

Education Town Hall Meeting – Monday, January 22nd, 2018

Topics prepared for the School Board

Discipline Matrix

Staff members have expressed various concerns with the behavior matrix for students in Charles County Public Schools. Most of the staff members who have expressed concerns see our behavior matrix as being too lenient and ineffective at discouraging negative or problem behaviors. It does not encourage or enforce a progressive discipline policy, and allows too much flexibility in how problematic behaviors are addressed. Essentially, our discipline policy is not progressive in practice.

First, the behavior matrix does not mandate that on each successive occurrence (per student, not per class) of a negative or problem behavior that the administration is required to move to the next level of consequence. Staff members describe students receiving “conference with student” or “lunch detention” as a consequence for repeated behaviors; and not two or three times, but many times over. It is the feeling, based upon observation of student behaviors, that this only enables to continue with negative behaviors, rather than discouraging the behavior from repeating.

The suggested remedy would be to include language in the Behavior Matrix that mandates that successive occurrences of a student’s behavior will progress to the next level of consequence, until the maximum level of consequence has been reached, at which point, all successive occurrences of that behavior will be dealt with at that level. There also needs to be language to make it clear that consequences for behaviors are addressed per student, not per staff member. If four different staff members write a student up for the same behavior, the student should progress through the levels of consequence, not receive four different minimum-level consequences, as sometimes happens at present.

Second, while the behavior matrix does state that consequences from any given level may use consequences from a lower level, it does not mandate that a consequence of the appropriate level be given. For example, if a student exhibits what is considered a Level 3 behavior, an administrator can give a Level 1 consequence without giving a Level 3 consequence. This goes counter to the concepts taught in the de-escalation portion of CPI (Crisis Prevention Intervention) training, where students are to be met at the level of their current behavior and de-escalated from that point. The Anne Arundel Code of Conduct states, on page 8, *“The administrator always has the option to use an intervention from a lower level as long as one from the prescribed level is also employed.”* At present, there is insufficient confidence that students are receiving appropriate consequences for their expressed behaviors.

The suggested remedy would be to include the same language in our Behavior Matrix. It is also recommended that we adopt similar supports listed with our consequences in the Behavior Matrix (similar to the supports listed in the Anne Arundel Code of Conduct) that explicitly state who is to be contacted when the specified behavior occurs.

Third, there is no place in Synergy to mark what level the staff member writing the referral believes the behavior to be at. While an administrator may disagree that an expressed behavior is at the same level that the teacher believes it to be, but that would be the administration’s ultimate decision. However, if a

staff member writes up a student for a Level 1 behavior, and the behavior occurs again, it would be reasonable to assume that the staff member could write that repeat behavior up as a Level 2 behavior (if the Behavior Matrix allows for that behavior to escalate to Level 2. Repetitive occurrences of the same behavior would continue to escalate until the maximum level has been achieved.

The suggested remedy is to give staff members the option to mark a student's behavior at a suggested level of consequence (provided that they are following progressive discipline policies and not just marking students at the maximum level of consequence on the initial behavior) in Synergy. Alternatively, when interventions are documented, or persistent misbehaviors occur, misbehaviors are automatically pushed to the next level of consequence, which the Synergy system could likely mark automatically.

Fourth, the Behavior Matrix in the Code of Student Conduct has some nonsensical levels associated with numerous behaviors that should be re-examined. It does not make sense that certain behaviors are allowed to be dealt with in the same fashion as persistent reoccurrences of the same behavior. I submit the following examples:

1. **Class Cutting:** "Failing to attend a class, after arrival at school, without an excused reason" (Level 1) carries the same consequence as "Persistently failing to attend a scheduled class, after arrival at school, without excused reasons" (Level 1-2).
2. **Tardiness:** "Arriving late to class or school, without an excused reason" (Level 1) carries the same consequence as "*Persistently* arriving late to class or school" (Level 1-3).
3. **Truancy:** "Being absent from school or assigned activity without an excused reason" (Level 1) carries the same consequence as "*Persistently* being absent from school or assigned activity without an excused reason (Level 1-3).
4. **Disruption:** All four categories of disruption all begin at Level 1. Why do we treat "minor behavior that distracts from the learning environment (e.g., talking out of turn, throwing small items, horseplay, misuse of school property, selling of unauthorized items on school property)" the same as we treat "chronic and extreme behavior that disrupts the educational process and creates a substantial barrier to learning for other students across the school day)? They all begin as Level 1 behaviors.

There are, of course, many such examples of this in the Behavior Matrix. It does not make sense to have a student, for example, come late to class and receive a Level 1 consequence (which is fine), but then persistently come late to class and still receive a Level 1 consequence. This does not discourage the behavior from becoming one that is persistent; it instead enables the behavior to continue. The suggested remedy here is to set the minimum level of consequence for persistent behaviors to be one or more levels higher than merely a single occurrence of the behavior, depending upon the nature of the behavior in question. Tardiness to class would, under this revision, still be a Level 1 behavior, while *persistent* tardiness to class (say, 3 or more) would constitute a (minimum) Level 2 behavior. However, disruption may begin as a Level 1 behavior, while *persistent* minor disruption would begin as a Level 2 behavior and *persistent* serious disruptions may begin as Level 3 or Level 4 behaviors.

Some staff members have expressed that the current system of consequences for persistent behaviors discourage staff members from writing referrals. The feeling among staff is that there is no genuine consequence that will be imposed to deter the behavior, so the behavior will not change, and therefore, the referral process is not achieving the desired result; curbing negative behaviors. The fact that the persistent behaviors carry the same level of consequence as individual occurrences of negative behaviors

is largely what drives this lack of confidence in our Behavior Matrix to curb negative behaviors. Therefore, it has been suggested that persistent behaviors universally carry a greater consequence than initial or “one-shot” behaviors.

There is also a general feeling of, “Why bother to correct the behavior of students?” among staff in multiple schools, since there is insufficient backup from administration to encourage students to listen to teachers the first time. Addressing students multiple times prior to any genuine consequence only reinforces the notion that students can misbehave without consequence, thusly reinforcing the negative behavior. Since teachers supposedly bear equal responsibility for student behavior, if students receive no consequences for failing to listen to teachers, it actively trains the students to not listen when a teacher gives the student a direction, making it more difficult to maintain any sense of discipline within the school setting.

Our students are bright, and as they realize that they do not have to listen to any individual teacher, particularly those teachers that they do not know very well, they ignore directions more and more. There are numerous interactions where an administrator is called to help redirect students, and when the administrator comes, they simply repeat the same instruction that the teacher had already been giving, which actively trains the students that they do not have to listen until the administrator becomes involved. Some administrators repeat the directions multiple times as well, diminishing the effectiveness of even contacting that administrator for assistance, as the students quickly learn that they do not have to listen to the administrator, either.

The suggested remedy for this concern is to either bring back insubordination as its own infraction, or to make it policy that when a teacher gives a reasonable directive that is not followed, that there is an immediate consequence for that failure when it is reported to administration, every time it is reported.

Lastly, there is a concern among teachers that we are not able to see what the disciplinary consequences are for students who receive referrals to administration. Article 11 of our Negotiated Agreement states that overall, school discipline is the shared responsibility of the teacher, administration, and the board, and that the teacher will handle, in as far as possible, the discipline problems in the classroom with the full support and cooperation of the administration and the Board of Education (provided that the teacher has conformed to professional and ethical procedures).

To that end, our Negotiated Agreement also states that teachers shall be informed at the earliest possible date of any action taken on referrals. Numerous teachers are unaware of the outcome of disciplinary referrals; a condition that stretches back several years. While teachers are able to see referrals that they put into the Synergy system, they are unable to see what the outcome of those referrals happens to be. It would seem logical to be able to see the outcome of past referrals within the Synergy system and receive some notification that a referral was addressed. That would provide immediate notification once a referral was “processed”. At present, there is no clearly defined system for notification once a referral has been processed, or what the action taken was.

Not only is this a potential violation of our Negotiated Agreement, it does not provide a reasonable level of transparency that demonstrates that teacher referrals are handled properly. There is currently no way to check other than addressing administration directly as to the disposition of any given referral; a practice that could be considered challenging to the administration. It could potentially set up an adversarial relationship between teacher and administration. Alternatively, it has been expressed on multiple

occasions that some teachers simply stop writing referrals, as they lack confidence in the administration's ability and/or willingness to deal with disciplinary issues within the school setting. This is not a concern that is limited to only one school, or only one school system, and a lack of confidence in administration can lead to a breakdown in communication and/or the following of protocol. Teachers should be the first line of defense in handling negative behaviors in the classroom and within the school environment. If teachers lack confidence that negative behaviors will be properly addressed, their effectiveness as this "first line of defense" is diminished. How can teachers be expected to hold primary responsibility for student discipline when they have no control over the disciplinary outcome, including being aware of what the disciplinary action taken was.

The suggested remedy is to provide immediate notification (preferably through the Synergy system) on each referral that is processed; to be given to teachers within 24 hours of the referral being handled.

Additional Resources:

- "Anne Arundel County Public Schools Code of Conduct" - <https://www.aacps.org/cms/lib/MD02215556/Centricity/Domain/247/codeofconduct.pdf>
- Reischer, Erica. "How to Get Your Kids to Listen the First Time"; *Psychology Today*, November 17th, 2014 - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-great-parents-do/201411/how-get-your-kids-listen-the-first-time>
- Rosemond, John. "How to Get Kids to Listen"; *Prager University*, June 12th, 2017 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= toRV6ziOYg>

Promotion Requirements/Social Promotion

The concern regards the notion that some classes are more vital to a student's educational success than others are, and therefore students are not required to pass all of their classes. Our students are keenly aware of the differences between classes that they are required to pass and classes that they know they do not have to be successful in. This has led to an increase in negative behaviors within classrooms that students view as "unimportant", as their focus drifts from educational concerns and focuses more on socialization. It also affects students who are genuinely interested in receiving instruction in particular areas; namely science, social studies, and related arts at the middle school level (or "specials" in elementary school).

In the current climate with Prince George's County under review for "grade fixing" and promoting students who have not actually fulfilled the requirements for graduation, it is the feeling of staff members that promoting students to the next "grade level" not only does not serve to benefit our students, but it also exposes teachers, and the county, to accusations of educational malpractice. It has been suggested that students would benefit more from being "retained" (if they must be) at younger ages as opposed to experiencing "failure" by the time they get to high school when they haven't received enough credits to promote to the next "grade level". We work with students by their grade level, not their age. We do not focus on students as being "12 years old, and therefore, they should be in 12-year-old classes"; we focus on them as being 7th graders and teach them at a 7th grade level. Our teachers do not want to be under the same level of scrutiny over grades and social promotion as Prince George's County teachers are currently experiencing.

There have been expressed concerns regarding graduation rates at some schools in Charles County. There is doubt as to whether some of our schools' graduation rates are genuine (Thomas Stone's high graduation rates were specifically mentioned), which becomes even more problematic when compared to the same questions that have been raised in neighboring Prince George's County.

The suggested remedy would be to see a requirement that students are required to pass all classes in elementary and middle school (or possibly move toward a "credits" system as they have in high school). Many teachers that I have heard from feel that students should be required to pass all of their "core content" classes, and to be required to pass their "related arts" classes as well. However, some recognize that some students are not necessarily gifted or motivated in particular areas and would be open to the idea that sometimes students can experience failure in certain areas, yet still promote to the next grade level.

For example, you could give 1 credit per class period, per year. This would mean that Math and Language Arts classes, at the middle school level, would receive 2 credits per year, and so you could require 6 credits for students to promote to high school. Science and Social Studies classes would receive 1 credit per year, and you could set the requirement that students need 5 (combined) credits in Science and Social Studies in order to promote (thus giving students a little bit of leeway if they are unsuccessful in those courses). Related Arts classes could be treated the same way, with 5 credits being required to promote (with students taking 2 credit hours of Related Arts per year; .5 credit hours of Physical Education, and 1.5 credit hours of other subjects, such as art, music, or technology classes).

Additional Resources:

- Aldridge, J., Goldman R. "Social Promotion"; *Education.com*, May 7th, 2014 - <https://www.education.com/reference/article/social-promotion-education/>
- "Effects of Social Promotion on Students"; *Seattlepi.com*, retrieved on January 11th, 2018 - <http://education.seattlepi.com/effects-social-promotions-students-2113.html>
- Warren, Franchesca, "Too Many Students Rely on Social Promotion"; *Huffpost*, September 29th, 2014 - https://www.huffingtonpost.com/franchesca-warren/social-promotion-is-not-a_b_5896120.html

Educational Accountability (A sub-topic of Social Promotion)

Reading levels among students and the issue of promoting students who are not prepared for the next grade level is a growing concern among staff. More and more students (without IEPs) are coming to the middle school level way below the expected reading level for a student at that grade level. Teachers have expressed concerns about not being certified to teach elementary, yet having students in their classrooms that are functionally on an elementary-school level in reading or mathematical skills. The question has been raised: "Why are we not holding the elementary schools accountable for passing along students that are so far behind?" This becomes an especially pointed topic of conversation given the amount of time that elementary school students spend on reading and mathematics.

The suggested remedy is that students who are two or more grade levels behind in reading or mathematics, that do not qualify for special education services, be retained at their current grade level until their reading or mathematics level is sufficient for them to no longer be two or more grade levels behind. This increases accountability for teachers, parents, *and* students, and would significantly reduce

concerns related to students being promoted to grades beyond their ability level. While it is recognized that this would initially be an unpopular policy and would result in a larger number of students being retained the first year that this policy is implemented, there is confidence among staff that this issue would take care of itself as parents and students become accustomed to the policy change. Given sufficient “advance notice”, parents and students could adequately prepare for any change in policy.

Additionally, some staff members have expressed concerns with the push for students being “college and career ready” for a variety of reasons. While, on the whole, it’s a great goal, it extends down into elementary school, and those students have very different priorities, as college is two whole lifetimes away to a six year old. Concerns have been expressed about students who are not passing CCPS Post-Tests and PARCC, yet are still being promoted, since these tests are the standard by which teachers are being evaluated. How can we ethically give students a minimum of 50% for their grade in the gradebook when they completely bomb the post-tests that are used to measure teacher effectiveness? Test scores have a major impact upon teacher evaluations, but a minimal impact upon student grades.

The suggested remedy is to either get rid of standardized testing as a part of teacher evaluations, or to require students to pass their assessments to promote to the next grade level. It has also been strongly suggested that these high-stakes test scores have greater impact upon a student’s grade. Right now, the feeling is that these “high-stakes tests” are only high-stakes for teachers, not for the students that these tests are supposed to benefit.

There have also been concerns expressed regarding the grade recovery program. Some teachers are concerned that student grades are being recovered (read: changed) without sufficient evidence that the student completed a rigorous program of study that is designed to help the students master the skills or tasks that they failed to master in the regular classroom setting. The suggested remedy is to have greater transparency for the grade recovery program, and to require that schools use the county’s “Change of Grade” form and procedures when altering any grades as a result of students successfully completing grade recovery.

Another matter that has been brought up is the pressure to pass students, regardless of the individual student’s achievement. Some staff feel that there is insufficient support from administration, and teachers are intimidated into changing grades for students who did not earn the results that the grades are being changed to. There is also a feeling that there is extreme pressure to pass students to be considered an effective teacher, and if students fail, it is the teacher’s fault that the student failed. There is even a question on the survey given to students and parents that suggests that the teacher is responsible when students fail.

Lastly, the notion that students may not in the future have to meet a 2.5 grade point average requirement to participate in extra-curricular events (notably sports) has raised some concern among staff. The notion that our children are students first and athletes second should be of a primary concern for any educational institution. There are some staff members that feel that we are prioritizing sports over academics in Charles County. The suggested remedy is to maintain the requirement that students must have a minimum 2.5 GPA to be eligible for extracurricular opportunities.

Co-Teachers and Instructional Assistants

It is the belief among some staff members that we have insufficient instructional resources to provide for our special needs students. Instructional assistants and co-teachers can also offer valuable feedback on how to meet the individual needs of students in our classrooms. That can take the form of a change of pacing for some students, the order in which information is presented to better meet the needs of students with organizational deficits, and changes to the content of information presented to make it more accessible for students with those special needs.

As our special education population blooms here in Charles County, the need for additional hands-on assistance in each classroom becomes more pronounced. We have more inclusion classes than ever before, and struggle to meet the needs of our changing population of students, as we have not had more instructional assistants or co-teachers to resource and provide the same quality of service that we used to be able to provide. With the rise in the number of special needs students, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate for every student's individual needs without the assistance of an instructional assistant or a co-teacher in our classrooms. Data collection, modification, and grading also become challenges, given the number of students with IEPs in any individual class, and it makes it very difficult for teachers to help students to reach their full potential. Some teachers feel that with the amount of students with special needs in their classrooms and the amount of work that having them entails, they are functioning as case managers for these students, since the workload to record accurate data for their students is so great.

Additionally, planning time with co-teachers and instructional assistants often does not fall within working hours, as schedules do not permit for time to plan with those other educators. Part of the potential planning time is due to an ever-increasing number of scheduled meetings with the Instructional Leadership/Resource Team and with administration. Furthermore, instructional assistants are often called upon to provide substitute coverage for absent teachers, drastically reducing their ability to be of assistance in the classroom setting.

There are also quite a few teachers that take issue with the fact that our lowest paid and sometimes lowest trained employees are teaching interventions to our students with the greatest needs. We have instructional assistants that are teaching math and reading interventions for students, and those students are being deprived of time in other subject areas that they may excel in, such as related arts, to receive supplementary instruction in mathematics and reading. This is not equitable for our instructional assistants, who receive no greater compensation for the added responsibilities of being the primary (and oft-times only) teacher in a classroom for students who have special needs. It is neither equitable in terms of time for our teaching staff to accomplish their primary education goals (particularly for students that don't even receive instruction in certain area, such as the aforementioned related arts).

The suggested remedy would be to see a requirement that if there are more than three special needs students in any one class that there should be either an instructional assistant or a co-teacher to help ensure that accommodations are being met. It helps to keep the student-to-teacher instructional ratio at a reasonable level, as many special needs students require one-on-one assistance at least part of the time during class. Additionally, a certificated professional should always teach students who have the highest needs. This may require an increase in certificated staffing to teach intervention classes.

Additional Resources:

- MacMillan, Ken. “The Benefits of Using Classroom Assistants”; *The Teaching Professor*, 2009 - <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/the-benefits-of-using-classroom-assistants/>
- Webster, Rob. “What’s the Evidence On... the Impact of Teaching Assistants?”; *Education Media Centre*, March 11th, 2014 - <http://educationmediacentre.org/researchnews/whats-the-evidence-on-the-impact-of-teaching-assistants-3/>
- “Teaching Assistants Improve Pupils’ Results, Studies Show”; *The Guardian*, February 26th, 2016 - <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/feb/26/teaching-assistants-improve-pupils-results-studies-show>

Equivalent Time for Core Content Classes

It has been suggested for years that teachers of core content classes receive equivalent time to teach their subjects; effectively, an equal opportunity to learn in each subject area. In particular, our Science and Social Studies teachers have been required to not only teach their content, but to reinforce the reading and writing of informational text that is a part of the language arts standards. Science and Social Studies are expected to convey content and to support language arts standards, but only get half of the amount of time allotted to language arts in order to meet expectations. This concern comes primarily from science and social studies teachers.

The suggested remedy is to alter school schedules to allow for all classes to have equivalent time. There has been no evidence provided to demonstrate that double time in mathematics and language arts classes have had any impact on the success of students in those subjects at the middle school level. In the absence of that evidence, adjusting schedules at the middle school level to allow for four core class periods and two related arts periods per day (each approximately one hour in length, minus transition time), organized by the students’ ability level in their related arts subjects rather than strictly by grade level. This would allow for related arts teachers to receiving lunch and planning time, and for students to select multiple areas of interest to pursue during related arts time.

Teacher Workload

This concern seems to be a perennial issue. Teachers are (seemingly) given more and more “other duties as assigned” as time goes by. It is understood that there are other responsibilities given to all employees of the school system, and that this problem is not unique to any single school system. It is a concern that leads to greater stress among teachers, which negatively impacts the school setting, including the loss of excellent teaching staff (including instructional assistants) to other schools or fields of employment.

Adequately addressing this concern is difficult, as the school system has many unmet needs, from fully staffed schools to having resources available as needed. Many teachers are not fully aware of the School Board’s efforts to support them in deed, as opposed to supporting them in word only. This is not specifically a failing of the School Board, as there are teachers who understand how we are supported, and that your support is limited by factors beyond your control. It may simply be a matter of regular communication (perhaps in the School News bulletin) as to how your support is ongoing, with specific examples to better publicize that show of support.

We have all heard (or used) the terms “overworked”, “underpaid”, and “underappreciated” when it comes to teaching. The focus on teaching as a profession right now is primarily negative, making it difficult

to recruit and retain teaching staff, which only adds to the workload of those who remain. Teachers, instructional assistants, and ILT are often called upon to provide substitute coverage (which is not universally handled according to stated policies in terms of who is providing the coverage) in addition to their regular responsibilities, as there are not enough human resources to go around on some days. It is understood that administration is working to address this issue, but when staff are called upon to take on additional duties, it only serves to feed the notion that there is simply “too much to be done, without enough time in which to do it”.

As a simple example of a workload concern, to collect funds for a field trip, a teacher must collect money, hand-write receipts for each student, and fill out a triplicate form that double-verifies all monies collected, and then turn in the triplicate form, plus the carbon copied (yellow) receipts from the receipt book. This entire process has layers of redundancy that make collecting money a chore, and it is well above and beyond the simple language that states, “teachers’ responsibility is limited to collection and forwarding to the office” in Article 12 of our Negotiated Agreement.

The suggested remedy is to look into cutting non-essential duties out of the regular workday. Reducing the amount of paperwork needed to fulfill one’s responsibilities would be a great relief to teaching staff (and likely administration). It may also be useful to define what “other duties as assigned” is intended to include and to limit the number of “other duties” that may be assigned to any one staff member from a list of potential duties that may be assigned. Alternatively, approving a policy similar to the “Fair Workload Charter” (referenced below) limiting teachers to no more than two hours’ directed time per week for staff, and three hours per week for leadership. Clearly defining some type of limit to the amount of “extra work” that can be given to any individual staff member could go a long way toward reducing the amount of stress that staff member accumulates throughout the course of a school day or school year.

Alternatively, requiring written explanation as to why staff members must perform “other duties” in excess of a specified number of necessary duties, similar to the language used in Article 13 (Section P) of our Negotiated Agreement with regard to multiple course preparations would be helpful toward reducing teacher workload. It may encourage leadership to look into which duties are truly necessary, and which duties may either take low priority, or could be handled by parent volunteers, which would increase parent involvement in our community schools.

Also, clearly stating what forms of communication are considered sufficient when it comes to contacting parents could greatly ease the burden of teachers who spend countless hours attempting to call parents to notify them of classroom concerns or behaviors that they see from students. One might think that the use of documentation of grades and behavior within the Synergy system would be considered sufficient notice to parents, as all parents have means to access Synergy if and when they so choose (including using public resources, such as libraries, to access the Synergy via the internet).

Additional Resources:

- Downey, Maureen. “Get Schooled”; *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2017 - <http://getschooled.blog.myajc.com/2017/10/30/national-teacher-survey-overworked-underpaid-underappreciated-questioned-and-blamed/>
- “Public School Teaching”; *Top Master’s in Education* - <https://www.topmastersineducation.com/public-school-teaching/>

- Harris, Colin. “The Level of Workload Expected of Teachers is Not Improving Schools, But It is Wrecking Lives”, *tes.com*, 2016 - <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-views/level-workload-expected-teachers-not-improving-schools-it-wrecking>
- “Fair Workload Charter”; *Education Improvement Board*, 2016 - http://www.nottinghamschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/53683_EIB-FAIR-WORKLOAD-CHARTER-2PP_6.pdf

Synergy for Elementary Schools

The use of Synergy at the elementary level does not grant teachers autonomy in grading, nor does it work as advertised. Primary classroom teachers have complete control over the report card, while specials areas teachers have virtually none. While each teacher has control over their individual gradebook, when it is time to do report cards, special areas teachers must, according to how Synergy has been set up, complete their grades *before* the primary classroom teacher, as the primary classroom teacher has to import grades from the specials areas teachers into their gradebook in order to export the grades onto the report card (as it is set up). Additionally, indicators for the report cards do not calculate correctly. While teachers can correlate individual assignments with indicators for learning, the indicators do not actually correspond with the lessons for all areas. Librarians and media specialists were not given access to the gradebook, and restricted access to instructional assistants reduced the ability for instructional assistants to help to maintain classroom control, as they can not enter referrals into Synergy.

The suggested remedies are to alter the Synergy setup for elementary schools to conform to what middle and high schools are set up as. This would allow the system to pull grades from individual teachers, rather than making it the responsibility of one teacher to provide the grades and comments for all classes (including classes that they do not teach). Additionally, all staff should have access to the Synergy program, at least for the purposes of using Synergy for discipline referrals. Finally, indicators should be revised, along with the input and assistance of all curriculum areas and content specialists, to become applicable to all content areas.

Use of Facilities/Performance Spaces

When it comes to the performing arts (band, chorus, drama, or orchestra) in Charles County, the schools are lacking in available performance spaces at all levels. Our facilities are too small, and overbooked for events. There is no dedicated time set aside for middle and elementary schools to schedule performance events in the high school auditoriums, and staff attempting to schedule events at the high schools are at the mercy of whomever is in charge of those facilities. The levels of service provided to high school programs is higher than that which is made available to elementary or middle schools that wish to use the spaces. It is understood that it is state law that there are no auditorium spaces built into elementary and middle schools, and that when schools undergo renovations, if an auditorium space is present, it is to be converted into classroom space. This forces our performing arts programs to use our high school spaces. There is no other decent option, as the behavior of the audience is influenced (or sometimes dictated) by the venue, and sound quality is affected, depending on the venue.

Theater managers, at present, have the right to deny the use of lighting and sound equipment for performances given by middle and elementary school students that they would otherwise provide if the performance was made up of high schoolers. This provides a disproportionate level of service to the students of Charles County and indicates that our elementary and middle school students are “less

deserving” of all of the available elements that could enhance their performance experience. Given the fact that “theater manager” is an extra duty position with no clearly defined expectations of their duties, at present, theater managers are being paid a stipend to either provide services to groups seeking to use auditorium space, or are being paid a stipend to *not* provide services.

The suggested remedy is to set designated days during the recommended weeks of the month for elementary and middle school students to schedule performances at the high schools. These designated days would be blocked off from use by high schools and outside requests until the first Friday in October to allow elementary and middle school performing arts groups to schedule the use of those days. As of the first Friday in October, unused days would be released to be used by anyone seeking to schedule events during those times.

Additionally, there should be clearly written expectations for the duties of the theater manager, and those duties (and the services provided) should be consistent for all performing groups associated with Charles County Public Schools. The theater manager should be responsible for providing those services to all Charles County Public Schools performing groups who request them, or to designate students and other teachers who are permitted to operate the equipment necessary to provide for lighting, sound, and other technical aspects of performance.

Lastly, it has been requested for years that the School Board adopt a plan for the future construction of a facility for the performing arts that is of sufficient size to host county-wide events, similar to the Mary Harrison Center located in Calvert County. This facility could host performances given by Charles County Public Schools students, and could be made available for the community to rent for performances or large-scale meetings. Such a facility could even host elementary and middle school promotion ceremonies, and high school graduation ceremonies. For far too long, our athletic facilities have far outshined the facilities provided for the performing arts in Charles County, which creates a disparity between how we allocate resources for students interested in athletic activities versus how we allocated resources for students interested in the performing arts. Our athletic facilities hold larger audiences, and are far more varied than a single auditorium per high school (swimming pools, basketball stadiums, football stadiums, outdoor sporting fields, etc...). While it is recognized that funding is an issue, there has, thusfar, been no visible plan to look for a location to build such a performing arts facility, nor have there been any plans drafted for the construction of such a facility at any point in the future.

Qualifications of Evaluators

Some staff feel that the persons responsible for conducting teacher evaluations lack the proper qualifications to determine whether a teacher is effectively performing their duties. It has been suggested that, as outlined in Malcolm Gladwell’s book, “Outliers: The Story of Success”, many administrators have not spent the 10,000 hours that Gladwell lists as a qualification to become “experts” in their field (or having achieved mastery in that field). This qualification is based upon a study by psychologist K. Anders Ericsson in the 1990’s where his results demonstrated that it takes approximately ten years, or roughly 10,000 hours of hard practice to become great at any particular skill. As they have not become experts in their field, by this measurement, they do not possess sufficient knowledge of the content in the classrooms.

The suggested remedy is to have a “master teacher” for each subject area perform content evaluations who not only carries administrative certification, but who also has the requisite 10,000 hours of expertise

in that content area. This “master teacher” should not be stationed at any one school, but instead be vetted by the Board of Education and the Education Association of Charles County, and come in to impartially observe and score the professional part of the evaluation. This “master teacher” could also function as a teacher mentor for teachers in their specific content area.

Additional Resources:

- Gladwell, Malcolm. “Outliers: The Story of Success”; *Little, Brown & Co.*, 2008 - <https://1.cdn.edl.io/yeDNUzxNZi8D02CILAUXb1PnzexgjXOeU0QJF0k7zVufFvRd.pdf>