

**PARENT TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
WEST CHICAGO COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL**

October 5, 2021 7:30 am

COMMUNITY ROOM: ROOM 1114-1116

ENTRANCE B

326 Joliet Street

West Chicago, IL 60185

1. CALL TO ORDER:

a. Dr. Dwyer began the meeting at 7:30 a.m.

b. Present were: Dr. Will Dwyer (Principal), Daisy Fernandez (Parent), Brianne Ferrerio (Teacher), Sandra Gonzalez (Support Staff), Pete Martino (Assistant Principal), Penny Munoz (Board Member), Stephanie Waller (Parent), Jenna Windt (Dean), Student 2, Student 3

Absent: Jovany Zuniga (Board Member) and Student 1

Also in attendance: Mary Howard (Assistant Principal)

c. Additions to the agenda: None

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Blanca Ruiz, President of the West Chicago High School Support Staff Association (WCHSSSA), thanked the committee for its work and addressed concerns about the impact the “Devious Licks” Tik Tok challenges for September and October have on staff. She asked if preemptive emails would be sent to students/parents and asked for disciplinary consequences for students who engage in the challenges.

Cheryl Moore introduced herself as the Director of HR from 2017-2021, which included the role of non-discrimination coordinator. She provided a “summary of concerns” to the committee that she compiled during a 2020-2021 “non-discrimination investigation” regarding disproportionality in the student dropout rate, suspensions, truancy, and student withdrawals. The document also addressed the composition and publication of the Parent Teacher Advisory Committee in years prior.

3. REVIEW PREVIOUS MEETING: (June 9, 2021)

Principal Dwyer described the purpose of the committee as an advisory body regarding policies and practices that make recommendations to the school board. Dr. Dwyer provided a brief historical perspective of the committee’s history and explained how the meeting schedule was impacted by COVID-19. He asked the committee to reflect on “what we are and what we could be.” Dr. Dwyer concluded by stating that the committee will meet again in the spring of 2022.

4, SUSPENSIONS AND INTERVENTIONS:

Dean Windt discussed the impact of COVID-19 on student social-emotional health, particularly increased anxiety. COVID-19 has also impacted students' understanding of and adherence to high school behavioral expectations. She noted that suspension data for the last twelve years has shown an increase in the number of in-school (ISS) and out-of-school suspensions (OSS); however, numbers for the 2020-2021 school year are an anomaly due to COVID-19 and remote and hybrid learning. Now that school has returned to full in-person learning and school begins at 7:55 am, student tardiness has resumed, as well as unexcused absences.

Ms. Windt stated that the "no hats and no hoods" policy has been relaxed since the spring of 2021 when students returned to the building for blended learning. The change was made to allow for a focus on masking and COVID-19 sanitation protocols. Since it has been more than a year since all students were engaged in full in-person learning, reestablishing behavioral expectations for students is a priority.

Assistant Principal Martino and Ms. Windt discussed the in-school and out-of-school suspension structure and current efforts to add interventions for at-risk students during in-school suspension. Adjustments were made this year to assign two social work interns to meet with students in ISS.

Funding a certified teacher and/or social worker dedicated to in-school suspension students is necessary to support student learning and identify the root causes of behavioral issues; it would also expand communication with parents. A full-time social worker dedicated to the dean's office is also needed.

Mr. Martino pointed out that universal masking requirements make it difficult for students and staff to build relationships. Students' sense of anonymity and disconnection has contributed to misbehavior. He added that this is a challenging time for all schools.

Board member Munoz asked about the extent to which WCCHS is able to provide push-in services to students assigned to in-school suspension. Mr. Martino stated that the social work interns are rotating into in-school suspension; however, there is a need for a full-time social worker dedicated solely to the dean's office.

Mrs. Munoz asked if a Special Education teacher is assigned to in-school suspension. Mr. Martino explained that there was an effort to staff a position of that nature two or three years ago, but that effort was not successful because no one applied for the position. Mrs. Munoz asked how Special Education

accommodations are provided. Ms. Windt and science teacher, Brianne Ferreiro, stated that both regular and Special Education teachers are able to drop-in to the ISS room, and teachers are able to have a student in ISS attend class for the period at the teacher's discretion.

Mrs. Munoz would like to work to identify the barriers to poor student attendance, tardiness, and behavior issues. She would also like to understand what factors contribute to the demographic disparity between white and Latino student suspension numbers. Mr. Martino stated that the majority of suspensions are due to non-compliance regarding detention, which creates a "consequence chain." Mrs. Munoz wants to work on parent education: she would like the school to help families address issues at home that "parents don't know how to navigate," which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Mrs. Waller asked for more outreach to parents regarding behavioral issues like headphone and phone usage in class.

5. HATS, HEAD COVERINGS, AND STUDENT DRESS CODE UPDATE:

Ms. Windt reiterated that efforts have been made to focus on mask compliance and deemphasize the scrutiny of student dress to minimize student anxiety, which has increased as a result of the return to in-person learning. Although head coverings are still prohibited in the student handbook, male and female students are allowed to wear them in an attempt to ease the transition. Mr. Martino emphasized that each teacher has the discretion to prohibit hats and hoods in his or her own classroom. Nevertheless, student attire that promotes drugs, violence, or alcohol is addressed by the dean's assistants, as well as attire that is clearly inappropriate.

In response to a student's concern about female dress code enforcement, Ms. Windt and Assistant Principal Howard explained that they along with social worker Lindsay Maxson met with a group of six female students to discuss dress code. The administrators communicated to the girls that female dress issues are often a result of the amount of skin visible, strapless garments, the type of garment, and the appearance of the outfit as a whole.

Student 3 stated that she feels some outfits worn by female peers are not school appropriate. Dr. Dwyer stated that he is "adamant that [a student's] first interaction at school is not a negative one." He added that dress code issues must be addressed privately and respectfully, not publicly. Dr. Dwyer also communicated that other principals in DuPage County report that they are seeing similar student dress due to fashion and that we will continue to address this through individual conversations and clarifying expectations. He concluded by saying that he does not want students sent home for a dress code violation, which would require them to miss class time.

6. CHRONIC ABSENCES AND TARDIES:

Ms. Windt stated that most tardies occur first period. The deans and dean's assistants meet individually with students who are chronically tardy to determine the cause(s). Parents are also contacted. Issues vary but frequently include missed alarms, the train, or choosing "outfits." Students who are chronically absent receive a home visit and referral to a social worker prior to suspension. Dean's assistant Sandra Gonzalez stated that she and her colleague attempt to identify the cause of student tardiness, keep in close contact with parents, and report students who are emotionally distressed to the social worker.

Students 1 and 3 discussed reasons they have been tardy to school including going to bed late, "snoozing" their alarm, carpooling, etc. Dr. Dwyer clarified that the WeGo tardy procedure requires teachers to close their door at the bell and direct students to report to Entrance B for a tardy pass as a deterrent.

Dr. Dwyer stated that there has been a small decline in the attendance rate as some students continue to struggle to go to school post-COVID-19. He also explained that there is a new absence category, "exclusion," to record when students are eligible to attend school due to COVID-like symptoms, close contact with a COVID-19 positive person, or a positive COVID-19 test.

Mrs. Munoz stated that she would like tardiness and absences to be discussed by the school board including incentive programs or a buddy system for students. In the future, she would also like to talk about other barriers including socio-economic status, routines, parent education and challenges created by kids working second shift, in an attempt to mitigate and solve problems. Student 3 shared difficulties she has had walking to school, not being able to get a cab, and the impact of a parent working more than one job. Mr. Martino commented that attempts are made to accommodate individual student/family needs. Mrs. Munoz stated that the larger issue is parent education that goes beyond the dean's office. She asked how data about the causes of student absences could be generated. Mr. Martino stated that there are numerous causes of tardiness rather than one or two although there are students with chronic tardiness issues. He also added that the pandemic has impacted the staff's ability to build relationships with students that help curb attendance concerns; remote and hybrid learning has impeded those efforts. Mrs. Munoz stated that "this could be a conversation bigger than this," and that additional staffing may be able to address these needs.

7. STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH DAYS:

Ms. Windt explained that in August of 2021, Governor Pritzker signed [SB1577](#) into law in August. This legislation, which goes into effect in January of 2022, enables students to take up to five excused “mental health days” per school year. ([This article](#) was linked in the meeting agenda.) WCCHS Administration has begun discussions about logistics and communication, including questions about the coding of these absences and communicating this resource to students, staff, and the community.

Dr. Dwyer noted that this bill is positive and useful in supporting student mental health; however, he also pointed out that one thousand students would be entitled to 5,000 cumulative absences per year.

The committee will revisit SB1577 at the spring meeting.

8. BUILDING SECURITY:

Mr. Martino explained that the number of Andy Frain security was increased for the 2021-2022 school year. He emphasized that the Andy Frain “are not the muscle. They are the eyes” in the building. He also noted that the majority of the Andy Frain staff are bilingual. Mr. Martino also stated that the responsibility of the Andy Frain is to “notify the right adults” in the building if there is an issue.

Dr. Dwyer communicated that he does not want WeGo to be a “police state,” and his goal for the building is to be a “friendly and safe place.” Mr. Martino said that Andy Frain serves as a deterrent; however, in a building the size of WCCHS, unsupervised spaces will exist.

9. OTHER:

None

10. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 am.