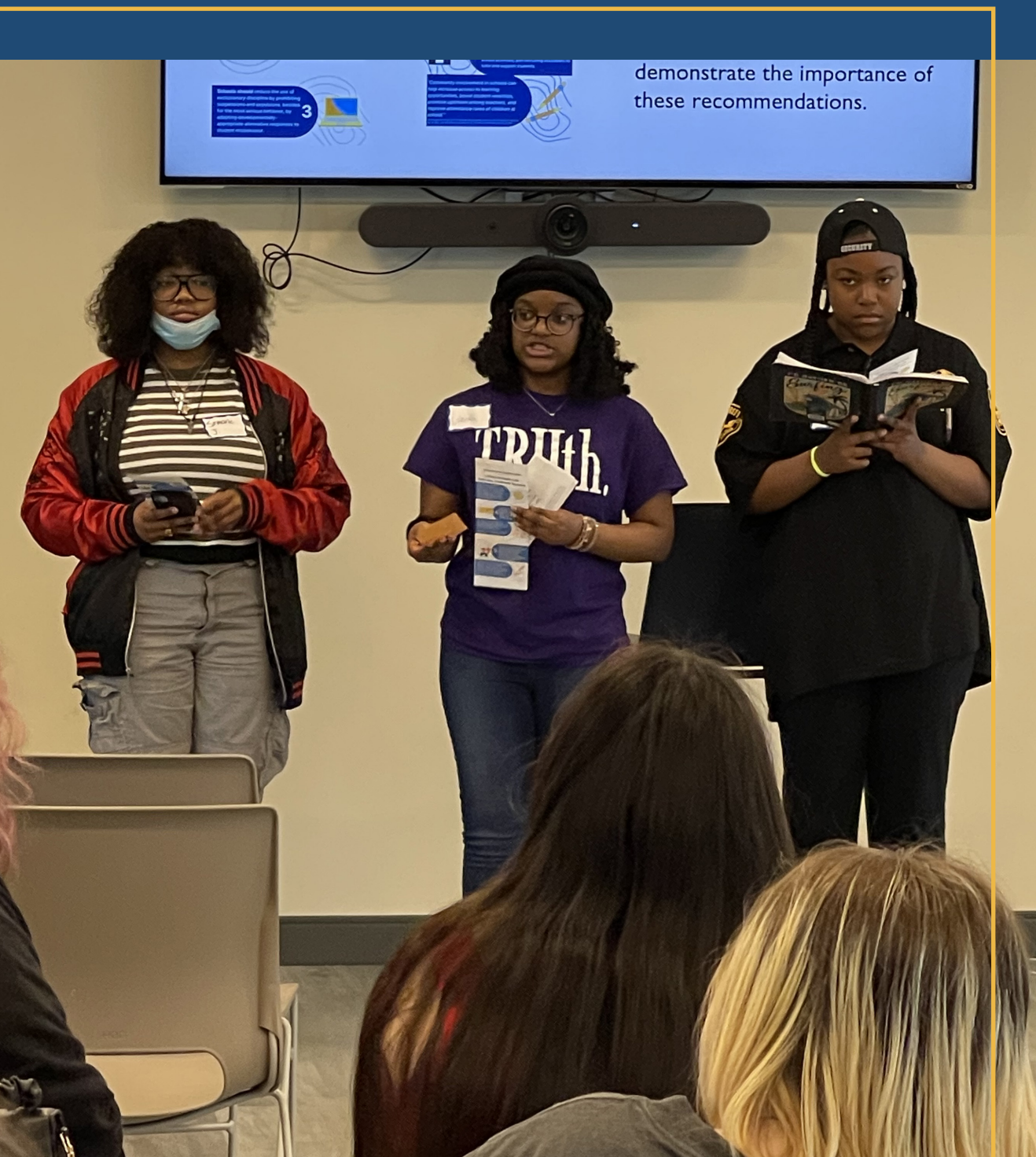Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana

Working Together to Create Excellence in School Culture and Climate

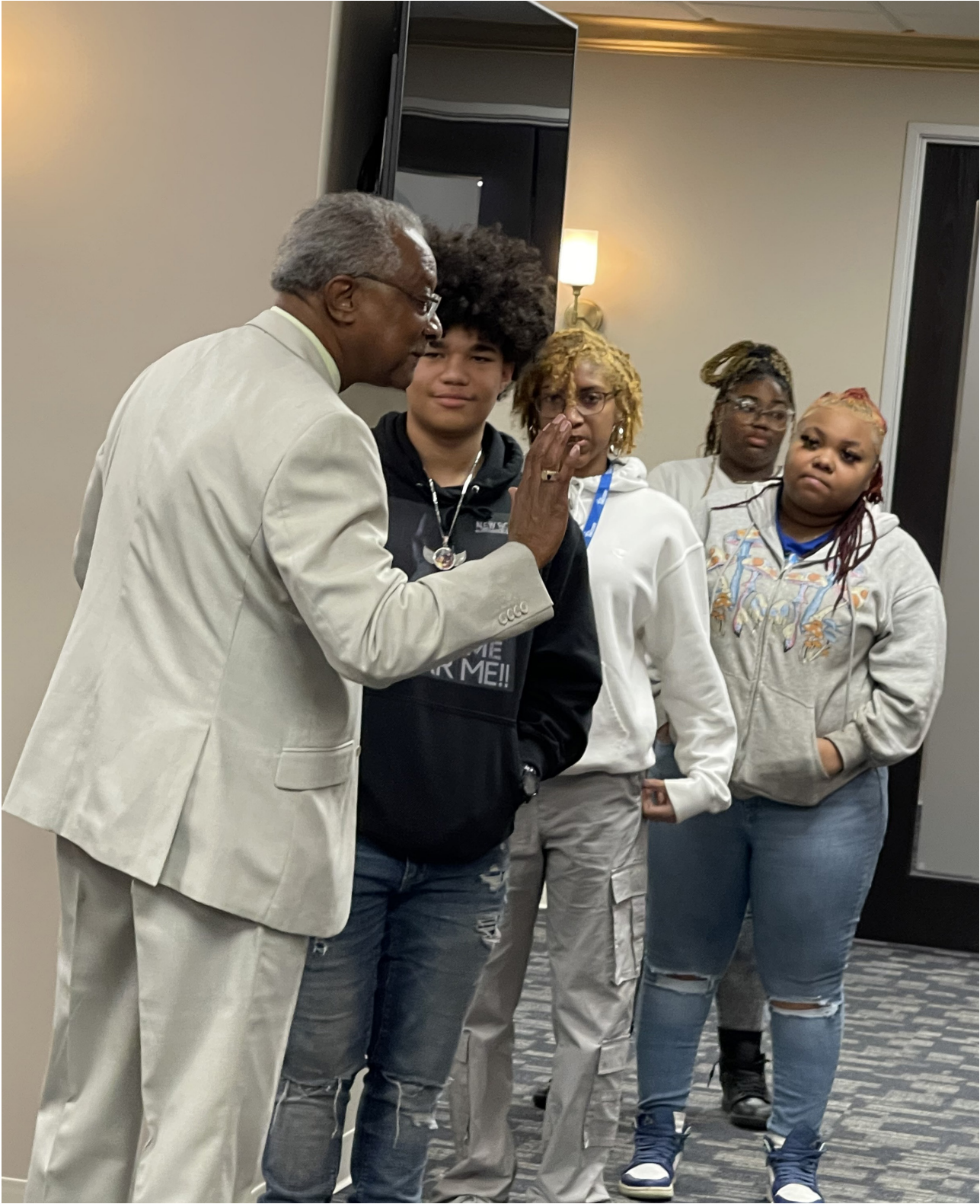# Working Together to Create Excellence in School Culture and Climate

A Series of Best Practice Workshops and Community Conversations for Transformational Change in Indianapolis,

June 2023-May 2024

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Executive Summary

The Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana (CPLI) conducted a series of Best Practices Workshops with two in-person gatherings, and, subsequently, convened a six-month long workgroup who analyzed the findings. The work from this year-long process has resulted in a report with nine themes, recommendations and action steps to support creating safe and secure positive school climates for every school in Marion County. Participants heard expert presenters and engaged in a Community Dialog Process that involved 60 representatives from 28 local government agencies, community stakeholders, and organizations serving families. Other key participants included state associations leaders and youth who heard concerns, and shared creative solutions for improving youth support services in Marion County. Report and Recommendations: Creating Excellence in School Culture and Climate (2024) spotlights nine themes tied together with a critical awareness of providing culturally-responsive, trauma-informed school and community environments where all students are supported and thrive with their best chances for educational success.

Nine themes emerged from the best-practice workshops that are crucial for bringing changes in the lives of students who need additional student support services. Not only do the themes and recommendations outline actions steps a school's leadership and staff can take, but the report also shares what the community's role is in creating changes. The nine themes are:

1. Listen and Hear All Voices:
Youth participants raised concerns of feeling unheard and misunderstood by adults, as well as sharing strong perceptions of the lack of safe spaces and supportive student support staff to connect within school and the community. Adults also expressed some of the same feelings, because too often, they felt school leadership did not incorporate their voices or the opinions of staff, parents, community members and service providers. Recommendations included among other activities, providing spaces and places to host forums and create opportunities for all voices involved with student success to be heard.

2. Create a Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Space in Every School District and Every School:
 For excellence to exist in school culture, schools must be viewed as welcoming places that meet the needs of students and their families. There must be high expectations in place that include instructional materials and practices to eliminate bias, and opportunities to provide access to excellent educational experiences for all students. To achieve this, schools must utilize culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices. Students must have access to sufficient numbers of licensed personnel who have the knowledge to support students with the highest needs.

3. Hire Increased Numbers of Licensed Support Personnel and Staff:
Students have clearly identified the need for more counselors and other supportive services. The ratios provided by the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) of actual vs. recommended licensed school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses in Marion County point out unacceptable discrepancies. This situation can change when appropriately licensed staff meet nationally-recommended student-staff ratios are placed in every school. School districts, schools, university and community agencies must do more to market, raise awareness and support students in higher education programs who choose these professions that allow them to work with children, our hope and promise of the future.

4. Hire Personnel with Whom Students Can Identify:
Despite recent trends to undervalue focusing on diversity issues, participants identified the barriers that some educators may face in developing mindsets to understand the cultural strengths of their students and their families. Data continues to reveal the shortage of licensed school personnel from diverse demographics who mirror the demographics of their student population. Most school staff ratios do not reflect the racial and cultural composition of the students they serve in urban and suburban areas. Students may not see successful men and women at their schools who look like themselves and believe in their ability to succeed. School districts and school leaders must create a high priority to recruit and retain teachers of color. Additionally, among other ideas, districts can promote efforts to work with students to understand the value and satisfaction that teaching as a profession can provide, as districts involve students in "grow your own" programs.

5. Define and Balance Opportunities for School Personnel and Community Services Using a Team Approach:
Data from the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) provided to participants during the Workshop portrayed a clear picture of the need to improve the ratios of licensed student support service providers, such as social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses. Relationships must begin based on mutual respect and a positive view of the community's expertise on key issues. Community services and programs offer a unique niche in understanding how to connect with and reach the youth, families and communities they serve. School leaders must evaluate their budgets and determine how they can provide appropriate funding to meet student needs for hiring certified, qualified and diverse staff, along with including community support services. Additionally, opportunities must be provided for certified school counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists to advise, inform, and train other school personnel, families, caregivers, and other community members. These trained service providers can share their expertise in helping others learn proactive strategies for mental health, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, emotional regulation and de-escalation skills, and strategic planning to create safe and caring environments for students and staff members.

6. Identify and Provide More Resources for Unmet Student Needs:

A recurring theme that sparked great concern from workshop participants centered on state funding allocations, and where and how money is being used. Participants urged school communities to use data to advocate and justify the need for additional resources. They also wanted schools to prioritize using funding to provide more student support services to create safe and caring school communities. This theme is accomplished when ongoing assessments are conducted of both the assets students and their families bring, and the needs of students in each school and district are also identified. The district and school budgets must be realigned to address these unmet student needs and identify adequate resources that prioritize the well-being of all children.

7. Provide Professional Development for All Faculty and Staff Members:

When there is accountability with high expectations that all staff will be involved in bringing positive change, school personnel can work to improve their school climate and culture and truly provide a safe and caring space for all students. This means training both licensed and certified personnel to address mental health and healing related to trauma, as they also become more culturally-responsive and trauma-informed. This can be achieved when all school districts and schools require all staff to participate in annual professional development on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent development. Additionally, professional development and the use of data are aligned and linked to concepts that are crucial for creating positive learning environments and high academic achievement to help children thrive and attain positive outcomes.

8. Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environments and Safe School Climates that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students:

Participation in school serves as a protective factor against delinquency and juvenile justice involvement. Over the last several decades, with zero tolerance, reliance on exclusion, and police involvement in schools, youth with unmet needs are positioned to become more vulnerable to justice system involvement. Aligning the role of police in schools with the principles of developing a positive school climate, while limiting the exercise of police powers to serious safety issues, is a best-practice to reduce the school-to-prison-pipeline. Out-of-school exclusion decreases when school boards, district and school leaders, and their administrative staffs are accountable and responsible for administering all school discipline. Additionally, when School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement are selected and hired, there must be a mutual expectation that they will help create a positive school climate and support the path the school takes to use culturally-responsive, trauma-informed approaches.

9. Reform Educational Policies and Laws, and Match Funding to Align with Creating A Positive School Climate and Culture that Supports the Needs of All Students:

To eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, the Indianapolis community must rethink public policies and laws that undermine student success. We must begin to advocate for reforms to increase student support services for students to thrive in school and empower parents/guardians/caregivers, educators, and service providers to speak out about meeting the needs of our students. Public policy reforms provide an opportunity to improve student academic outcomes, decrease absenteeism, increase student support services for improved mental health well-being, prevent suicide, promote community-based resources, provide adequate funding to support identified concerns, and reduce student contact with the justice system. An overarching long-term goal of all policy reforms touching these areas, is to provide all students with the opportunity to succeed in school, and then one day enter the workforce ready to thrive and support the economy for themselves and their families.

This report, Creating Excellence in School Culture and Climate (2024) with its recommendations and action steps, provides a call to action from workshop

participants. In sharing their concerns and insights, they spoke of the need for systemic and transformative policy changes to create effective school culture and climate in every school in our county. By reasserting their expertise on the need to start or continue using culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, participants offered many effective strategies for educators and other community members to review and then begin promoting change.

Many knowledgeable and concerned stakeholders came together and demonstrated the power of multi-age group thinking. Collectively, workshop participants raised their voices to bring awareness to issues and problems that concerned them; and also, to offer solutions to help solve those concerns. The resulting recommendations offer support for meeting the challenges faced in addressing developmental, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of the "whole" child.

Ultimately, changes in public policies and funding priorities will support creating positive school environments that help eliminate the school-to prison pipeline. As community leaders come together to review this report, they can respond to the Action Steps by supporting their fellow educators, school leaders and community partners in creating schools with positive learning environments, where all students thrive. The Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana, (CPLI) stands ready to convene working voices to continue creating positive outcomes for all children.
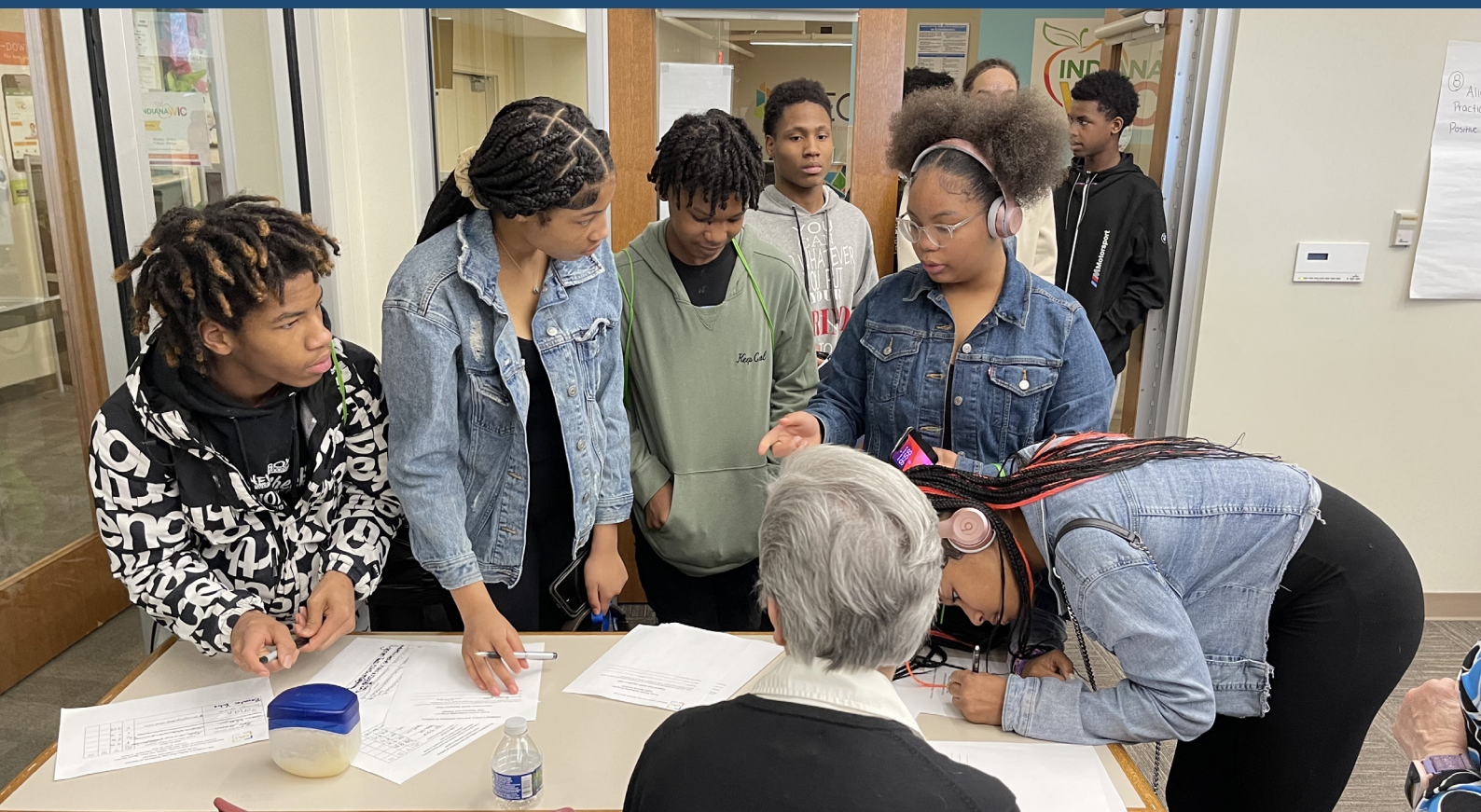
Opening Remarks

Dear Indianapolis Community, Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana (CPLI) worked with several youth organizations and service providers to plan and host a series of Best Practice Workshops and Community Conversations for Transformational Change in Indianapolis. Over the past year, these workshops included 60 representatives from 28 local government agencies, community stakeholders, and organizations serving families, youth, educators, and state associations leaders. CPLI brought this group together to share perspectives and uplift youth voices and experiences regarding the improvement of youth support services in Marion County. The rich, insightful discourse held there serves as the basis for this Report and Recommendations: Creating Excellence in School Culture and Climate (2024) as an important step to create a shared vision and commitment for change in our community.

A facilitated discussion among youth—informed by and grounded in youth experiences facing housing, poverty, and gun violence concerns—raised critical issues that resulted from the lack of support and services for youth who face trauma and mental health crises in their lives. The forum created an opportunity for stakeholders to work with youth to identify problems, solutions, and action steps that the Indianapolis community should undertake to move toward achieving. These actions will produce safe and healthy learning environments that promote healing and resiliency for youth who are experiencing and suffering from trauma. Through two workshops in 2023 and a multiple-month third phase that identified recommendations and action steps grounded on input from the workshops, CPLI is able to advocate for excellence in creating positive school culture and climate.

Through this year-long initiative, CPLI has sought to expand knowledge and understanding about culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices. These practices can effectively address trauma and mental health issues that students experience within school and the community due to systemic racism, violence, economic disparities, and racial injustice. Our goal is to create change within schools and the community where our students live that supports our youth and prevents them from entering the school-to-prison pipeline. These activities are supported in part through a generous grant by the Indianapolis Foundation of the Central Indiana Community Foundation. We thank all of those who participated in The Best Practice Workshops, all of those who served in the workgroup of the third phase of this initiative, and all of those who reviewed and submitted comments on earlier drafts of this Report.

It's important to note, our youth are dependent on the goodwill and intentions of adults. The consistent message we heard from youth voices is that good intentions and promises have been broken. As one youth participant asserted, "People like you ask questions, and you know people, but don't share what we say, and there's never action." To honor this young person's perspective, we urge community members to work in good faith to collaborate and bring consensus around change, while meeting youth where they are, addressing their needs, and lifting their experiences to help solve problems. We look forward to working with the Indianapolis community in the future on actions for success that help all young people thrive.

Moving forward with promise and hope,
Meisha Wide, Executive Director, CPLI

Best Practice Workshop Series Purpose Statement

The Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana (CPLI) hosted two Best Practice Workshops and Community Conversations focused on reshaping and transforming school climates across the Indianapolis community. This series was built upon the transformative work already being done through CPLI's 2022-23 Youth Justice Leadership Program (YJLP). Through a Central Indiana Community Foundation Elevation grant, CPLI entered into meaningful relationships with Indianapolis youth to identify community issues, many of which directly correlate with CPLI'S Youth and Policing Report released in 2022. The Best Practice Workshop Series focused on the work that the YJLP Fellows pursued to advocate for more student support personnel and trusted mentors in school, along with other culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices that provide supports for students while minimizing exclusionary approaches to discipline.

Workshop One: In the Know and Sharing Facts, June 15, 2023, 10am-2pm, centered on the current best practices happening nationally, local data trends, and perspectives and experiences by local service providers and youth, as we identified the needs in our Indianapolis community.

Workshop Two: Discovery and Opportunities to Overcome Barriers, August 10, 2023, 10am-2pm, focused on identifying perceived barriers to equitable outcomes while considering the changes that would be required to improve school climate and bring about more student supports in schools.

Best Practice Workshop Report Workgroup: After these two initial meetings, CPLI formed a small workgroup with some who had attended these workshops and came from a variety of backgrounds. Throughout the course of 2023-2024, this workgroup helped shape the Creating Excellence in School Culture and Climate Report based on the data, expertise, and stories from the two workshops.

City-wide stakeholders--educators, community leaders and organizations, government officials, various professional associations, parent groups, youth and others--participated in these interconnected workshops. These workshops encouraged community solutions for schools to employ comprehensive student supports that addressed the root causes of individual and community trauma-induced adolescent behavior. Participants heard from accomplished national and local speakers who addressed post-COVID best practices around school culture and climate leading to improved academic outcomes for all students. Attendees discussed solutions that keep youth in school, improve graduation rates and support their well-being to ensure opportunities for positive life outcomes. This collaborative work will be a catalyst for the Creating Excellence in School Culture and Climate Report and driving force for creating a healthier, more resilient and economically viable workforce in the Indianapolis community.

JauNae Hanger,
Founder & Former President

Dr. Gwendolyn J. Kelley,
Sr. Executive Consultant

Part A:

Overview of Community Conversations Workshop Experience

Part A:

Overview of Community Conversations Workshop Experience

The Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana (CPLI) convened a year-long engagement of the Indianapolis community on how to improve school climates and increase necessary student support services for youth in Indianapolis schools. The process began with two interconnected, community-wide discussions at Martin University on June 15 and August 10, 2023, with 60 representatives from 28 local government agencies, community stakeholders, and organizations serving families and youth, educators, state associations leaders, and youth, to hear concerns for improving youth support services in Marion County. These workshops were followed by a smaller working group that met over 6-months to review the workshop session findings and develop specific recommendations based on the prior facilitated discussions. The draft Recommendations were then shared with 28 youth in the CPLI Youth Justice Leadership Program on March 16, 2024. The working group reviewed and incorporated additional insights into the Recommendations based on feedback from the youth.

The Best Practice Workshop activities, and subsequent Report and Recommendations, are an outgrowth of the 2022-23 CPLI Youth Justice Leadership Program (YJLP), involving more than 25 youth who shared their voices and concerns about how educators and the community can create a safe and secure learning environment in their schools. The youth identified the need for culturally-responsive, trauma-informed training for the educators who teach them, and wondered why more teachers did not seem to have this type of training to help youth better understand themselves. They also advocated for improved youth accessibility to social-emotional support services, a key consideration to address culture and climate. One youth in the YJLP said, "I personally struggle with mental health, so I want to make sure others have an understanding of it." This moving sentiment was a plea many youth articulated throughout the year. Subsequently, both youth and stakeholder organizations in the Best Practice Workshops affirmed the need for the Indianapolis community to come together and advocate for changes to help

greatly improve resources for schools to address trauma and mental health issues of youth and families through a cultural lens amplified by post-COVID implications for housing, poverty, and gun violence in the community. The activities over the last year have been supported in part by both an Elevation grant through the Central Indiana Community Foundation and the City of Indianapolis, and a grant by the Indianapolis African- American Quality of Life Initiative.

The findings emanating from the Best Practice Workshop Series were developed through a year-long process with three distinct phases of work, beginning in June, 2023 and concluding in June, 2024. Workshop One, In the Know and Sharing Facts Using a Culturally-Responsive, Trauma-Informed Lens, highlighted national data and best practices, paralleling local data and insights from service providers and youth. Workshop Two, Opportunities to Overcome Barriers, collaboratively identified the barriers and challenges to equitable outcomes and opportunities for creating next steps to reach improvements. A third phase of the work in late 2023 through early 2024 manifested as a small workgroup of representatives from several participating community organizations advanced the work to organize input from the first two sessions. This team incorporated youth input, distilled and assimilated workshop feedback and findings to identify recommendations and developed action steps to help mobilize collaboration in Indianapolis that advocates for excellence in school culture and climate and the transformational change needed.

DATA TRENDS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

One key set of data points shared by the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) spotlight the dire dilemma we face because of the quantified need to greatly increase and enhance student supports within our schools. This data serves as a foundational baseline for the community to diligently work to create urgent change and improve the ratio of student-to-support personnel within our schools.

Data for the state of Indiana and Marion County shows that school support services are significantly understaffed and under-resourced, well exceeding the national benchmark ratio for students to support staff. This data underscores why young people's intensive cries for more student support services and mentors should be heeded—as the crisis it is.

STUDENT STAFF RATIO TO STUDENT POPULATION, MARION COUNTY

	SCHOOL COUNSELORS	SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS	SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS	SCHOOL NURSES
RECOMMENDED	250:1	250:1	500-700:1	750:1
INDIANA	624:1	2,788:1	2,699:1	959:1
MARION COUNTY	624:1	2,148:1	1616:1	1616:1

Indiana Youth Institute 2023

Part B:

Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve Excellence in School Culture and Climate

1. Listen and Hear All Voices

2. Create a Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Space in Every School District and Every School

3. Hire Increased Numbers of Licensed Support Personnel and Staff

4. Hire Personnel with Whom Students Can Identify

5. Define and Balance Opportunities for School Personnel andCommunity Services Using and Team Approach

6. Identify and Provide More Resources for Unmet Student Needs

7. Provide Professional Development for all Faculty and Staff Members

8. Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environments and Safe School Climates that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students

9. Reform Educational Policies, Laws and Match Funding to Align with Creating Positive School Climate and Culture to Support the Needs of All Students

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

1

Listen and Hear All Voices

1. Listen and Hear All Voices

Overarching Goal: Collaborative Communications and Essential Youth Involvement in Systemic Change

A youth stated during a Workshop to identify data and recommended changes to pursue, "Making recommendations is not enough; there needs to be accountability by holding Indianapolis to their word."

During Workshop One, youth participants raised concerns of feeling unheard and misunderstood by adults, as well as sharing strong perceptions of the lack of safe spaces and supportive student support staff to connect within school and the community. Additionally, community leaders and educators expressed they often do not feel heard either. All participants discussed creating what their desired reality for change would be. For youth, the need emerged to be more involved within established groups and to have input on major decisions at school and in the community. Another major theme that surfaced was an astute recognition by the youth that they need more services for mental health issues. As we seek to resolve issues related to improving student support services, the overall well-being of students and individuals who serve them, and students' academic achievement, we must identify the connection between the challenges. Both the qualitative and quantitative data we continue to collect play a key role in defining our understanding of what our youth are feeling, wanting, and needing. Their expressed concerns reflect their need for mental health support that compels schools to find solutions that involve their greater community.

When youth feel heard, understood, and respected, it empowers them and reveals their inner strength that was there all along; however, they need to feel supported as they figure out the best way to express their thoughts and

concerns. In uplifting their voices, addressing their concerns, and listening to their proposed solutions, students grow more connected to the community and learn how to exercise their own leadership skills while advocating for their rights as students. Overwhelmingly, youth clearly indicated that listening is not enough; youth perspective should be a standard part of the information gathering and decision-making process. Furthermore, consensus-based recommendations for action about youth should be collaboratively pursued and implemented.

Although youth perspectives are essential to solving problems and issues, listening to and respecting concerns from all voices—educators, parents and caregivers, social workers, school counselors, nurses, school psychologists, and community service providers—are necessary for all parties to feel empowered. This consolidated approach for creating collaborative opportunities to pursue meaningful solutions can lead to lasting and powerful systemic change. To maximize the mental health well-being of our young people, improve their academic outcomes, equip them to thrive, help them fulfill their life-goal pursuits, and empower them to lead and serve requires the guidance and involvement of educators working in tangent with parents, mentors, community leaders, and other stakeholders who collectively share these common goals as a priority.

"Professionals know the data; (and they) see it from year to year. It's time to implement solutions that effectively uplift our youth, especially for youth of color who experience racial disparities."

A juvenile public defender shared,

Recommendation 1:
Create forums for consistent open communication to allow all groups of students the opportunity to be empowered and allowed to propose their recommended solutions for systems change and continuous involvement in the work.

Recommendation 2:
Create opportunities within school and the community at large to ensure all voices connect with ensuring student academic success by providing services that support students in being heard, respected, and honored regarding education policy, practices, and solution-making.

Action Steps

1 School Administrators, Parents, and Youth develop opportunities to communicate issues and concerns, including student-led activities and forums, that affect youth development and safe learning environments in school, and provide recommendations for problem-solving or reform.

2 Districts and School Administrators form student advisory committees and establish regularly scheduled communications between them and school administration and school boards on issues identified by youth that need addressed by the school community.

3 School Administrators create opportunities for youth and youth organizations to survey, evaluate, and share findings to discuss the needs of their student population on what the youth feel they are missing emotionally, academically, mentally, and physically, and their ideas to solve identified issues.

4 School administrators, with involvement of Youth and School Community, appoint diverse representatives from the student body to serve on and participate in school administrative working committees and groups.

5 School Administrators empower parents, families, and community mentors as advocates for youth concerns; provide youth with opportunities to build communication and leadership skills; and elevate youth voices and experiences to change the narrative of youth to be strength-based.

Overarching Goal: Collaborative Communications and Essential Youth Involvement in Systemic Change

School Administrators involve all youth populations, including the most vulnerable, at all levels of decision-making to share their unique perspectives and experiences.

6

School Administrators create opportunities to elevate school voices at the community level with local governing bodies such as the Mayor's Office, the City County Council, the business community at large, and workforce development audiences.

7

School Administrators and Student Support Personnel are empowered to advocate, provide guidance, and recommend support services during student transition periods and breaks away from school; and they work on challenges often left unaddressed to help students better engage and adjust back into the school environment when they resume their academic study.

8

School Administrators build relationships of trust with youth, parents, and families of youth who have been marginalized, and work to involve concerned community members and organizations to ensure all voices are heard.

9

School Administrators ensure how School Counselors, Social Workers, Nurses, and Psychologists work together on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed methods while including student voices as advisers for youth perspectives on student well-being with administrators and community leaders.

10

School Administrators collaborate with Youth, Community Organizations, Youth Mentors, and Youth Providers to communicate consistently and work with the schools to bring support to students.

11

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

2

Create a Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Space in Every School District and Every School

2. Create a Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Space in Every School District and Every School

Overarching Goal: Positive School Climates

A student shared in response to what is a safe learning space: "Having a safe space, a place to be you, to be treated how you want to be treated, communicate—listen to their problems, try to understand them, having more resources to engage with students, (and) love."

Schools must be viewed as welcoming places that meet the needs of students and their families, with expectations in place that include instructional materials and practices to eliminate bias and provide access to excellent educational experiences for all students. Fostering a new culture of care in every school places an emphasis on building trust-based practices. This includes a "connect before you correct" approach and training to de-escalate behavior issues that promote self-regulating practices. Determining the state of youth/adult relationships and levels of accountability to service the needs of students that data reports indicate, requires schools to conduct climate audits, assessments, climate surveys and interviews, along with using disaggregated data to guide those decisions.

Safe, supportive spaces also empower youth through deliberately creating positive programs that build resilience and life skills, provide space for opening up about depression and trauma, use alternatives to suspension, and engage restorative justice and conflict management skills. These types of spaces build hope and help youth destigmatize sharing about their emotions as they confront grief, anxiety, trauma, and hopelessness. A comprehensive approach to bringing change involves integrating student voices and engaging families in decision-making; addressing root issue concerns, such as healthcare for medical, dental, and mental health; and reducing chronic absenteeism, depression, suicide rates, and suicide ideation. Participants asserted the need for increasing culturally-responsive and trauma-informed training for all school personnel including school boards who create policy, reevaluating priorities of key school personnel in hiring and determining staff responsibilities, and changing

how they respond to bullying, school conflicts, and other discipline issues that arise among students.

During the workshops, multiple youth reported feeling disconnected to teachers and other school staff. They shared that oftentimes they felt adults did not care about students' struggles, needs, or overall well-being. Students of color expressed being less likely to have trusted individuals that ask them questions about their school and home life. Without trusted mentors, youth perceive little opportunity to develop emotionally and mentally, and they may share feelings of rejection, which contributed to some of their disengagement.

Students must have safe spaces where they can thrive, access a trusted listening ear and time to grieve, relax, or "just be youth" in a low-stress learning environment. Through safe, consistent, and supported learning situations, their needs can be validated and met. Effective engagement with youth by providing trusted relationships who engage them through culturally-responsive, trauma-informed approaches is essential to creating healthy spaces for students to excel academically. This necessitates developing ways to move a school culture from harsh and punitive discipline policies with exclusionary punishment to a positive school climate that works to keep youth within the school learning environment.

> ## "Relationships, trust, and connection should lead to emotional safety, which is required for engagement."
>
> **A youth mentor who works in schools shared**

Recommendation 3:
Employ and validate use of culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices that build mutual trust to create positive learning environments that lead to excellence in educational outcomes for all students.

Recommendation 4:
Shift school culture, policies, practices, for classroom management techniques from punitive/control to an approach centering student validation and engagement while affirming safe and orderly learning environments.

Recommendation 5:
Create appropriate student-to-staff ratios of licensed, trained personnel are in place to support student services.

Recommendation 6:
Confirm that students with the highest needs, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and others who experience trauma, mental health issues, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts, have sufficient access to needed services aligned with appropriate policies, practices, and procedures.

Recommendation 7:
Identify and establish standards for implementation of a culturally-responsive, trauma-informed, student-supported, safe, and affirming learning environment.

Action Steps

1

School Administrators conduct surveys, analyze, and disseminate the results on School Climate and Culture for parents, students, and teachers so that improvement areas are continuously identified and opportunities provided to collaboratively resolve issues to further incorporate trust-based practices.

2

District Leaders and School Administrators use positive affirmations and positive discipline with all students, expect all staff members to consistently model the practices, and ensure that every student has a trusted adult as emotional support

3

District Leaders and School Administrators increase the amount of counselors/social workers in schools to give all students the opportunity to meet with regularly, build relationships, and provide emotional breaks and guidance on addressing and responding to social-emotional and mental health issues, while employing restorative practices and de-escalation and self-regulation skills to mediate conflict and behavioral issues.

4

School Administrators and Designated School Personnel organize and accept invitations to meetings with youth and families, along with community organizations who have a specialized relationship working with the youth/families, to develop and implement plans of action and provide resources to build resiliency skills among students.

5

District Leaders ensure that School Administrators and Personnel review research on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed strategies, and update school policies regularly to ensure they align with the needs of BIPOC students and students with special needs, mental health concerns, substance abuse, or trauma-related issues.

2. Create a Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Space in Every School District and Every School

Overarching Goal: Positive School Climates

6

District and School Leaders use disaggregated school discipline, school-based arrest, and academic data to understand student outcomes, identify solutions for improving student achievement, reduce discipline referrals, school-based arrests, and absenteeism rates often disproportionate by race, and include the data published from the Indiana Department of Education Annual School Performance Reports so it can be easily accessed on District/School websites for parents/families and community review.

3
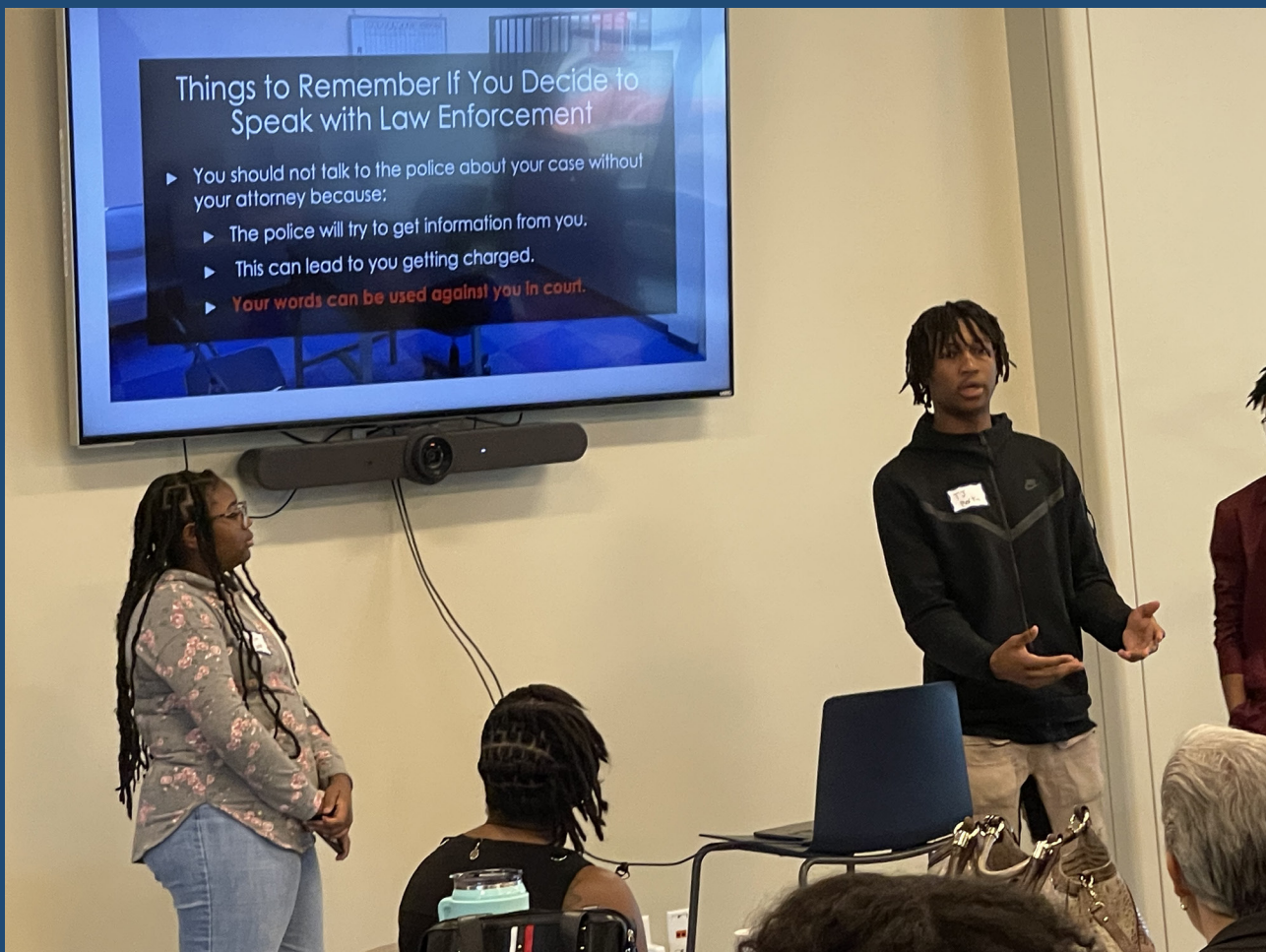
Hire Increased Numbers of Licensed Support Personnel and Staff

3. Hire Increased Numbers of Licensed Support Personnel and Staff

Overarching Goal: Sufficient Level of Student Supports to Meet the Needs of Students

A youth reflecting on the topic of counselors and mentors in schools stated, "More counselors and mentors would be a great use for strengthening student support. There need to be more counselors geared towards the development of life skills."

Insufficient numbers of qualified, licensed, and trained personnel in schools is a barrier to the connections sought after by youth. Students have clearly identified the need for more counselors and other supportive services. The ratios provided by the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) of actual vs. recommended licensed school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses in Marion County point out unacceptable discrepancies. Staff limitations and workforce development issues not only impact the reduced availability and capacity of trained staff in each of the four fields, but foster serious implications for using personnel with limited shared experiences and connections with youth, their families, and communities.

Additionally, staff shortages risk creating overworked staff who struggle with the capacity to prioritize the needs of youth effectively. While school personnel may receive training on culturally-responsive topics, the question lingers in the community if the training has really created needed mindset changes for educators to work effectively with all students, especially in schools with staffing deficits of qualified, licensed, and trained personnel to help guide and support thorough in-depth training of all educators.

Serious gaps remain in qualified support staff according to evidence-based ratios to provide the proper support services that students are missing. Thorough background checks provide credibility for individuals in these roles and increase the likelihood they are adequately qualified in mental health issues, trauma, and grief responses. A lack of proper training exacerbates the issue of disconnect between students and staff, and may lead to overly punitive responses to student behavior that can increase the risk of school failure.

Where there is a shortage of school support staff, school teams frequently may use under-qualified individuals in inappropriate roles and positions within their schools. The identified staff members may lack essential training to engage youth effectively, and thus contribute to school climates where students feel unsafe. The perception of the community is that unqualified staff members contribute to an increase in school failure rates. If students have experienced trauma, do not feel safe in their school, or cannot make a relatable connection to educators or community members, they may distance themselves and act out, resulting in depression, anxiety, deviance, or even violence or suicide. Such youth are at greater risk of experiencing discipline that excludes them from learning and school, and ultimately leads to a cycle of further disengagement, failure to thrive academically, and increased risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

> "We are significantly short-staffed when it comes to mental health resources. There are too many youth that are struggling with mental health and don't have informed adults to connect with."

A youth program director wrote

Recommendation 8:
Appropriately licensed staff meet nationally-recommended student-staff ratios in every school.

Recommendation 9:
Workforce development efforts are supported to create an appropriate job pool to meet the needs of schools and districts.

Recommendation 10:
Certified or licensed personnel are hired who: (1) demonstrate understanding and high expectations for academic success with all populations of students; (2) support professional training needs of school staff on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices; (3) serve as a resource to address vicarious trauma and burnout among staff; and (4) offer training opportunities for students to develop conflict resolution and other life skills, including de-escalation and emotional self-regulation.

Action Steps

1

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office commissions a Marion County assessment of the numbers of certified deployed staff by district and school, based on nationally recommended staff-student ratios; disseminates a report with findings to district leaders, school administrators, and the public; and works with district leaders to identify appropriate levels of funding to address workforce development issues to match known deficits.

2

District Leaders and School Personnel seek diverse candidates and hire qualified certified personnel to close the gaps identified by the assessment.

3

District Leaders and School Personnel regularly evaluate student staff-ratios to ensure compliance with national benchmarks, and share data and findings with the public and data collecting agencies.

4

Public Policy Officials, District Leaders, and School Administrators coordinate with universities, local high school counselors, and the community to assist with recruitment efforts and the identification of workforce development issues for expanding interest in and increasing the job pool for all education-related fields.

5

District Leaders and School Administrators ensure the health and well-being of all staff through regular surveys, training, and communication; and collaborate with and leverage resources through community mental health serving agencies.

Overarching Goal: Sufficient Level of Student Supports to Meet the Needs of Students

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

4

Hire Personnel with Whom Students Can Identify

4. Hire Personnel with Whom Students Can Identify

Overarching Goal: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Hiring Practices

Multiple youth shared that they want: "A diverse staff that better relates to a diverse student population." One youth commented: "Not everyone can understand a Black child like a Black man or woman can."

Another key factor beyond the lack of licensed personnel within schools is the ability of all educators to help all children thrive and triumph above the conflicts they face both in school and the community. Despite recent trends to undervalue focusing on diversity issues, participants identified the barriers that some educators may face in developing mindsets to understand the cultural strengths of their students, despite the data that indicates their students may be conspicuously falling behind academically. Deliberately planning to help existing staff members expect the best from all students and working to recruit adults that can identify with, must remain a priority. Data continues to reveal the shortage of licensed school personnel from diverse demographics who mirror the demographics of their student population.

Educators highlighted the responsibility placed on them to be the safe, unfailing trusted-person that many students turn to when adversities come about. They shared that in schools with students of color, the school climate often supports youth viewing their teachers of color as more than an educator, but also in a mother/father figure role and, conversely, too often as disciplinarians. While all teachers are charged to share in meeting the needs of all students, teachers of color, especially, often take on this responsibility in a unique way as they may recognize and have a shared common life experience similar to their students. The scarcity of educators of color who can fulfill the role of being a culturally-responsive, influential, trustworthy, mentor-like influence is evident from the data and remains a problem that must be tackled.

Although all staff, both licensed and certified, should receive appropriate training that is culturally-responsive and trauma-informed, training alone is not sufficient for staff to create a connection with students. Participants shared that staff who have the capacity to engage and relate to the experiences of the students they serve better engage with the community they serve by supporting local businesses, attending local events, and being aware of resources and services within the community. Hiring BIPOC educators who have training in issues specific to BIPOC youth provides them with strategies and resources so they are better equipped to sustain high expectations while using such connections to address negative behavior instead of quickly resorting to punitive approaches that feed the school-to-prison pipeline.

We need community leaders that are visible within the community so students can 'see' themselves."

A representative from the Indiana Council on Educating Students of Color wrote

Recommendation 11:
Staff ratios reflect racial and cultural composition of the students they serve.

Recommendation 12:
Human resource policies and hiring practices align with workforce development goals to increase diversity of school staffing to reflect the demographic make-up of the student population, including shared life experiences; and also work within the district in high school programs to begin creating "grow your own" campaigns.

Recommendation 13:
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) personnel are hired to: (1) coordinate culturally-responsive trainings for all staff and students; (2) track and analyze current demographic data trends; (3) help align school policies with equity initiatives and culturally-responsive practices; (4) provide resources and materials; and (3) create opportunities for all school staff and students to grow in their understanding of their diverse student body, their communities, and the systemic issues that relate to excellence in academic outcomes for all students.

Action Steps

1

District Board and Administrators ensure collaboration among administrators, teachers, student support services staff, and the human resources department to assess and refine the current application process for recruiting diverse candidates.

2

District Human Resource Officers and School Administrators broaden the search and networking process to identify diverse candidates for employment among diverse demographics.

3

School Administrators actively recruit qualified, non-certified, diverse community members to serve as instructional assistants and encourage them to become certified, licensed personnel.

4

City Officials, the Commission on Higher Education, Indiana Department of Education, District and School Leaders, and Community Organizations work collaboratively with universities, high schools, and other community agencies to develop a citywide campaign to create a diverse pool of preservice educators and other certified staff, including recruiting potential preservice university students to the field of education, counseling, social work, psychology, and nursing.

5

School Boards as well as District and School Administrators collectively work with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Personnel and Student Support Services Personnel who are well versed in serving all students, including underperforming and over-disciplined students, to create a sustainable Cultural Competence Plan as provided for in 2004 Legislation (HB 1308) that holds all students to high academic expectations while addressing student trauma, social/emotional issues, and mental health challenges, using culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices.

Overarching Goal: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Hiring Practices

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

5

Define and Balance Opportunities for School Personnel and Community Services Using a Team Approach

5. Define and Balance Opportunities for School Personnel and Community Services Using a Team Approach

Overarching Goal: Collaborative Community Involvement

One youth stated that amplifying community and youth collaboration is to "help the students advocate within their communities for systemic change."

Data from the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) provided to participants during the Workshop portrayed a clear picture of the need to improve the ratios of licensed student support service providers, such as social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses. Participants reported that community programs, mentors, and services offered from community agencies are also important in serving the needs of students. School personnel and community providers must address how to work together to form relationships that include needed services. At times, the balance between extending a welcoming experience and receiving needed services are stifled by barriers. Relationships must begin based on mutual respect and a positive view of the community's expertise on key issues. Community services and programs offer a unique niche in understanding how to connect with and reach the youth and communities they serve. Increasing these opportunities can layer diverse skill sets that support existing services, help reduce wait time for students to receive services, add services at reasonable costs and also increase the number of volunteers who can relate to students and their families' economic, social, and cultural experiences, and provide opportunities to enrich student learning.

Community input acknowledged and advocated for schools providing more opportunities for eliminating barriers, increasing mental health services, and offering opportunities for partnership with community providers to come into

the schools. Participants rationale included increasing community connections that bring information from schools to share with the parents who cannot be "in the room" at school. Partnering to educate parents on mental health needs and investing in destigmatizing the mental health and well-being of our youth, educators, and families could provide a substantial benefit to both school and community partners.

Although School personnel may be overworked and under-resourced, some are reluctant to reach out or remain unaware of services available in the community. In the absence of licensed personnel employed by the school system, trained and skillful support can help supplement some of the gaps. To build sustainable trust, school leaders and support service personnel must build effective communication with community agencies as they work together to reduce inconsistent services and care that students may receive, discuss ways to ensure confidentiality and student privacy, and determine what information can and cannot be shared with non-school personnel. Community agencies too, have the same issues that they must work through as they also may be privy to information that parents/guardians may not want schools to know.predictable program to provide the valuable services they offer. However, the benefits that occur when community mentors, programs, and services complement school support services can add to an individual school's goals of helping to fortify their students and family needs. When school teams assess student and family needs, they can determine who and what community supports are needed and match them to services that are available through coalitions of youth services such as those found in Closing the Gap Between School & Community Partnerships, An Assessment of Schools in Indianapolis, 2021, (Marion County Commission on Youth (2021).www.mccoyouth.org)

Appointing a designated, full-time school staff person to work with community and family, to either form or become an integral part of a team that works in sync with all parties to facilitate communication within and between the school leaders, student support staff, parents/guardians/families, and community groups help break down barriers and engage community resources and support. Using standardized tools to assess needs, refer services, and offer resources identified through a team approach, would benefit programs representing the faith-based community, youth providers, and trusted mentors. This collaborative approach could provide a level of trust and understanding about the strengths of the school's population. Such teams increase transparency and build a mutual trust in the community, as school and community members share evidence of student needs and how they can be met by reviewing disaggregated academic and behavioral data and other measures of progress to build awareness. Participants strongly advocated for a Community School approach that offers these hopes (www.communityschools.org).

Adding a balance of qualified licensed personnel working with community youth providers who receive ongoing training increases trusted relationships and helps provide the resources they each bring to challenging situations. Community services offer youth and families program interventions to help deter traumatic encounters within the school setting. This match creates an effective model to address the needs of diverse student populations. Community mentors offer a positive incentive for school personnel to embrace their extended work with youth in the community to engage and support them by supplementing services rather than replacing the school's role.

A team approach can generate respect, improve communication, and build trusted collaboration among school staff, community members, families, and ultimately, with the youth they all serve. Youth service providers can access and provide students with opportunities to become involved with positive programs in the community that students identify with and help them bond with the community. Mentoring agencies can leverage the relationships

many of them have with court- appointed or Department of Child Services connected youth, and provide mental health services that help improve children's well-being by granting them the tools to succeed academically and socio-emotionally. Stronger community relationships can lead to more proactive community connections instead of over reactive responses that promote student disengagement and broken communication in negative situations. Together, with school personnel, community services can promote high-quality, consistent and caring service to support students and their families.

"Relationships, trust, and connection should lead to emotional safety, which is required for engagement."

A youth mentor who works in schools shared

Recommendation 14:

School budgets provide appropriate funding to meet student needs for hiring certified, qualified, diverse staff, with community support services.

Recommendation15:

School community team approach is established to meet student support service needs.

Recommendation 16:

Schools value and employ a collaborative approach to workforce development among certified staff and youth providers for the unique skill sets and services they each provide.

Recommendation 17:

Collaborations among systems—education, juvenile justice, mental and physical health, and child welfare—meet the needs of all students, including the most vulnerable students and their families/caregivers.

Recommendation 18:

Provide opportunities for certified school counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists to advise, inform, and train other school personnel, families, caregivers, and other community members in mental health, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, emotional regulation and de-escalation skills, and strategic planning to create safe and open environments for students.

Action Steps

1

District and School Leaders hire a full-time school community liaison to coordinate collaboration initiatives among educators, families, and community services, and work with a school-community team to balance opportunities to share unique resources and strengths to meet the needs and support strength-based assets of the students and families in the school community.

2

School Administrators and Community Mentors engage on a school-community team with a common mission aligned with school improvement goals to leverage resources, communicate regularly with one another, and meet the needs of the students they serve.

3

School Leaders ensure that school community teams—consisting of critical school personnel such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, caregiver representatives, youth providers/mentors, and community representatives—share information and training opportunities on culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices, participate in collaborative planning activities, and advocate on behalf of all students.

4

District and School Leaders share information with the community that they have established school community teams and provide regular updates on collaborative initiatives that meet the needs of all students.

5

Community Providers seek opportunities and community stakeholders advocate for these collaborative opportunities

Overarching Goal: Collaborative Community Involvement

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

6

Identify and Provide More Resources for Unmet Student Needs

6. Identify and Provide More Resources for Unmet Student Needs

Overarching Goal: Obtaining and Matching Resources to Meet the Unmet Needs of Students

A youth mentor asked, "How can we help lower suicide and depression rates in our youth and give all of our youth the same academic opportunities?"

A recurring theme that sparked great concern from workshop participants centered on state funding allocations, and where and how money is being used. They urged school communities to use data to advocate and justify the need for additional resources and prioritize use of funding to provide student support services within safe and caring school communities. Attempting to understand school funding raised several important questions from the community stakeholders: How do we increase mental health services and providers in schools? Are there differences in what each school offers? What services are available? How do schools make information known to students and parents about what is available? What is the impact on different racial groups? Do schools report out their needs, while still protecting the identity of students? What role does IDOE have in making information known about what funding is available from the state? How do schools know if they are eligible to get all the funds that are available for them to receive? Trying to understand funding raised more questions than answers.

Participants hoped for opportunities to meet and bring together additional partners, such as the Indiana Department of Education, Indiana Department of Child Services, and the Indiana Division of Mental Health and Addiction, to provide their voice and support to improve resources to help build safe and caring school communities. After discussing barriers to forming community partnerships and the financial deficits faced by the schools and community, participants questioned how we can all continue to work together to determine what community

supports are needed to develop more Community Schools, and expressed a need to educate the general public on how school financing works.

Although school districts received additional federal dollars that passed through the Indiana State Legislature and the Indiana Department of Education because of COVID, the measures put in place with the funding are not sustainable. The complex needs of students have increased. There are stark inequities in the resources provided for students among school districts and schools. Students in many school districts are missing critical resources needed to protect their mental health and academic success. Data from IYI, 2024 Report indicates that Indiana ranks 45th in public health standing and 28th in overall child well-being. To address academic achievement, additional support must be provided for underserved students by providing tutors and other after- school programs. Without additional funding targeted toward maintaining and increasing the number of support personnel in schools, the ratio will not improve, nor will services be provided to ensure all student needs are met to reach their full potential.

Frequently, the community is not aware of the needs or resources offered for youth. Participants proposed topics for future investigations that should be shared with all community members. Suggestions included ways to: eliminate housing and food instability, form more partnerships with youth-serving organizations, such as the YMCA and other mentoring agencies, and develop additional youth groups and programming for the most vulnerable youth not being served. It was noted that the school and community must incentivize all youth to participate in positive activities that interest and nurture them, and provide opportunities for students to share their voices to help create and apply solutions.

"We are significantly short-staffed when it comes to mental health resources. There are too many youth that are struggling with mental health and don't have informed adults to connect with."

A community member shared

Recommendation 19:

Ongoing assessments are conducted of both the assets students and their families bring and the needs of students in each school and district are identified.

Recommendation 20:

A user-friendly public data source is developed that compiles strategic information about student assets, needs, the resources available to meet the needs, and the percentage of youth needing various services, while providing transparent information to parents/guardians, community members, and others who can easily access the information.

Recommendation 21:

District and school budgets are aligned to address unmet needs and identify adequate resources that prioritize the well-being of all children.

Recommendation 22:

Necessary resources are leveraged from existing school and community assets and services.

Recommendation 23:

Staffing with licensed personnel is in place to work with community partnerships to leverage existing assets, develop lasting relationships, and identify new resources through the school community team, which is a key Community School Program strategy.

Recommendation 24:

District and school have plans for meeting unmet student and family needs by identifying and advocating for new resources and leveraging school related community resources, including physical, mental, and emotional health; food and nutrition; academic supports; extra-curricular programming; childcare access; and financial assistance, housing, and legal aid service needs.

Recommendation 25:

School boards conduct strategic planning based on data revisited regularly, and ensures it is accessible to all community partners, youth, and families, with concrete identified issues and proper systems of tracking and monitoring goals.

Action Steps

1

District and School Administrators increase school-to-community transparency by publicizing documented needs of various schools and indicating to the public the resources needed through such means as: providing easily accessible and digestible end-of-year summaries to the community regarding physical and mental health initiative updates, academic success, funding usage, and future goals on how the district and schools are working to improve services and meet the needs of students

2

District and School Leaders designate personnel to work with school-community teams to advocate for adequate funding and resources to meet the unmet needs of students; and provide awareness of, information about, and access to resources that families and community members can use to ensure that student needs are met, while noting any limitations, eligibility requirements, transportation opportunities, and programs offered by the school and others in the community.

3

District and School Administrators create engaging opportunities for school personnel to connect with the community they serve by: supporting local businesses, participating in local events, promoting awareness of services, establishing regular communication with community partners, and creating opportunities for community input on grant applications.

4

District and School Leaders survey staff, youth, and youth organizations, community, and parents on practices or issues of concern that implicate training.

Overarching Goal: Obtaining and Matching Resources to Meet the Unmet Needs of Students

5

Community Stakeholders and Youth Serving Organizations provide their services including time, talent, and finances to support student needs as volunteers or through compensated services from designated funds that support meeting the needs of students.

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

7

Provide Professional Development for All Faculty and Staff Members

7. Provide Professional Development for All Faculty and Staff Members

Overarching Goal: Holding Educators Accountable through Mandating Essential Professional Development with Expectations for Change

A youth stated, "Someone who understands youth needs is emotionally regulated and trauma-responsive."

Challenges to student success raised by Youth Justice Leadership Program (YJLP) youth, a parent, and other community members included concerns about the need to increase the availability and accessibility for personnel to have more training on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices and holding leaders and elected officials accountable for what they can do to bring about change. When there is accountability with expectations for change, schools can work to improve their school climate and culture and truly provide a safe and caring space for all students.

This means training the appropriate licensed personnel serving in their role of expertise who are willing to address mental health and healing from trauma to become more culturally-responsive and trauma-informed so they can also help train others. Doing so leads to increased student learning time and more non-punitive and supportive approaches to manage behavior. Usually staff members who are open to growing their skillsets participate in ongoing professional development open to all staff. However, if not required, staff members who exhibit the greatest needs to reconsider how they support students' needs may not attend.

Professional development opportunities must be required for board members, administrators, educators, school resource officers, and any other school personnel who come in contact with students. School districts should also offer community stakeholders who participate in the school community the opportunities as well. Training on topics related to student well-being are crucial if educators and community service providers are to give the support, nurture, healing, and help that impact our students and individuals who educate them. Traditionally through the years, there has been a focus in urban schools, in particular, and others across the state with somewhat diverse populations to ensure that culturally-responsive, trauma-informed training occurs. With a shift in political perspectives during the last few years, some schools and educators may feel uncomfortable about discussing different aspects of the topics. Despite their concerns, it remains necessary to help educators meet the needs of students they serve who often exhibit the greatest needs.

Educators at the workshop agreed with community members that training opportunities on culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices and appropriate resources must be provided to all staff members to help them address the needs of all students. Recognizing the importance of involving parents and community members to meet the needs, leaders must continually seek the most effective ways to make this happen. Problems occur when school personnel and community stakeholders may be unaware of how to find highly effective training opportunities and funding resources to present best practices taught through a culturally-responsive lens to positively impact students' emotional and mental health, and improve academic achievement. Further ambiguity remains about how students can be proactively involved in this process at school and in the community. The Youth Justice Leadership Program provides an example of students meeting to discuss their knowledge about when culturally responsive-trauma informed practices are used or needed in their schools and how teachers need to be trained in how to break the school-to-prison pipeline. To ensure accountability that students are involved and best served, school leaders, community stakeholders, and students must use data and other facts to advocate, implement, and then monitor the outcomes of using practices that keep all entities informed, trained, and ready to effectively share and implement what they know.

"Trained service workers, therapists in schools, and responsive school staff when issues are being voiced."

A DEI Specialist in the community wrote that we need

Recommendation 26:
All school districts and schools require annual professional development on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent brain development for board members, administrators, educators, school resource officers, all non-certified staff, and community providers and stakeholders.

Recommendation 27:
Professional development and the use of data are aligned and linked to concepts that are crucial for creating positive learning environments and high academic expectations and achievement to help children thrive and attain positive outcomes.

Recommendation 28:
Community members are empowered to advocate for culturally-responsive, trauma-informed training to occur for all school personnel, community stakeholders and organizations, and students.

Recommendation 29:
Youth voices are included in training and conversations related to topics presented by school personnel and community stakeholders that address student support service needs

Action Steps

1

District and School Leaders seek out and include local professionals and their expertise for regular trainings related to topics such as culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, child/adolescent development, diversity, and inclusion in multiple forums, such as staff meetings and professional development days.

2

District and School Leaders provide mentoring and training opportunities for new employees, community providers, and families from seasoned staff members who are experts in or trained on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices and other social-emotional topics.

3

District and School Administrators provide all personnel with training on mental health, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, and all available community resources, with consideration of employing the skills of outside vendors.

4

District and School Leaders use disaggregated district and school student data to identify personnel for targeted training purposes to improve practices and address challenges with implicit bias, impact of race and identity on student outcomes, disproportionality in academic achievement, low attendance rates and absenteeism, school discipline, in- and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests (school-to-prison pipeline), to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

5

School Administrators empower parents, families, and community mentors as advocates for youth concerns; provide youth with opportunities to build communication and leadership skills; and elevate youth voices and experiences to change the narrative of youth to be strength-based.

Overarching Goal: Holding Educators Accountable through Mandating Essential Professional Development with Expectations for Change

6

School Resource Officers and Police are trained annually on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, child and adolescent development, mental and behavioral health, de-escalation skills, and their role and limitations on the use of law enforcement powers in the school setting.

7

The Indianapolis Mayor's office, collaborating with School District Leaders, Educators, Professional Associations, Area Universities, Non-Profits, Youth Serving Organizations, Youth-Led Organizations, and Local Training Professionals publish an annual updated directory of available best practice professional development opportunities for all staff members focused on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care and make available to all schools, school districts, community partners, and parents.

8

Community Stakeholders and Organizations seek out training on best-practices in culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent development that empower them to meet the needs of students.

9

Youth-Led Organizations, Non-Profits, Youth Serving Organizations, Government Officials and Agencies, Faith-Based Organizations, and Schools empower students to share their voices and experiences on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent development to inform educators and community agencies to better serve youth in the community.

10

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office, collaborating with School District Leaders, Educators, Professional Associations, Area Universities, Non-Profits, Youth Serving Organizations, Youth-Led Organizations, and Local Training Professionals, produce guiding principles and standards that result in a rubric to attain positive learning environments in all schools in Marion County based on implementing culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices.

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

8

Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environments and Safe School Climates that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students

8. Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environments and Safe School Climates that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students

Overarching Goal: Redefining the Role of School Law Enforcement to Support Positive Learning Environments

In response to whether law enforcement should be involved in schools, one youth expressed that Indianapolis must: "Pull back and limit involvement because many kids get intimidated and get the wrong idea about what police are taught to do."

Participation in school has served as a protective factor against delinquency and juvenile justice involvement. Over the last several decades, with zero tolerance, reliance on exclusion, and police involvement in schools, many youth with unmet needs have become more vulnerable to justice system involvement. A large percentage of referrals to the juvenile justice system come directly from school interactions. The purpose of this set of recommendations is to minimize the risk of children having adverse interactions with law enforcement that lead to justice system involvement and school dropout. Aligning the role of police in schools with the principles of positive school climate and limiting their exercise of police powers to serious safety issues is a best practice to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline. This involves training, building trusted relationships, and developing a clear understanding about the respective responsibilities of school administrators and the limitations of school resource officers in school discipline.

"Leaders need to hear that voice and choose connection over correction and bring back Social Emotional Learning."

A representative from a youth serving agency offered

Recommendation 30:

School Boards, District and School Leaders, and their Administrative Staffs are responsible for administering all school discipline.

Recommendation 31:

School Boards and District and School Leaders produce policies that define the role of School Resource Officers and law enforcement consistent with principles of developing positive and safe school climates and limit the exercise of school law enforcement powers to matters of serious public safety.

Recommendation 32:

School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement are selected and hired with the expectation that they will help create a positive school climate and support the path the school has taken with a culturally-responsive, trauma-informed approach.

Recommendation 33:

School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement receive appropriate training and support to contribute to a positive learning environment and school climate for all students, including students with the greatest needs.

Action Steps

1 School Boards and District and School Leaders develop and adopt school policies and/or Memorandums of Understanding to define the role of law enforcement in creating a positive school climate and to limit officer participation in school disciplinary matters.

2 District and School Leaders have policies and training in place that prevent School Personnel from making referrals to law enforcement for issues that are not serious public safety issues; and ensure appropriate supports are in place to assist staff in de-escalating disruptive student interactions.

3 School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement have adequate training, knowledge, and skills to de-escalate interactions for all children, including children/adolescents who have an IEP or an identified mental health, behavioral, or developmental disability; and all referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests are tracked and included in publicly reported data.

4 School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement seek opportunities for appropriate training on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, and building trusted relationships with all students, school personnel, and community.

8. Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environments and Safe School Climates that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students

Overarching Goal: Redefining the Role of School Law Enforcement to Support Positive Learning Environments

Part B:
Workshop Themes and Rational to Achieve
Excellence in School Culture and Climate

9

Reform Educational Policies, Laws and Match Funding to Align with Creating Positive School Climate and Culture to Support the Needs of All Students

9. Reform Educational Policies, Laws and Match Funding to Align with Creating Positive School Climate and Culture to Support the Needs of All Students

Overarching Goal: Changing Public Policies and Funding Priorities that Contribute to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Approaches that Create Positive Learning Environments

To eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, the Indianapolis community must rethink public policies and laws that undermine student success, and advocate for reforms to increase student support services for students to thrive in school and empower parents/guardians/caregivers, educators, and service providers to meet the needs of all students. Advocacy must occur at the school, district, county, and state levels. How school personnel will meet the challenges they face given workforce development shortages is an important consideration. Public policy reforms provide an opportunity to improve student academic outcomes, decrease absenteeism, increase student support services for improved mental health well-being, promote community-based resources, provide adequate funding to support identified concerns, reduce contact with the justice system, and improve workforce conditions to achieve a positive learning environment for all.

New and refined workforce development strategies have proven essential to reinforcing the need for adequate funding levels with salaries to recruit and retain qualified school personnel. New policies to increase funding to attract more college-bound students into the education field through increased scholarship opportunities have been legislated in Indiana the past few years. However, these measures are not enough. Heightening the importance

of having qualified educators, nurses, social workers, counselors, and school psychologists who choose these professions to serve the needs of the students they impact, especially in high need areas, is crucial. Providing competitive salaries that match other more lucrative fields remains challenging. There must be strategic planning and support to create policies that provide attractive offerings to incentivize high performing students to enter these fields and close the gaps in the student-to-staff ratios that exist.

Educators may struggle in isolation and misunderstanding about their vicarious trauma, heavy workloads, lack of self-care, and concern about their ability to meet the challenges to. interact with their students successfully. Their own well-being can be compromised by their inability to manage their own mental health concerns that can inhibit their ability to effectively interact and engage all youth. Without adequate assistance from student support personnel, such as school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers, teachers, and school administrators, they may become overwhelmed and many leave the profession. Where policies and practices still undermine student success, changing laws to align with creating a positive learning and work environment can improve school climates for all. Investing in resources within the school community that provide support and expertise for students and school staff is essential for educators to become culturally-responsive and trauma-informed.

While collaborating with essential professional associations to include their specific concerns, system changes will require reassessment of workforce development issues and careful planning to address known deficits in local and state resources that need modification. Collaborative efforts within the community offer advocates an opportunity to reform laws and public policies by staying informed and alert as governmental bodies prepare for their legislating. Collecting and disseminating baseline data that identify gaps, inequities, and misaligned ratios help pinpoint issues that need to change. Through collective efforts, groups can organize to influence policymakers and lawmakers with pertinent facts, lived experiences, and best-practice findings. Preparing our youth to share their stories is also a wise strategy. Using community meetings, forums, and position statements to educate concerned individuals and organizations for coalition building creates a synergy to empower people to voice concerns. The movement prepares the community to express challenges to laws and strategize how to improve practices through supporting new legislation and funding that address effective ways to create positive school culture and climate for all students.

Multiple youth shared the need for community bonding and action in order to promote the equity they believe their schools are lacking. One youth wrote,

"I would try to voice my opinion,"

in response to the addition of community engagement in educational reform.

Recommendation 34:

A community report and plan advances recommendations and action steps from this report.

Recommendation 35:

A local and statewide Advocacy Network (consisting of youth-led organizations, non-profits, youth serving organizations, government officials and agencies, faith-based organizations, and schools) is developed to lead policy reform drawing on individual organizational strengths that collaborate to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline.

Recommendation 36:

In cooperation with educators and statewide professional associations who lead policy reform, a statewide Advocacy Network addresses public policy needs, issues, and funding levels related to dramatically increasing the pool and hiring of qualified personnel who provide resources and student support services, such as school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

Recommendation 37:

The Advocacy Network will be responsible for identifying further public policy reforms essential to creating positive learning environments and eventually eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline.

Recommendation 38:

A system of relationships is established with state governing bodies, including the governor's office, relevant departments, and members of the general assembly to bring strategic awareness of the issues facing the need for appropriate student support services for all students in the state.

Recommendation 39:

A user-friendly statewide data source system is established that compiles strategic information for the county about academic achievement, disciplinary practices, student needs and resources, and other data to meet the needs of the public to view and contrast outcomes of various education school systems and, including, disaggregated data for traditional public, charter, innovation and voucher settings.

Action Steps

1

A Collaboration of Organizations facilitate the development of a local and statewide Advocacy Network to implement a reform agenda to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline, advocate for increased levels of student service support in schools, and oversee the development of strategies to advance the recommendations.

2

Local and Statewide Advocacy Network advocates and produces communication about the importance and the positive impact of following the recommended ratios for student services to staff, parents, and the community.

3

Community Members and Organizations reach out to District and School Level Leaders about the support they provide, current projects being worked on, and what the leaders view as needs, increasing communication and transparency in the community on improving school climate.

4

District and School Leaders provide a welcoming space and invite parents and educators to collaborate and create a proposal for a reformed approach to education, improving educational outcomes and eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionate discipline and suspension outcomes, and excessive school-based arrests.

5

District and School Administrators with Community Leaders create advocacy groups to focus on building the school's resources and funding to align with the recommendations.

Overarching Goal: Changing Public Policies and Funding Priorities that Contribute to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Approaches that Create Positive Learning Environments

6

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office with Community Organizations verify that district and individual school leadership have established school community teams consisting of critical school personnel, such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, caregiver representatives, youth providers/mentors, and community representatives, that collaborate to meet the needs of all students, and consider local and statewide legislative action to require implementation of the community teams.

7

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office collaborates with School Districts and the Community Organizations to collect and report critical data points to hold each other accountable for budgeting and funding needs as well as identifying critical areas for reform.

8

A Collaboration of Organizations identify policy issues related to improving school climates and reducing the school-to-prison pipeline, including reforming school discipline law to align with disciplinary best practices, identifying funding to implement positive approaches to school discipline, and addressing the root causes of absenteeism without punishment.

Part C:

Moving Forward: Creating a Movement

A Community Charge to Implement Recommendations to Achieve Excellence in School Climate and Culture

Leadership is important in every sector: schools, districts, government, and community serving agencies. The policies, choices, and priorities leaders set will help determine how quickly schools, personnel, staff, and community members create needed momentum for change. However, as the community gains more information, it, too, can help provide greater advocacy and help build the public will for change.

Many issues persist in impacting public education in individual schools and school systems as they work to close the achievement gaps and improve overall performance and well-being of all students. The top workshop participant-identified issues impacting student success and the challenges discussed also exist outside of the school building within the community. These include learning more about: social and emotional health, trauma and violence, mental health, culturally-responsive training, chronic absenteeism, social media and internet usage (Marion County Commission on Youth (2021). Closing the Gap Between School & Community Partnerships, An Assessment of Schools in Indianapolis, 2021. www.mccoyouth.org).
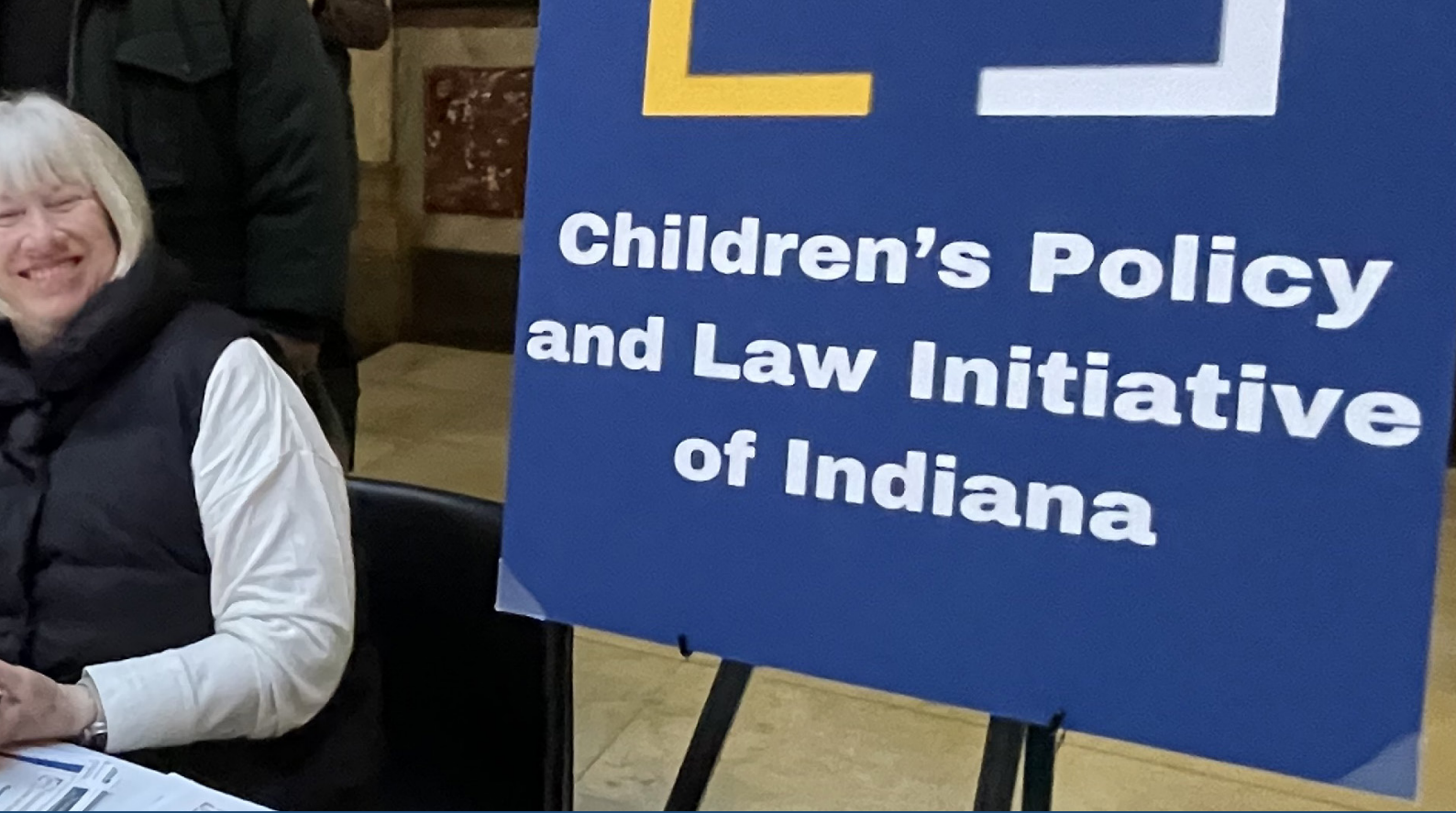
Far too many educators do not have the training to address these community issues, so schools must build community partnerships to meet family needs. Workshop participants realized the remedies can all be further impacted by limited time availability of educators, inadequate and misaligned funding structures, lack of access to community resources, and difficulty in navigating existing community resources. Additional barriers identified for families and students that indirectly affect schools include lack of transportation, scheduling conflicts, as well as cost and availability of services to secure the necessary conditions for learning.

With the information gathered from this year-long process of Working Together to Create Excellence in School Culture and Climate: A Series of Best Practice Workshops and Community Conversations for Transformational Change in Indianapolis, the goal remains to continue building solutions to the problems and concerns identified to ultimately improve how our community delivers student support services. Suggestions vary from developing a community plan, continuously updating the community on relevant topics, and working with educators, associations, community groups, youth serving agencies, youth, and their families to ensure that every student has the support and resources needed. We urge concerned citizens in our community to remain engaged and come together to ensure these ideas become reality.

CPLI's role in convening empowered voices in conversations and collecting data on best practices, lived experiences, observations, and concerns of knowledgeable participants provides a piece of the answer. CPLI recognizes that every voice is important, and has the power to bring change. We issue a charge to our community to move forward in implementing the Themes, Recommendations and Action Steps outlined in this report to help our students, educators, and schools thrive as safe, secure, welcoming places.

Part D:

Appendix

1

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2

Table of Community Recommendations

This Table of Community Recommendations fairly articulates what the community discussed during the Best Practice Workshops held on June 15, 2023 and August 10, 2023. As the Indianapolis community considers its next steps, individual roles and collective action should be pursued to implement these recommendations and ensure accountability.

1 Overarching Goal: Communication and Youth Involvement in Systemic Change
Listen and Hear All Youth Voices

RATIONALE:

We've found that when youth feel heard, understood and respected, it empowers them and reveals their strengths that were there all along; they just need to feel supported. In uplifting their voices, addressing their concerns and listening to what their proposed solutions are, they grow connected to the community and their own leadership skills while advocating for their rights as students.

Programs, schools, and family units have shown to be necessary for youth to feel empowered. Getting students invested in their future requires the guidance of communities, legislators, parents, and educators. All voices are more than just youth. Listen to and

respect concerns from all voices educators, parents, nurses, social workers, community members, school counselors, etc.

Recommendations

1 Create forums for consistent open communication to allow all groups of students the opportunity to be empowered and allowed to propose their recommended solutions for systems change and continuous involvement in the work.

2 Create opportunities within school and the community at large to ensure all voices connect with ensuring student academic success by providing services that support students in being heard, respected, and honored regarding education policy, practices, and solution-making.

Action Steps

1

School Administrators, Parents, and Youth develop opportunities to communicate issues and concerns, including student-led activities and forums, that affect youth development and safe learning environments in school, and provide recommendations for problem-solving or reform.

2

Districts and School Administrators form student advisory committees and establish regularly scheduled communications between them and school administration and school boards on issues identified by youth that need addressed by the school community.

3

School Administrators create opportunities for youth and youth organizations to survey, evaluate, and share findings to discuss the needs of their student population on what the youth feel they are missing emotionally, academically, mentally, and physically, and their ideas to solve identified issues.

4

School administrators, with involvement of Youth and School Community, appoint diverse representatives from the student body to serve on and participate in school administrative working committees and groups.

5

School Administrators empower parents, families, and community mentors as advocates for youth concerns; provide youth with opportunities to build communication and leadership skills; and elevate youth voices and experiences to change the narrative of youth to be strength-based.

6

School Administrators involve all youth populations, including the most vulnerable, at all levels of decision-making to share their unique perspectives and experiences.

1

Overarching Goal: Communication and Youth Involvement in Systemic Change

Listen and Hear All Youth Voices

7

School Administrators create opportunities to elevate school voices at the community level with local governing bodies such as the Mayor's Office, the City County Council, the business community at large, and workforce development audiences.

8

School Administrators and Student Support Personnel are empowered to advocate, provide guidance, and recommend support services during student transition periods and breaks away from school; and they work on challenges often left unaddressed to help students better engage and adjust back into the school environment when they resume their academic study.

9

School Administrators build relationships of trust with youth, parents, and families of youth who have been marginalized, and work to involve concerned community members and organizations to ensure all voices are heard.

10

School Administrators ensure how School Counselors, Social Workers, Nurses, and Psychologists work together on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed methods while including student voices as advisers for youth perspectives on student well-being with administrators and community leaders.

11

School Administrators collaborate with Youth, Community Organizations, Youth Mentors, and Youth Providers to communicate consistently and work with the schools to bring support to students.

2 Overarching Goal: School Climate

Create A Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Environment In Every School District and Every School
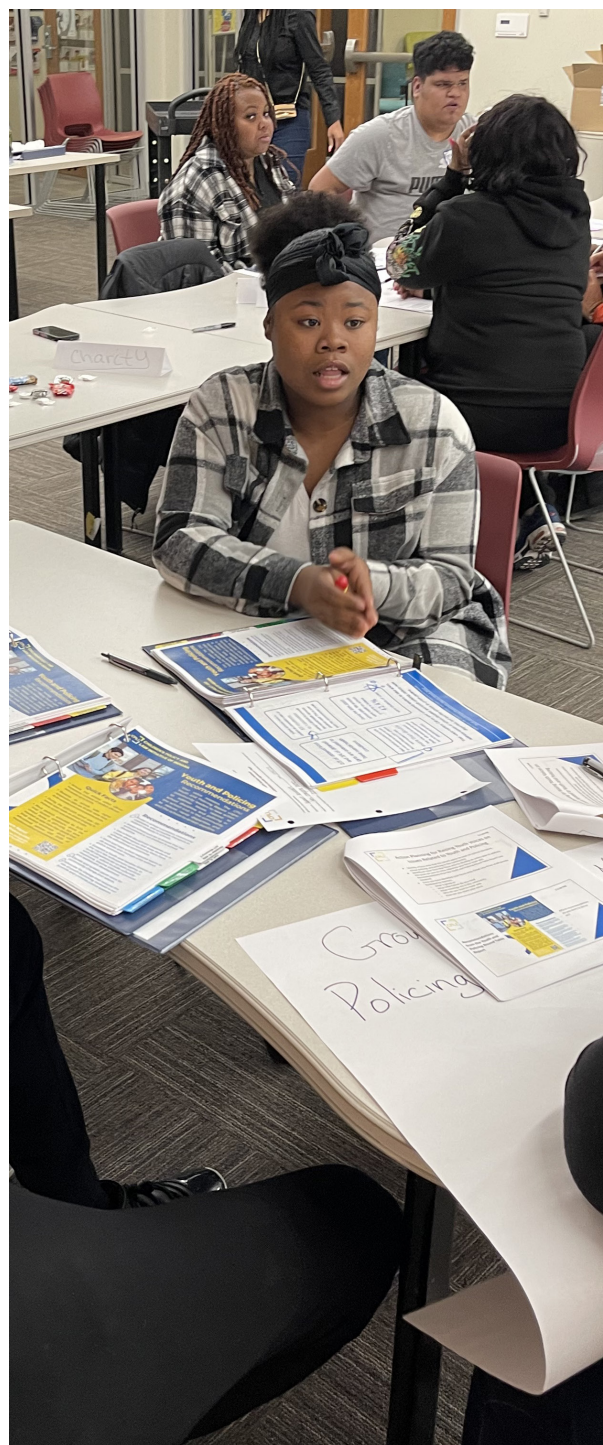
RATIONALE:

Many students reported that feeling connected to teachers was incredibly difficult. Oftentimes they didn't think the adults cared about students' struggles, needs, or overall well-being. Students of color are less likely to have neighbors that ask them questions about their school and home life. There's no room for them to develop emotionally and mentally as they tend to shut down their feelings after getting rejected. Therefore, students who are provided safe spaces where they can take the time to grieve, relax, or just be youth establish a low-stress learning environment and safer, consistent, supported learning as their needs are validated and met. Before bringing in officers and referrals, students must learn how to connect to themselves, their educators, and their environment.

Recommendations

1. Employ and validate use of culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices that build mutual trust to create positive learning environments that lead to excellence in educational outcomes for all students.

2. Shift school culture, policies, practices, for classroom management techniques from punitive/control to an approach centering student validation and engagement while affirming safe and orderly learning environments.

3. Create appropriate student-to-staff ratios of licensed, trained personnel are in place to support student services.

4. Confirm that students with the highest needs, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and others who experience trauma, mental health issues, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts, have sufficient access to needed services aligned with appropriate policies, practices, and procedures.

5. Identify and establish standards for implementation of a culturally-responsive, trauma-informed, student-supported, safe, and affirming learning environment.

Action Steps

1

School Administrators conduct surveys, analyze, and disseminate the results on School Climate and Culture for parents, students, and teachers so that improvement areas are continuously identified and opportunities provided to collaboratively resolve issues to further incorporate trust-based practices.

2

District Leaders and School Administrators use positive affirmations and positive discipline with all students, expect all staff members to consistently model the practices, and ensure that every student has a trusted adult as emotional support.

3

District Leaders and School Administrators increase the amount of counselors/social workers in schools to give all students the opportunity to meet with regularly, build relationships, and provide emotional breaks and guidance on addressing and responding to social-emotional and mental health issues, while employing restorative practices and de-escalation and self-regulation skills to mediate conflict and behavioral issues.

4

School Administrators and Designated School Personnel organize and accept invitations to meetings with youth and families, along with community organizations who have a specialized relationship working with the youth/families, to develop and implement plans of action and provide resources to build resiliency skills among students.

5

District Leaders ensure that School Administrators and Personnel review research on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed strategies, and update school policies regularly to ensure they align with the needs of BIPOC students and students with special needs, mental health concerns, substance abuse, or trauma-related issues.

2

Overarching Goal: School Climate

Create A Consistent Student Supported Safe and Affirming Learning Environment In Every School District and Every School

6

District and School Leaders use disaggregated school discipline, school-based arrest, and academic data to understand student outcomes, identify solutions for improving student achievement, reduce discipline referrals, school-based arrests, and absenteeism rates often disproportionate by race, and include the data published from the Indiana Department of Education Annual School Performance Reports so it can be easily accessed on District/School websites for parents/families and community review.

3 Overarching Goal: Student Supports
Hire Increased Numbers Of Licensed Support Personnel And Staff

RATIONALE:

While there is a shortage of school support staff, it's been proven that under-qualified individuals in incorrect roles can hurt the system we are trying to fix. If students don't feel safe or can't make a relatable connection to educators and community members, they tend to distance themselves and act out, often resulting in depression, anxiety, deviance, or even violence. Currently, there is not only not enough staff according to the ratios to provide the proper services that students are missing, but there is also not enough appropriate staff. Thorough background checks provide credibility for individuals in these roles and that they are adequately qualified in trauma, grief responses, and mental health issues. A lack of proper training only exacerbates the issue of a lack of connection between students and staff.

Recommendations

1 Appropriately licensed staff meet nationally-recommended student-staff ratios in every school.

2 Workforce development efforts are supported to create an appropriate job pool to meet the needs of schools and districts.

3 Certified or licensed personnel are hired who: (1) demonstrate understanding and high expectations for academic success with all populations of students; (2) support professional training needs of school staff on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices; (3) serve as a resource to address vicarious trauma and burnout among staff; and (4) offer training opportunities for students to develop conflict resolution and other life skills, including de-escalation and emotional self-regulation.

Action Steps

1

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office commissions a Marion County assessment of the numbers of certified deployed staff by district and school, based on nationally recommended staff-student ratios; disseminates a report with findings to district leaders, school administrators, and the public; and works with district leaders to identify appropriate levels of funding to address workforce development issues to match known deficits.

2

District Leaders and School Personnel seek diverse candidates and hire qualified certified personnel to close the gaps identified by the assessment.

3

District Leaders and School Personnel regularly evaluate student staff-ratios to ensure compliance with national benchmarks, and share data and findings with the public and data collecting agencies.

4

Public Policy Officials, District Leaders, and School Administrators coordinate with universities, local high school counselors, and the community to assist with recruitment efforts and the identification of workforce development issues for expanding interest in and increasing the job pool for all education-related fields.

5

District Leaders and School Administrators ensure the health and well-being of all staff through regular surveys, training, and communication; and collaborate with and leverage resources through community mental health serving agencies.

Overarching Goal: Student Supports

Hire Increased Numbers Of Licensed Support Personnel And Staff

4

Overarching Goal: Hiring Practices

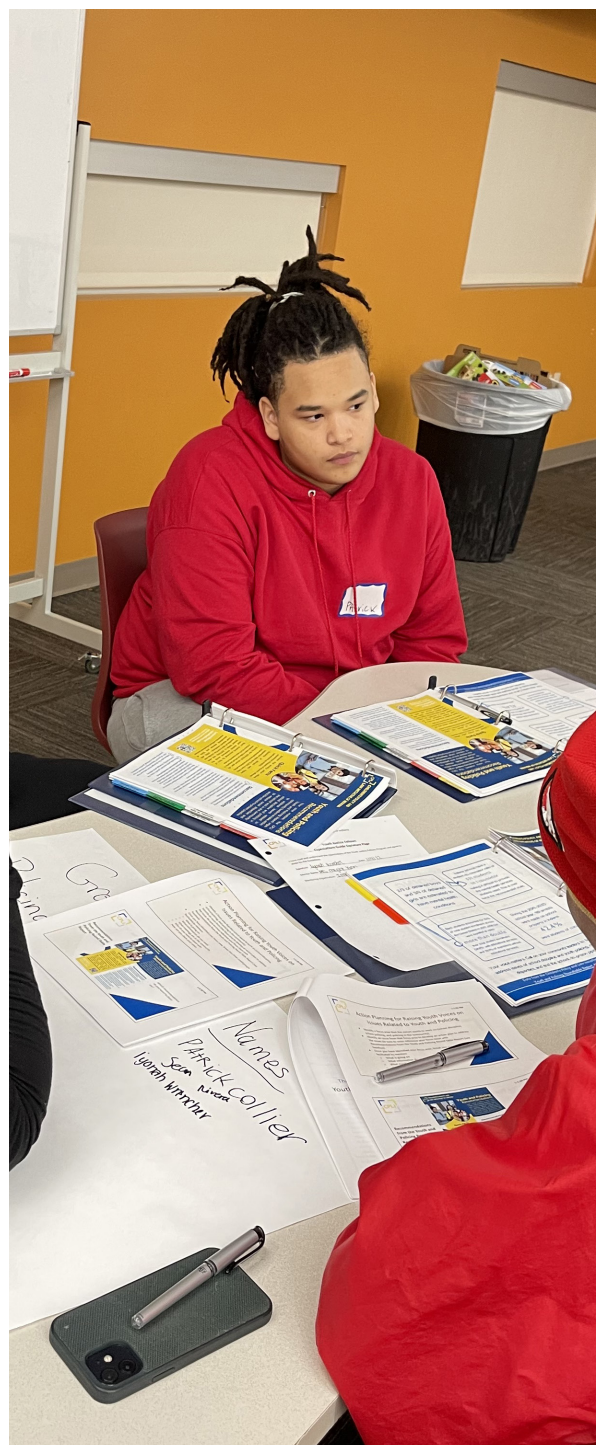## Hire School Personnel With Whom Students Can Identify

RATIONALE:

Statistics show that there is a shortage of staff who are equipped to deal with children's social, emotional, and mental health. Therefore we must ensure that the present staff is receiving the appropriate training. Culturally-responsive and trauma-informed training is not sufficient for staff to create a connection with students. Staff who have the capacity to engage and relate to the students they serve are shown to better engage with the community they serve; bus rides around town, supporting local businesses, going to local events, and awareness of services. Hiring BIPOC educators who have trained in issues specific to minorities grants them tools so they are better equipped to sustain high expectations while using connection to correct instead of the corrections system.

Recommendations

1 Staff ratios reflect racial and cultural composition of the students they serve.

2 Human resource policies and hiring practices align with workforce development goals to increase diversity of school staffing to reflect the demographic make-up of the student population, including shared life experiences; and also work within the district in high school programs to begin creating "grow your own" campaigns.

3 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) personnel are hired to: (1) coordinate culturally-responsive trainings for all staff and students; (2) track and analyze current demographic data trends; (3) help align school policies with equity initiatives and culturally-responsive practices; (4) provide resources and materials; and (3) create opportunities for all school staff and students to grow in their understanding of their diverse student body, their communities, and the systemic issues that relate to excellence in academic outcomes for all students.

Action Steps

1

District Board and Administrators ensure collaboration among administrators, teachers, student support services staff, and the human resources department to assess and refine the current application process for recruiting diverse candidates.

2

District Human Resource Officers and School Administrators broaden the search and networking process to identify diverse candidates for employment among diverse demographics.

3

School Administrators actively recruit qualified, non-certified, diverse community members to serve as instructional assistants and encourage them to become certified, licensed personnel.

4

City Officials, the Commission on Higher Education, Indiana Department of Education, District and School Leaders, and Community Organizations work collaboratively with universities, high schools, and other community agencies to develop a citywide campaign to create a diverse pool of preservice educators and other certified staff, including recruiting potential preservice university students to the field of education, counseling, social work, psychology, and nursing.

5

School Boards as well as District and School Administrators collectively work with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Personnel and Student Support Services Personnel who are well versed in serving all students, including underperforming and over-disciplined students, to create a sustainable Cultural Competence Plan as provided for in 2004 Legislation (HB 1308) that holds all students to high academic expectations while addressing student trauma, social/emotional issues, and mental health challenges, using culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices.

Overarching Goal: Hiring Practices

Hire School Personnel With Whom Students Can Identify

Overarching Goal: Community Involvement

5 Define And Balance Opportunities to Provide Student Support Services through Certified School Personnel While Involving Community Services Using A Team Approach

RATIONALE:

Our work shows a balance of certified personnel with community resources and youth providers create effective methods to address the needs of a diverse student population.

A team approach provides respect, communication and collaboration between all school staff, community members and families. Increasing transparency, providing evidence, and improving communication between all parties about ongoing collaborative efforts promoting positive change tends to incentivise continued engagement from community members and families.

Clarity and easier accessibility to resources provided by schools to families on community events/resources, mental health services, etc. improve children's well-being by granting them the tools to succeed academically and socio-emotionally.

It also is shown to foster stronger relationships with proactive actions and connections instead of reactive responses and communication in negative situations.

Recommendations

1 School budgets provide appropriate funding to meet student needs for hiring certified, qualified, diverse staff, with community support services.

2 School community team approach is established to meet student support service needs.

3 Schools value and employ a collaborative approach to workforce development among certified staff and youth providers for the unique skill sets and services they each provide.

4 Collaborations among systems—education, juvenile justice, mental and physical health, and child welfare—meet the needs of all students, including the most vulnerable students and their

5 Provide opportunities for certified school counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists to advise, inform, and train other school personnel, families, caregivers, and other community members in mental health, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, emotional regulation and de-escalation skills, and strategic planning to create safe and open environments for students.

Action Steps

1

District and School Leaders hire a full-time school community liaison to coordinate collaboration initiatives among educators, families, and community services, and work with a school-community team to balance opportunities to share unique resources and strengths to meet the needs and support strength-based assets of the students and families in the school community.

2

School Administrators and Community Mentors engage on a school-community team with a common mission aligned with school improvement goals to leverage resources, communicate regularly with one another, and meet the needs of the students they serve.

3

School Leaders ensure that school community teams—consisting of critical school personnel such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, caregiver representatives, youth providers/mentors, and community representatives—share information and training opportunities on culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices, participate in collaborative planning activities, and advocate on behalf of all students.

4

District and School Leaders share information with the community that they have established school community teams and provide regular updates on collaborative initiatives that meet the needs of all students.

5

Community Providers seek opportunities and community stakeholders advocate for these collaborative opportunities.

5

Define And Balance Opportunities to Provide Student Support Services through Certified School Personnel While Involving Community Services Using A Team Approach

6 Overarching Goal: Resources and Needs
Assess and Provide Sufficient Resources For Unmet Student Needs

RATIONALE:

As mentioned previously, students are severely missing the resources needed to protect their mental health and academic success. Indiana has ranked 45th in public health and 28th in overall child well-being. Youth are being underserved in their communities and it's affecting their success in schools. They are lacking proper personnel in school to assess both in school and out of school needs, schools are lacking the proper funding and budgeting to prepare students for success, and the communities aren't being made aware of the lack of resources they could use to assist their youth..

Recommendations

1 Ongoing assessments are conducted of both the assets students and their families bring and the needs of students in each school and district are identified.

2 A user-friendly public data source is developed that compiles strategic information about student assets, needs, the resources available to meet the needs, and the percentage of youth needing various services, while providing transparent information to parents/guardians, community members, and others who can easily access the information.

3 District and school budgets are aligned to address unmet needs and identify adequate resources that prioritize the well-being of all children.

4 Necessary resources are leveraged from existing school and community assets and services.

5 Staffing with licensed personnel is in place to work with community partnerships to leverage existing assets, develop lasting relationships, and identify new resources through the school community team, which is a key Community School Program strategy.

6 District and school have plans for meeting unmet student and family needs by identifying and advocating for new resources and leveraging school related community resources, including physical, mental, and emotional health; food and nutrition; academic supports; extra-curricular programming; childcare access; and financial assistance, housing, and legal aid service needs.

7 School boards conduct strategic planning based on data revisited regularly, and ensures it is accessible to all community partners, youth, and families, with concrete identified issues and proper systems of tracking and monitoring goals.

Action Steps

1

District and School Administrators increase school-to-community transparency by publicizing documented needs of various schools and indicating to the public the resources needed through such means as: providing easily accessible and digestible end-of-year summaries to the community regarding physical and mental health initiative updates, academic success, funding usage, and future goals on how the district and schools are working to improve services and meet the needs of students.

2

District and School Leaders designate personnel to work with school-community teams to advocate for adequate funding and resources to meet the unmet needs of students; and provide awareness of, information about, and access to resources that families and community members can use to ensure that student needs are met, while noting any limitations, eligibility requirements, transportation opportunities, and programs offered by the school and others in the community.

3

District and School Administrators create engaging opportunities for school personnel to connect with the community they serve by: supporting local businesses, participating in local events, promoting awareness of services, establishing regular communication with community partners, and creating opportunities for community input on grant applications.

4

District and School Leaders survey staff, youth, and youth organizations, community, and parents on practices or issues of concern that implicate training.

5

Community Stakeholders and Youth Serving Organizations provide their services including time, talent, and finances to support student needs as volunteers or through compensated services from designated funds that support meeting the needs of students.

6

Assess and Provide Sufficient Resources For Unmet Student Needs

7

Overarching Goal: Professional Development

Provide Professional Development For All School Staff and Community Stakeholders

RATIONALE:

Educators and community members agree that training opportunities on culturally-responsive and trauma-informed practices and appropriate resources must be provided to all staff members to help them meet the needs of all students. Recognizing the importance of involving parents and community members to meet those needs, leaders must continually seek the most effective ways to make this happen.

Problems occur when school personnel and community stakeholders may be unaware of how and where to find highly effective training opportunities and resources that use best practices taught through a culturally-responsive lens to positively impact students' emotional and mental health needs, and maintain improved academic achievement outcomes. Further ambiguity remains about how students can be proactively involved in this process at school and in the community. To ensure accountability that students are best serviced, school leaders, community stakeholders, and students must use data and other facts to advocate, implement, and then monitor the outcomes of using practices that keep all entities informed, trained, and ready to effectively bring positive outcomes for all students.

Recommendations

1. All school districts and schools require annual professional development on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent brain development for board members, administrators, educators, school resource officers, all non-certified staff, and community providers and stakeholders.

2. Professional development and the use of data are aligned and linked to concepts that are crucial for creating positive learning environments and high academic expectations and achievement to help children thrive and attain positive outcomes.

3. Community members are empowered to advocate for culturally-responsive, trauma-informed training to occur for all school personnel, community stakeholders and organizations, and students.

4. Youth voices are included in training and conversations related to topics presented by school personnel and community stakeholders that address student support service needs.

Action Steps

1

District and School Leaders seek out and include local professionals and their expertise for regular trainings related to topics such as culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, child/adolescent development, diversity, and inclusion in multiple forums, such as staff meetings and professional development days.

2

Districts and School Administrators form student advisory committees and establish regularly scheduled communications between them and school administration and school boards on issues identified by youth that need addressed by the school community.

3

District and School Administrators provide all personnel with training on mental health, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, and all available community resources, with consideration of employing the skills of outside vendors.

4

District and School Leaders use disaggregated district and school student data to identify personnel for targeted training purposes to improve practices and address challenges with implicit bias, impact of race and identity on student outcomes, disproportionality in academic achievement, low attendance rates and absenteeism, school discipline, in- and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests (school-to-prison pipeline), to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

5

School Administrators provide and School Personnel seek training on classroom management techniques that shifts the focus towards providing students with skills to regulate their emotions and enable them to have open conversations in both group and individual settings to express emotions constructively and safely, while they hold the students accountable to the school community without use of school suspension and out-of-class time.

7

Provide Professional Development For All School Staff and Community Stakeholders

6

School Resource Officers and Police are trained annually on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, child and adolescent development, mental and behavioral health, de-escalation skills, and their role and limitations on the use of law enforcement powers in the school setting.

7

The Indianapolis Mayor's office, collaborating with School District Leaders, Educators, Professional Associations, Area Universities, Non-Profits, Youth Serving Organizations, Youth-Led Organizations, and Local Training Professionals publish an annual updated directory of available best practice professional development opportunities for all staff members focused on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care and make available to all schools, school districts, community partners, and parents.

8

Community Stakeholders and Organizations seek out training on best-practices in culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent development that empower them to meet the needs of students.

9

Youth-Led Organizations, Non-Profits, Youth Serving Organizations, Government Officials and Agencies, Faith-Based Organizations, and Schools empower students to share their voices and experiences on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed care, mental health, bullying, suicide prevention, and child/adolescent development to inform educators and community agencies to better serve youth in the community.

10

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office, collaborating with School District Leaders, Educators, Professional Associations, Area Universities, Non-Profits, Youth Serving Organizations, Youth-Led Organizations, and Local Training Professionals, produce guiding principles and standards that result in a rubric to attain positive learning environments in all schools in Marion County based on implementing culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices.

Overarching Goal: School Law Enforcement

8 **Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environment and Safe School Climate that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students**

RATIONALE:

A large percentage of referrals to the juvenile justice system come directly from school interactions. The purpose of these recommendations is to minimize the risk of children having adverse interactions with law enforcement that lead to justice system involvement and school dropout. Aligning the role of police in schools with the principles of positive school climates and limiting their exercise of police powers to serious safety issues is a best practice to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline. This will involve training, building trusted relationships, and developing a clear understanding about the respective responsibilities of school administrators and the limitations of school resource officers in school discipline.

Recommendations

1. School Boards, District and School Leaders, and their Administrative Staffs are responsible for administering all school discipline.

2. School Boards and District and School Leaders produce policies that define the role of School Resource Officers and law enforcement consistent with principles of developing positive and safe school climates and limit the exercise of school law enforcement powers to matters of serious public safety.

3. School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement are selected and hired with the expectation that they will help create a positive school climate and support the path the school has taken with a culturally-responsive, trauma-informed approach.

4. School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement receive appropriate training and support to contribute to a positive learning environment and school climate for all students, including students with the greatest needs.

Action Steps

1

School Boards and District and School Leaders develop and adopt school policies and/or Memorandums of Understanding to define the role of law enforcement in creating a positive school climate and to limit officer participation in school disciplinary matters.

2

District and School Leaders have policies and training in place that prevent School Personnel from making referrals to law enforcement for issues that are not serious public safety issues; and ensure appropriate supports are in place to assist staff in de-escalating disruptive student interactions.

3

School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement have adequate training, knowledge, and skills to de-escalate interactions for all children, including children/adolescents who have an IEP or an identified mental health, behavioral, or developmental disability; and all referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests are tracked and included in publicly reported data.

4

School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement seek opportunities for appropriate training on culturally-responsive, trauma-informed practices, and building trusted relationships with all students, school personnel, and community.

8

Align Law Enforcement Practices in Schools with Principles of Developing Positive Learning Environment and Safe School Climate that Maximize the Academic Success of All Students

9

Reform Educational Policies and Laws to Match Funding that Aligns with Creating Positive School Climate and Culture to Support the Needs of All Students

RATIONALE:

To eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, the community must begin to advocate and rethink public policies and laws to reform how to provide student support services that help students and empower guardians, educators, and service providers to meet the needs of all students. As we consider the needs of students, there has to be a reckoning with how school personnel are meeting the challenges they face.

New and refined workforce development strategies have proven essential to reinforcing the need for adequate funding levels with salaries that attract and retain qualified school personnel.

Educators may struggle in isolation and misunderstanding about their vicarious trauma, heavy workloads, lack of self-care, and concern about their ability to meet the challenges to interact with their students successfully. Without adequate assistance from student support personnel, such as school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers, teachers and school administrators may be overwhelmed.

This is why systemic change must occur. Investing in resources within the school community that provide support and expertise for both students and school staff is essential for educators to become trauma-informed. These resources will provide an opportunity to improve students outcomes and improve workforce conditions that create a positive environment for all.

Recommendations

1 A community report and plan advances recommendations and action steps from this report.

2 A local and statewide Advocacy Network (consisting of youth-led organizations, non-profits, youth serving organizations, government officials and agencies, faith-based organizations, and schools) is developed to lead policy reform drawing on individual organizational strengths that collaborate to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline.

3 In cooperation with educators and statewide professional associations who lead policy reform, a statewide Advocacy Network addresses public policy needs, issues, and funding levels related to dramatically increasing the pool and hiring of qualified personnel who provide resources and student support services, such as school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

4 The Advocacy Network will be responsible for identifying further public policy reforms essential to creating positive learning environments and eventually eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline.

5 A system of relationships is established with state governing bodies, including the governor's office, relevant departments, and members of the general assembly to bring strategic awareness of the issues facing the need for appropriate student support services for all students in the state.

6 A user-friendly statewide data source system is established that compiles strategic information for the county about academic achievement, disciplinary practices, student needs and resources, and other data to meet the needs of the public to view and contrast outcomes of various education school systems and, including, disaggregated data for traditional public, charter, innovation and voucher settings.

Action Steps

1

A Collaboration of Organizations facilitate the development of a local and statewide Advocacy Network to implement a reform agenda to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline, advocate for increased levels of student service support in schools, and oversee the development of strategies to advance the recommendations.

2

Local and Statewide Advocacy Network advocates and produces communication about the importance and the positive impact of following the recommended ratios for student services to staff, parents, and the community.

3

Community Members and Organizations reach out to District and School Level Leaders about the support they provide, current projects being worked on, and what the leaders view as needs, increasing communication and transparency in the community on improving school climate

4

District and School Leaders provide a welcoming space and invite parents and educators to collaborate and create a proposal for a reformed approach to education, improving educational outcomes and eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionate discipline and suspension outcomes, and excessive school-based arrests.

9

Reform Educational Policies and Laws to Match Funding that Aligns with Creating Positive School Climate and Culture to Support the Needs of All Students

5

District and School Administrators with Community Leaders create advocacy groups to focus on building the school's resources and funding to align with the recommendations.

6

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office with Community Organizations verify that district and individual school leadership have established school community teams consisting of critical school personnel, such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, caregiver representatives, youth providers/mentors, and community representatives, that collaborate to meet the needs of all students, and consider local and statewide legislative action to require implementation of the community teams.

7

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office collaborates with School Districts and the Community Organizations to collect and report critical data points to hold each other accountable for budgeting and funding needs as well as identifying critical areas for reform.

8

A Collaboration of Organizations identify policy issues related to improving school climates and reducing the school-to-prison pipeline, including reforming school discipline law to align with disciplinary best practices, identifying funding to implement positive approaches to school discipline, and addressing the root causes of absenteeism without punishment.

3

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