

INFORMATION ITEM

Date: August 28, 2017
To: Members, Board of Education
From: Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.
Subject: Response to the Community Review Committee (CRC) Report

BACKGROUND

For more than four decades, the Community Review Committee (CRC) has united stakeholders around an expansive set of initiatives and supported transformative growth of District 39's mission. The Community Review Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Education, draws participation from District 39 parents, community members, teachers, and administrators. Each spring, this committee generates a report on a topic of community interest, resulting in strategic recommendations supported by research. Following a June report by administration detailing the previous year's progress with the strategic plan goals/outcomes, the Superintendent and administrative team reviews the CRC's report. Then in August, the Superintendent presents a formal response regarding implementation of CRC recommendations.

CRC's report, "School Climate," presented findings and recommendations focused primarily on improving the District's commitment to "provid[ing] an environment that supports the academic, social-emotional, and physical well being of each student."¹

SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSE TO THE CRC

The Superintendent reviewed and presented the following strategic recommendations to District 39's administrative team which includes those presented by the Community Review Committee:

1. District 39 recommends approval of the Statement of Inclusion as presented in June to the Board of Education.
2. District 39 should identify areas of difference that exist in its student body and develop ways to promote how these differences can be respected and celebrated by students, parents, and teachers.
3. District 39 should assess the effectiveness of all areas where social-emotional learning is currently taught, including Second Step, and research other programs that will support students in social-emotional learning. In addition, the district should assess whether any of its current classroom practices are having the unintended effect of making children feel excluded and promote more sensitive alternatives instead.

¹ <http://wilmette39.ss9.sharpschool.com/cms/one.aspx?portalId=360930&pageId=845727>

4. District 39 should engage and utilize student leadership to help support expectations and promote a positive school climate.
5. District 39 should help parents understand why it is promoting an improved school climate and give parents tools they need to support their children in this endeavor.
6. District 39 should develop a protocol to educate parents, teachers, and students in order to improve communication about district policies, processes, and services with respect to situations involving bullying and social conflict.
7. District 39 should emphasize and prioritize the promotion of “upstander behavior” in its students, which is the practice whereby instead of colluding with or passively witnessing bullying, children either directly or indirectly say “no” to bully-victim behavior.

The Superintendent and administration supports these recommendations and acknowledges that each contribute to achieving the intended outcome of the School Climate continuing initiative. As stated in the strategic plan, District 39 continues to be committed to reviewing current practices, study best practices and develop short-and long-term plans to improve school climate. District 39 plans to embed these recommendations in the 2017-2018 Strategic Plan under School Climate as appropriate. Appendix A provides a draft of this initiative with action steps. The 2017-2018 Strategic Plan will be presented to the Board during the September Board of Education meeting.

CONCLUSION

The Superintendent commends the 2016 -2017 Community Review Committee members for the comprehensive work and research required to provide the findings and recommendations in the report. These strategic recommendations will assist District 39 in delivering its mission:

District 39’s mission is to nurture, guide, and challenge students to become creative thinkers, collaborators, and socially responsible, compassionate, and productive citizens of a global society.

We provide an environment that supports the academic, social-emotional, and physical well being of each student by:

- Ensuring all staff are highly qualified and well supported.
- Fostering strong partnerships with parents and the broader community.
- Balancing educational priorities and fiscal responsibilities to best support our students and community.²

The Superintendent values and appreciates CRC’s valuable research as it contributes to the strategic planning process and ensures that District 39 remain current in best practices. District 39 continues to support the work of the committee and looks forward to future reports.

Respectfully submitted for presentation to the Board of Education,



Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D., Superintendent

² Ibid

Appendix A

DRAFT School Climate: Creating a Culture of Empathy

<p>Situation</p>	<p>There is a need to better develop empathy, instill respect, and promote acceptance of responsibility within our school communities. Currently, debates regarding the difference between social conflict and bullying are occurring among a variety of people in and out of the educational setting. Potentially, some situations defined as “bullying” could actually be incidences of typical social conflict for the age group. Education of all District 39 stakeholders is needed in this area and continued efforts should be made in developing a common understanding.</p> <p>The district takes cases of bullying seriously and investigates all reports of bullying. Before, during and after school bullying incidences may involve racial and/or religious tension, social conflicts and/or bullying in person or online through social media. These types of incidences are known to have an impact on student attendance as it contributes to social avoidance. Therefore, proactive measures need to be made in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A coordinated effort to develop empathy, instill respect, and promote acceptance of responsibility will reduce behavioral incidents. • A single standard format for tracking behaviors will help identify patterns of social conflict and bullying. • Education will help parents and students understand the difference between social conflict (which is a normal part of social learning) and bullying (which is harmful). • Professional development for staff will help improve responses to behavioral incidents.
<p>Question(s)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we promote empathy, respect, and responsibility in students? • What is the difference between social conflict and bullying? • What tracking system can be implemented consistently so that students transitioning from schools remain on the “radar”? • What venues should be used to educate students, teachers, and parents about bullying and social conflicts? • How do we empower teachers to respond to incidents of bullying and social conflict? • What research embedded in Social Emotional Learning and the Second Step program helps District 39 refine our efforts in improving school climate?
<p>Intended Outcome</p>	<p>District 39 will review current practices, study best practices and develop short- and long-term plans to improve school climate.</p>
<p>Action Steps</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Add the Statement of Inclusion to District 39’s website under its mission statement. 2. Identify areas of difference in the student body and develop ways to promote how these differences can be respected and celebrated by students, parents, and teachers. 3. Identify and communicate explicit definitions for social conflict vs. bullying. 4. Plan educational for parents, staff, and students regarding the distinction between social conflict and bullying. 5. Revise practices to have meaningful consequences to behavior/restorative practices. 6. Investigate ways to engage and utilize student leadership to help promote a positive school climate and “upstander behavior”. 7. Develop a consistent practice of Early Childhood - grade 8 behavior tracking among schools. 8. Establish behavior baseline data to help monitor progress. 9. Review Second Step Bullying supplemental materials. 10. Review of the SEL curricula, universal screeners, strategies, and resources by the Response to Intervention (RtI)/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Committee. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Second Step Curriculum Resources b. Second Step’s Bullying Supplemental Materials c. Other similar esources available.