to be shared on a middle school level? Is that something that all LEAs should know? Is this key info pushed out at a citywide level? Is it a framework?
 - If we are sharing data, we want to be sure it is being used by the receiving entities. If the other school ignores/doesn’t use it for resource allocation, there is no sense in sharing. How it should be used/monitored?
- We should discuss an at-risk preference in lottery.
 - We should bring people in for at-risk preference and at-risk distribution.
- Problem # 3 (Lack of structures in place for cross-sector sharing of best practices for serving at-risk students) and problem #4 (Lack of cross-sector coordination on serving off-track secondary students) overlap.
- We may not cover all of these problems. The funding issue (problem #2) may not be right for us to tackle. We might not need to get to #3.
- Problem #2 (Inadequate or inefficiently used funding for at-risk students) is fascinating to me. We had a hearing on how we use at-risk money. Bottom line: a lot of the funding goes to at-risk programs but not all of it. We don’t know how charters use it.
- The plan moving forward will be to share notes, framed theories of action for problem #4, focus on problem #1 next and then plan for problem #2 after that.
- We should talk about buses for students without reliable transportation. We haven’t talked about it.