



School Climate in Guilford County Schools

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Executive Summary

The School Climate Task Force was formed in July of 2007, made up of parents, teachers, principals, law enforcement, school officials, students, and community leaders.

The Guilford County Board of Education charged the task force to:

1. review the district's handling of student misbehavior;
2. review the Guilford County Disproportionate Minority Contact Report;
3. meet with teachers, parents, students and community stakeholders;
4. form a report by consensus back to the Board of Education.

The consensus report should include concrete steps that the Board of Education may adopt to:

1. reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of Guilford County school students;
2. improve the relationship between law enforcement utilized in our schools and minority communities disproportionately represented in arrest records;
3. facilitate greater communication and understanding between the community, schools, parents, SRO officers and students;
4. improve the classroom education component of the SRO program and increase the safety of our campuses with an emphasis on the growing gang concern.

Members of the task force went out into the community and interviewed teachers, principals, parents, students, counselors and other stakeholders. We reviewed data included in the Student Safety survey (2006)¹, the Disproportionate Minority Contact Report², the latest Teacher Working Conditions survey (2006)³, data on suspensions and arrests of minors, and performed a Teacher's School Climate survey (2008)⁴. After eight months of meetings, reviewing data and discussion with stakeholders the following report defines our recommendations to improve the school climate in Guilford County schools.

The recommendations in this report address key findings that have contributed to a poor school climate including;

1. A lack of personnel, materials, technology and facilities to handle an exploding student population, many who come from difficult social or family situations and by definition are at-risk to drop out of school and enter the criminal justice system creating a pipeline from the play ground to our prisons;
2. Inconsistencies within the schools in relation to discipline, tenure of principals and constantly changing programs resulting in frustration and low morale among all the stakeholders;
3. A community with two diverse perspectives, one that feels that when students are disruptive or misbehave they should be suspended, the other, that students who are misbehaving need additional support and education and that no student should be suspended, this division falls mainly along racial lines;

¹ School Safety survey May 2006, based on a statistically representative sample of 2572 students in Guilford County.

² Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact In The Juvenile Justice System, Guilford County Demonstration Project, September 2006

³ Teachers Working Conditions survey Fall 2006, based on a statistically representative sample of 4236 teachers (70% of the GCS educators).

⁴ Teacher School Climate survey January 2008, based on 771 response from teachers in GCS.

- a. A belief by some that racism is in play and explains the wide discrepancies in the number of African American students who have been suspended compared to their white counterparts;
 - b. A belief by others that the central office is putting pressure on principals to reduce the suspension of African American students with no process in place to assess a student's problems or quality alternatives to educate them so they are returning to the classroom with little or no accountability for their actions;
4. A lack of respect and trust between all the stakeholders;
5. Frustrated principals and teachers who have too little time to plan and who are inundated with additional responsibilities that have nothing to do with teaching;
6. An SRO program that encompasses a very large school system and three different law enforcement agencies, the Greensboro City police, the Guilford County Sheriff's department and the High Point city police resulting in different management styles, regulations, policies and inconsistencies;
7. A real concern about a growing gang problem within our schools.

There are a number of things that the task force has found that are already being implemented in GCS that are exciting and making a positive influence on the GCS climate;

- Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) is being implemented in many schools. PBS is a program that rewards good behavior by students and has a very good data collection and a data retrieval portion that allows administrators to spot trouble areas. The basis of this program is to provide 4 or more positive messages to 1 negative message. The schools who are using this program are reporting good results. The problem is the program has not been fully funded due to budget cuts;
- Middle colleges are a savior for at-risk students. We saw many examples of students who may have dropped out of school if it were not for the middle college attributes that teach relevant subjects, with close personal instruction and small class sizes. These non-traditional schools are working very well and should be continued and expanded to lower grades for earlier intervention.
- A comprehensive training program for assistant principals;
- A new twilight school for students who are 16 years old and still in middle school;
- A new non traditional school for students who have been suspended 3 or more times;
- A new program at New Light Baptist Church as an alternative for academic recovery for students in out of school suspension. We should look to collaborate with churches around the county as a very positive alternative to sending students home to possibly unsupervised environments so that the gangs in their neighborhoods do not become their teachers. Other churches have committed to host similar programs.

In a recent Teachers Working Conditions survey (2006) produced by the Guilford Education Alliance analysis of the GCS results yields the following information:

- Teachers need more time for planning and collaboration among their peers;
- Teachers need access to resources to provide quality instruction;
- Teachers should be able to influence and affect district decision making relating to student achievement;
- Teachers value strong, supportive leaders at the district and school Level;
- Teachers need meaningful continuing education experiences that enhance their craft.

In a recent report produced by the New Maryland Education Coalition⁵ a group of 22 educators (with a cumulative total of 322 years of educational experience) were tasked with defining a prototypical design for schools and adequate money needed to fund education. Although the group differed on the proper level of funding they all agreed on these key attributes that should be present in our schools;

- Principals should be strong instructional leaders who are not over-encumbered by operational concerns;
- Early remediation should be provided for “at risk” students through targeted intervention;
- Lower class sizes;
- An emphasis on all students reading no later than third grade;
- Access to pre-kindergarten for most or all students;
- Full-day kindergarten programs;
- Adequate technology and technology support;
- The time and resources for teachers to meet the individual needs of all students and develop relationships with students that lead to strong academic outcomes;
- Professional development integrated into teacher schedules;
- Parent involvement programs.

This report will examine these findings and provide recommendations on how we can start to bring together a divided community and the stakeholders within our school system to improve the school climate within Guilford County.

⁵ A Professional Judgment Approach To Determining Adequate Education Funding in Maryland, by The New Maryland Education Coalition, June 5, 2001

Findings and Recommendations

- 1. A lack of personnel, materials, technology and facilities to handle an exploding student population, many who come from difficult social or family situations and by definition are at-risk to drop out of school and enter the criminal justice system creating a pipeline from the play ground to our prisons.**

There is an ongoing debate on whether additional funding for schools translates in to higher test scores and more educated students. School funding reform advocates, including activists, teachers and superintendents, say more money, spent wisely, is likely to lead to higher student scores. But taxpayer groups and other critics have opposed increased education spending, particularly through tax hikes, arguing that more money for schools only guarantees higher-paid teachers and administrators---not better student performance.

In the 2007 annual report for the Guilford Education Alliance (GEA)⁶ you can see that Guilford County is well above the state's average in the number of students per central office administrators and well below the state's average for number of students per instructional support positions indicating that Guilford County has significantly less central office administrators and instructional support personnel than the North Carolina average.

	GCS	NC Average
Students per Central Office Administrator	801.1	510.1
Teachers per Central Office Administrator	53.3	34.8
Students per Instructional Support Position	88.8	118.0

According to the 2003-2004 ALEC Report Card on American Education⁷, North Carolina ranked 42nd in expenditure per student for the 2003-2004 school year. According to the GEA annual report, Guilford County ranks third in North Carolina in school district size, but it ranks eighth in terms of county appropriation per student.

Why do we continue to compare ourselves to the lowest common denominator? When we compare ourselves to other counties in North Carolina and North Carolina ranks 42nd in the nation in school spending, aren't we setting our sights low?

How do we expect to our students to achieve high levels of performance when we don't hold them accountable and continue to allow substandard performance.

If Guilford County were ranked one of the best school systems in the nation it would have a huge impact on the whole county. We wouldn't need to spend millions of dollars attracting businesses to our county, land values would rise, crime would go down, our local business would have a rich pool of local talent to hire. Investing in our children's education is one of the best investments we can make for our future.

⁶ Guilford Education Alliance Annual Report, Education Matters in Guilford County, 2007

⁷ American Legislative Exchange Council, Report Card on American Education 1981-2003

This task force is not equipped to determine what an adequate level of funding is appropriate for Guilford County schools, but we can report that in the Teacher School Climate survey (2008), lack of funding for personnel, technology, materials and facilities was referenced 124 times in teacher's comments second only to comments about behavioral problems.

Sample comments from the Teacher's School Climate survey:

*Our school is an older school and some of the teaching environments are not conducive to learning. Noise levels, interruptions, peeling paint and questionable carcinogens in rooms. Facilitators are using hallways, corners, and any space they can fit a desk in to teach. Heating of some areas is not consistent. Also the rooms are not kept clean. **Elementary school teacher***

*This is not what the school can do but what the SCHOOL SYSTEM can do. Provide for lower class size. Fourth grades at our school have had 27 in both their classes until recently and now it is 27 and 25. We don't have enough to hire another teacher but it is still a lot of kids! Lower the number of students that a grade level must have in order to hire another teacher so class size is smaller! Imagine test scores then! **Elementary school teacher***

*WE NEED MORE ASSISTANTS IN THE CLASSROOMS. There should be a full time assistant in all K-1 classes especially with 24 children in a room. Assistants should NOT be pulled for other duties throughout the day. With high expectations & behavior issues in the classes two teachers are needed at all times! PLEASE give us back our assistants.; not have just 1 for all of 1st grade and just 1 in the upper grades to cover 2-5! Maybe with more help, we wouldn't have to stay at work until 6:00pm to catch up! **Elementary school teacher***

*My wish to improve the learning experience for students and the teaching environment is to have the necessary classroom resources for all students. Students sharing books and computers do not always guarantee that all students will have the opportunity to learn because time constraints and lack of access to performance. **Middle school teacher***

*All teachers should have their own classroom. I have shared a classroom for the past three years and have to remain after school everyday to get work done because I have no time in my room that I can prepare lessons or grade student work. This makes differentiated instruction difficult at best. It is disrespectful to me and to the teacher who has roamed from room to room for three years. **High school teacher***

Recommendations:

- An independent study to determine if our schools have adequate funding, this should evaluate number of personnel, quality and number of facilities, class size, technology, materials and resources. Then implore the county commissioners to fully fund our schools;
- A dedicated effort to look for creative and alternative funding sources in addition to local, state and federal funding, more emphasis and dedication on finding grant funding;
- Create stronger relationships with the local community college and universities to;
 - provide alternative educational environments for all students including pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and elementary students who are at-risk;
 - provide input on the curriculum and training for future teachers;
 - provide instructional support internships for university students within our primary and secondary schools;
 - utilizing empty campuses to provide remedial education and other programs for at-risk students during the summer months;

- A dedicated effort to create a closer relationship with the business community by creating a business advisory board that would meet on a regular basis with the BOE and superintendent to look for ways to;
 - Provide sponsorship for instructional programs, after school activities, and athletics;
 - Provide donations of computers and other technology that is outdated for business use but would work well within the classroom;
 - Provide training for students who don't plan to attend college but are interested in vocational skills to learn a professional trade;
 - Provide volunteers to help with clerical, substitute teaching, security, etc.;
 - Provide jobs and internships for at risk students;
 - Hire more teachers to reduce class sizes.
- 2. Inconsistencies within the schools in relation to discipline, tenure of principals and constantly changing programs resulting in frustration and low morale among all the stakeholders;**

In multiple discussions with stakeholders at every level we found that inconsistencies across the school system have had a huge negative impact on school climate. We found three major areas where inconsistencies were affecting school climate.

- Rules and repercussions for breaking rules are different from teacher to teacher and student to student. Not all the stakeholders had the same opinion on what the rules should be or what the punishment should be for rule breakers but we did find that most of the stakeholders we interviewed felt although it may make sense to adjust rules and punishment to fit the culture of a particular school, rules and punishment should be consistent for all students within a school.
- Moving principals from school to school creates a major impact for teachers, students and parents within a school. Each new principal comes in with his/her own rules, programs and method for running a school. Some schools have experienced multiple principal changes within a school year. We certainly understand that the BOE cannot control a situation where a principal resigns or is terminated but many of these changes seem to be centered around advancement, salary structure or other reasons to move principals within Guilford County Schools.
- Programs that are started within a school are changed before they have had an opportunity to work. Many times this is the result of a new principal or a new program instituted before the original program has been fully implemented or had an opportunity to work. This wastes money and creates frustration among teachers and students.

Sample comments from the Teacher's School Climate survey:

*Have consistency through out the school. Changing discipline procedures over and over is not working and ISS is not working. Students WANT to go there. They don't think it is a bad place to go. Also if they had a strict tardy policy like Lock out then I think the students will want to be on time. They wont be able to make up work and once they realize they are failing they will begin to be on time for class. **High school teacher***

Be consistent in enforcing rules and procedures in every part of the school. Administration should stand behind teachers and give appropriate consequences to students for their inappropriate behavior. Teachers should not be questioned regarding student behavior issues in front of the student. I think our school gives some students too many chances before giving consequences.

Also, the students realize that even if they fail all their classes, they will still be passed on to the next grade. **Middle school teacher**

I wish my school had definite guidelines for discipline across the board. Each teacher and staff member knew the guidelines and kept to them. All students would be accountable as well as staff. **Elementary school teacher**

I wish this school would be consistent with behavior consequences. If a student is in a fight or disrespects a teacher, there should be consequences. If a student hits a teacher, there should be consequences. If students verbally disrespect other students, there should be a consequence. A teacher needs back up through administration and parents. This is not occurring. **Elementary school teacher**

This is not for above the school but for the county. Stop bouncing from one instructional support program to another without letting the new programs get introduced, used and the teachers to determine how and when to best use them. We seem to bounce from year to year from new program to new program. An example is in math: we all had to attend and then use Algebraic thinking, to Springboard and now to what ever we are calling this year's program. It takes a few years to learn and use each. **Middle school teacher**

Before I reply I must preface it with: These surveys are fine and make us feel included, but GCS and its leaders have an agenda that they will follow no matter what is said. So discouraging! **PICK AN IMPROVEMENT METHOD OR PROGRAM AND GIVE IT TIME TO WORK. DO NOT KEEP PUTTING ONE PROGRAM ON TOP OF ANOTHER BEFORE TRUE ACCEPTANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION CAN TAKE PLACE. IT MAY TAKE A FEW YEARS. PLEASE COME AND LOOK AT THE MATERIALS HERE THAT ARE NO LONGER USED, THOUSANDS OF \$ WASTED.** **Middle school teacher**

The BOE should implement policies to create a more consistent environment across the county.

Recommendations:

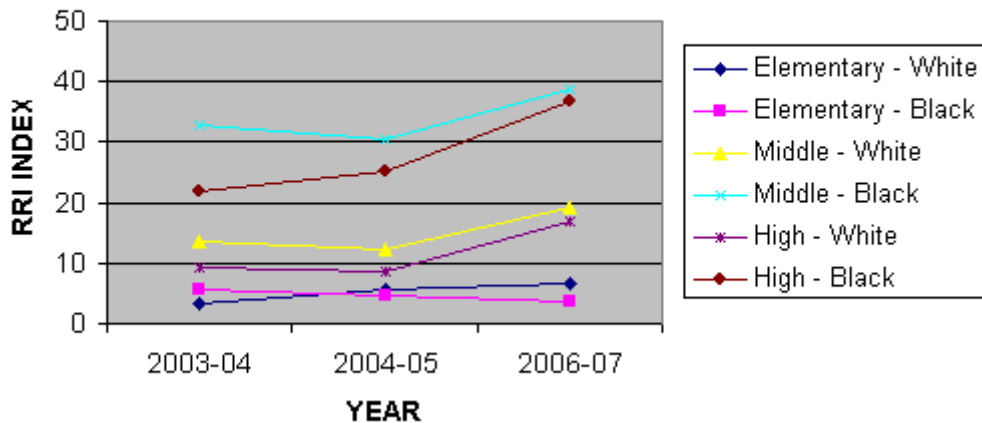
- Rules need to be consistent within a school. Each school should work to reach a consensus to define the school's rules and disciplinary guidelines. These rules should specifically address a multicultural environment and a way to earn the respect of all parties while upholding the county's antidiscrimination policy. ALL teachers within a school should be required to comply with the enforcement of those rules.
 - Consequences for disciplinary problems should be given in a timely manner.
 - Create incentives for principals and teachers to stay in a school and improve test scores, school climate and teacher/student/parent relationships.
 - Fund the complete training and implementation of any new program and then allow the program to have a chance to work before adding or moving on to new programs.
 - Better training and implementation of programs that are introduced into schools.
 - Complete the funding, training and implementation of the PBS program in all schools.
- 3. A community with two diverse perspectives, one that feels that when students are disruptive or misbehave they should be suspended, the other perspective, that students who are misbehaving need additional support and education and that no student should be suspended, this division primarily falls along racial lines.**

There is a belief by some that racism is in play and explains the wide discrepancies in the number of African American students who have been suspended or arrested compared to their white counterparts as presented in the Disproportionate Minority Contact report.

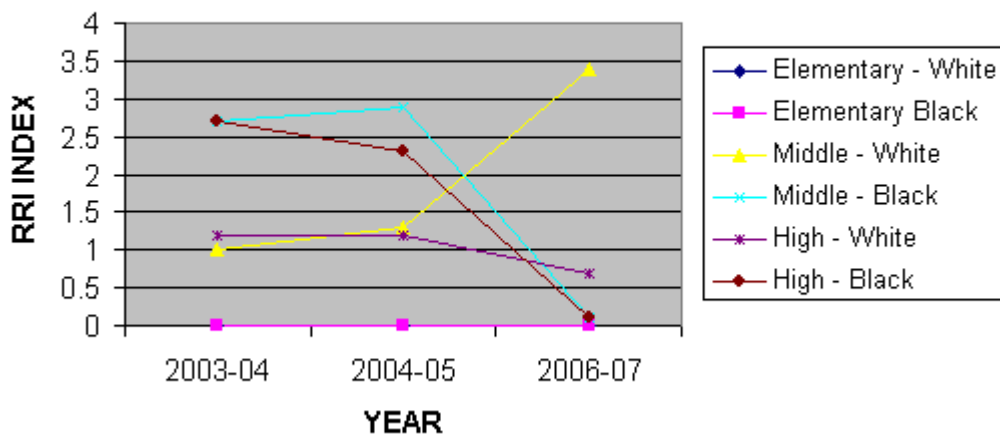
Others believe that the central office is putting pressure on principals to reduce the suspension of African American students with no process in place to assess a student's problems or quality alternatives to educate them so they are returning to the classroom with little or no accountability for their actions.

By reviewing the information below you can see that there has been a significant increase of African American and white students who have had short term suspensions or In-School Suspensions (ISS) and there is still disproportionate number of African American students who have been affected. But last year the number of long term or Out-of-School-Suspensions (OSS) plummeted for African American students last year while OSS for white middle school students increased. This wide swing in long term suspensions may indicate exactly what we have heard from parents and teachers, that principals are using ISS instead of OSS, particularly for African American students and thus returning students, who should have experienced OSS, to the classroom with little or no repercussions for their actions. It would also validate people who feel the rules are not being applied consistently.

Average Short Term Suspensions by School Level



Average Long Term Suspension by School Level

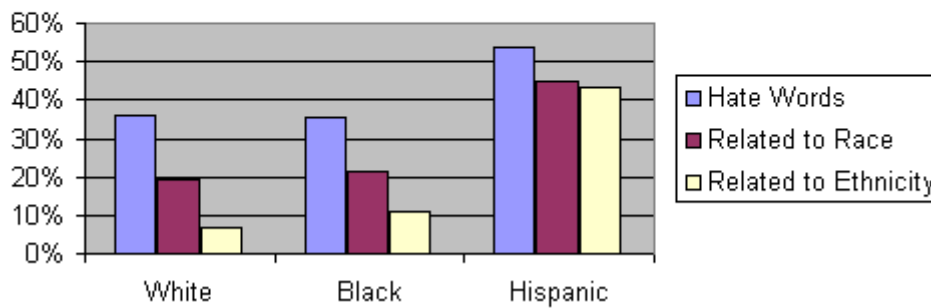


One of the keys to reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions of Guilford County schools and improving school climate is to determine why there is such a discrepancy.

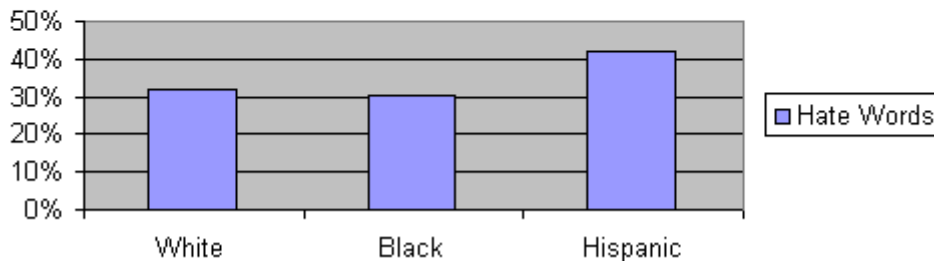
In the Guilford County Student Safety survey (2006), students were asked.

"Since the start of school, has anyone called you a derogatory or bad name at school having to do with your race, religion, ethnic background or national origin or disability, gender or sexual orientation? We call these hate words."

Since the start of school, has anyone called you a derogatory or bad name having to do with your race or ethnicity?



Since the start of school have you seen hate-related words or symbols written in school classrooms, bathrooms, hallways or outside the school building?

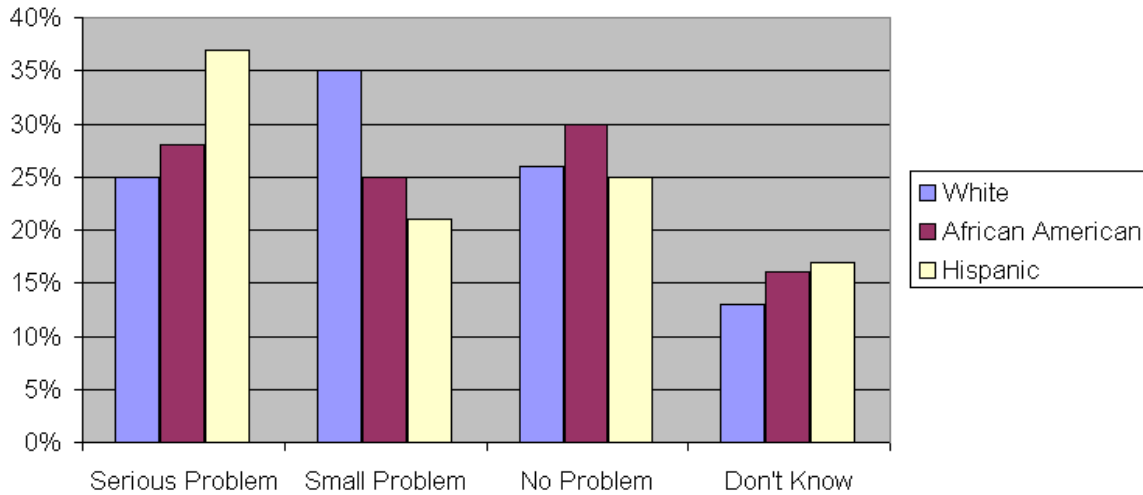


By reviewing the graphs above you can see African American and white students were almost exactly the same with about 35% saying they had not experienced derogatory statements, but more than half of Hispanic students (54%) said they had experienced derogatory statements.

Of the 35% of the African American and white students who had experienced derogatory statements, again African American and white students were the same with only about 30% saying the derogatory words had to do with their race or ethnicity. 45% of Hispanic students said the derogatory words had to do with their race or ethnicity.

Finally students were asked; "Please rate your concern about race issues at your school."

Is racial conflict a problem at your school?



Again you can see, African American and white students are very similar with 28% and 25% respectively who feel racial conflict as a serious issue. Again Hispanic students feel racial problems are much more of an issue with 37% saying that racial conflict is a serious issue. In fact when you combine the students who feel that racial conflict is a problem (serious or small), more white students feel it is a problem (61%) than Hispanic students (58%) or African American students (53%).

In a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Washington Post and Harvard University (2206)⁸ found that 65% of African American males felt that the problems facing black men are “what black men have failed to do for themselves”, 12 % felt equally that problems facing black men were “what they have failed to do for themselves and what white people have done to blacks” and 18% of their problems stem from “what whites people have done to blacks”.

In the same survey when black men were asked, “If you had to pick just one thing what would you say is the single biggest problem facing blacks today?”, 31% of black men responded that young black men are not taking their education seriously enough. Only 6% of black men who took the survey felt that racial discrimination was the biggest problem facing black men today.

Racial conflict is a real problem within our schools and community. With a growing number of Hispanic students in our community, the results of the Student Safety survey show a greater number of Hispanic students are experiencing racial conflict or discrimination the their African American and white counterparts.

We need to understand that Guilford County schools are now made up of over 100 different nationalities and cultures and that racial conflict is not just a white on black problem but a problem that transcends all races.

⁸ The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University African American Men Survey, June 2006, 2864 randomly selected people were surveyed with large over-samples of African American men and women.

The problem having the largest affect on school climate is behavioral problems, a lack of accountability for students who misbehave and a lack of programs to deal effectively with students who misbehave.

During our discovery process we surveyed teachers and asked for them to

“Share one thing that you wish the school would do to improve the learning experience for students and the teaching environment for you as a teacher.”

The number one response centered around improving student behavior and a lack of quality programs to deal with disruptive students. It is apparent that teachers are very frustrated because school administrators are not reactive when they want a disruptive student removed from their classroom. When a student is removed the problem is compounded because they return with little or no consequences for their behavior and they are behind on their work. In School Suspension (ISS) and Out of School Suspensions (OSS) in most schools are failed systems and do little to punish or rehabilitate with any sort of quality education.

We need to realize that all students need to be accountable for their behavior and one mold does not fit all students. We need programs to intervene with at-risk students at an earlier age. Students who misbehave need to be removed from the classroom giving the rest of the students the opportunity to learn. Teachers need to feel confident that the school administration is supportive of their disciplinary actions. Students who are habitual behavioral problems need to be moved to non-traditional educational settings in an attempt to give them the best opportunity for success.

If we continue to send students to a failed ISS program or send students home for OSS we can expect this problem to grow. It costs much less to educate students who are behavioral problems than to incarcerate them.

We did hear many times from teachers and SRO officers that Standard Mode of Dress (SMOD) helped with behavioral issues and school safety. Teachers reported that it leveled the playing field for all students, eased some of the socioeconomic differences, removed some of the distractions within the classroom and allowed them to concentrate on the student and not how he/she was dressed. SRO officers reported that it made it very easy to spot a visitor or someone who did not belong on campus helping them maintain a safe environment.

When the task force met with the high school principals we asked them for the top three changes they would like to see made to improve school climate. They were unanimous in their list;

- Provide local quality educational alternatives for students in OSS (ten days or less) and long term suspensions;
- Add more security personnel so principals can concentrate on being strong leaders. High school and middle school principals spend much of their time corralling students, patrolling the boundaries of their schools and clearing halls instead of working with teachers to improve curriculum, training or creating a positive learning environment;
- Add a quality reading program for incoming freshman, if a student does not know how to read by high school they are doomed for failure in our educational system.

We feel strongly that GCS needs to make sure that every Guilford County student is literate by third grade and not wait until high school to intervene. We need to stop promoting students who are not ready to move on in school but identify these students early and provide the intervention necessary to make sure they are equipped to succeed. When students are promoted before they

are ready it adds to the frustration, embarrassment and social isolation that leads to the kind of behavioral problems that we are experiencing in our middle and high schools today.

Sample comments from the Teacher's School Climate survey:

*Discipline of problem students is not being addressed - school-wide or system-wide. The good kids have to waste a lot of valuable learning time because the worst students are made to stay in the classroom except in cases of a last resort and cannot be sent to the office. The administration has a look-the-other-way approach. Who is more important, the majority of the kids that are here to learn, or the few that are PREVENTING them from learning, as well as making some teachers' jobs impossible? **Elementary school teacher***

*We have a program called CHOICES that is for disruptive students, but the students who are sent there have fun. They are not disciplined, they can talk, sleep, listen to music, etc. I never receive work from the teacher from students that I have sent there. The students enjoy it so much that many ask to be sent or misbehave just so that they can be sent out. It is absolutely not effective. I have lost faith in it and I do no plan to send students ever again. **High school teacher***

*I am very concerned about the behavior I see in the school. Teachers are spending more time with discipline than on instruction. Our school is overcrowded. The administration is stretched too thin. One student even transferred to a private school because he was afraid to come to school!. Gang graffiti is written on bathroom walls, students very disrespectful to teachers, foul language is common place, noncompliance is a daily occurrence, small fire set in outside trashcan, drugs in 6th grade bath **Middle school teacher***

*I think our discipline plan is a mess. Very few students are suspended which could be seen as a positive except that many of the students should be suspended for threatening teachers and students. I also feel that many teachers fear retaliation for discussing their ideas or criticisms. Our school is in dire need of diversity training for both students and faculty. Lastly, we need to have the principal present more. When she's gone there is no one left who can make decisions about anything. **Elementary school teacher***

*Too many students who need "special assistance" are left to flounder in classes where they cannot cope. This is especially true with students who have behavior challenges, special needs, or who are not identified. Not all students can do well in some classes. Frequently students are "dumped" into classes where enrollment is open rather than being placed in the class where they can be most successful....especially true in elective classes. **Middle school teacher***

*Deal with student behavior. Misbehavior and defiance are becoming more commonplace because there are no real consequences. Many students already have real gang connections and behavior. Students are not motivated to achieve and many parents do not seem supportive of this. All of this is very frustrating for teacher morale. However, please understand that the teachers here love our students. We work very hard to do for them, motivate and encourage them. But, many of us feel beaten down. **Elementary school teacher***

Administrators need to be on campus more. Disruptive or unruly students who consistently break rules and disrupt class should be handled in the office. They are given comic books, and candy as bribes to behave and returned to the classroom and allowed to continue to disrupt. It is a major problem here, and I often feel that our worst students are given the most attention, while our

*really good students have to suffer their misbehavior and wonder why the "bad" kids get special treatment. **Elementary school teacher***

*Disruptive, wandering students must be removed because they are interfering with instruction and/or are not participating. I don't know what the solution is but I fear that we are not holding teenagers accountable for their actions and are creating a group of students that think they are "untouchable". **High school teacher***

*It is with a deep concern that I believe there are systemic problems with education in Guilford County due to the inability for both teachers and administrators to hold our students truly accountable. I believe in order to establish a true atmosphere of professionalism that, if teachers are to be held accountable for EOC's and failing students, then the students must be held accountable for their effort and behavior. **High school teacher***

*Students need consistent handling and teachers need to not be punished because of student misbehavior. If a student is a problem, it should not be up to the teachers to keep them after school. Students who show violence toward a teacher should not be placed back into that teacher's classroom. Students who present a consistent problem need to be taken care of quickly and efficiently. Students are saying they don't if they are written up because nothing happens to them. **Middle school teacher***

*Enforce ALL of the rules for the low-income minority students. The more of a problem a student is, the more s/he seems exempt from the rules. **High school teacher***

Recommendations

- Overhaul ISS with a complete process definition for referring and working with students during the ISS period. When and how a teacher should refer a student, how the student is processed within ISS, what occurs while in ISS and what should be expected when the student returns to class should all be defined clearly . Components that should be considered:
 - Additional training for teachers on conflict resolution;
 - When a teacher is ready to refer a student, the student should be removed from the class immediately;
 - ISS should have a full time certified teacher and be a separate self contained unit;
 - A defined process for referring a student to ISS which includes a check and balance system so work is provided for the student when they enter ISS and something that shows they completed the work when they return to class;
 - Use of computer learning programs while in ISS when possible (ie Plato or whatever system the school is using);
 - ISS should include a separation of students who are in ISS from the regular school population so there is a punishment component to the program. They should not eat lunch with other students or perform in recreational or athletic events while in ISS;
 - Carousels or some sort of separation while in ISS so students can concentrate on their work;
 - Counselors or social workers when there is deemed to be learning disability, psychological, physical, personal problem;
 - Parental involvement in the process to assist with behavior modification.
 - No more than 10 students in an ISS class;
- Create quality alternatives to OSS;

- The Middle College template with small class sizes and close individual instruction is working for students who cannot work in a traditional high school environment;
 - Move repeat behavioral problems to quality alternative learning environments;
 - Move students who are 16 years of age or over and still in middle school to a quality alternative environment;
 - Vocational middle colleges where students who are not college bound can learn subjects that interest them and will result in job training;
 - Chronic behavioral problems, felons or parolees should be in a quality alternative learning environment and not mixed with other students;
- Enhance upon SCALES program to include intervention measures that will address students' needs;
 - Establish a more comprehensive transition for students returning to their local school;
 - Assign a school employee to the student to assist and monitor student with his/her educational progress;
 - Expand SCALES time for student, when appropriate;
- Create quality educational and day care programs for young children (starting at age 3 or younger) in lower socio economic areas;
- Create an alternative school for students who do not know how to read by third grade;
- Students should be held accountable for their actions. The administration should accept a rise in suspensions as principals and teachers regain control of their schools and classrooms;
- Implement SMOD countywide;
- Provide more diversity training and programs within schools that encompass all races;
- Empower students to work to solve their own problems by;
 - Conduct an evaluation of teen court to find out how it can be expanded and improved countywide to assist in servicing school needs and stop students from entering the criminal justice system for minor offenses;
 - Establish a GCS centralized mediation/human relations center to provide students, teachers and parents an efficient alternative for conflict resolution and intervention into racial conflict or volatile situations prior to their being an affect on the educational environment;

4. There is a lack of communication and respect between all the stakeholders, counselors, administration, parents, teachers, law enforcement and students. We found an environment where many of the Guilford County employees feel under valued, overworked and disrespected.

Teachers feel like the administration does not respect the time necessary to teach students and consequently they are assigned to help with non-teaching duties. Many teachers feel like the upper administration does not understand what they do or what they have to deal with on a day to day basis. Quality communication and relationships with students suffer when teachers are overloaded and frustrated.

Counselors feel like they spend most of their time doing testing on duties not related to counseling and are not allowed to do what they were hired to do, counsel students.

There is frustration between counselors and teachers. Teachers feel like students use counselors for a refuge from learning and they have little or no impact on suggesting a path for student's

course selection. Consequently students are placed in classes without the proper prerequisites or pushed into AP classes where they are destined to fail.

Many parents do not trust the school administration, feel unwelcome in our schools and/or feel that there is an attempt to hide or misrepresent the current climate or issues within our schools. Teachers experience apathetic parents many times when they try to contact them for behavioral or academic reasons.

There is a lack of communication and cooperation between law enforcement and our school system. Sheriff BJ Barnes was recently quoted as saying, "I've had principals tell me they don't feel the need to report certain things that are going on there because it reflects poorly on the school and on the system." This type of misrepresentation of the facts or hidden agendas hurt morale and creates the air of mistrust that exists today among GCS stakeholders.

Sample comments from the Teacher's School Climate survey:

*Get more security because one SRO cannot monitor this school by himself. Most teachers know that they have to fend for themselves if they're cornered or confronted. We need more security or support personnel whose sole mission is to bring a stop to students who are constantly walking the halls/skipping class and/or disrupting classrooms and the school environment. If 5% of the trouble makers and habitual skippers were put out of here, we could have school. **High School teacher***

*I wish we had professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy and on working with children from poverty. We have huge issues with respect among our students, and at times with our frustrated staff. I have been at this school for 25 years, and the rise in violence and drugs on this campus are troubling. I believe that our administrators work hard, but often are not supported downtown. We have an intolerable failure rate among students on this campus, and I need more space here. **High school teacher***

*The principal treats teachers with disrespect and does not listen to our concerns. She does retaliate against us. She is always right and the teacher is always wrong. Everything her is done HER way. She claims to accept suggestions as a front. This never happens. This is a very difficult situation to deal with. It's very depressing to come to such a beautiful school and be treated like scum of the Earth. Sorry, I'm just being honest. **Elementary school teacher***

*Morale among the staff is at an all time low. Opinions of staff seems to not be appreciated by administration. The effort and additional work put forth by staff is not recognized. Changes are made without staff input. Many changes appear to be unnecessary and unexplained. It appears that grade level changes are being made as punishment for speaking out and suggesting alternatives. We are confident that this matter can be resolved to restore our school to a more comfortable environment. **Elementary school teacher***

*Administrative communication is an area needing considerable improvement. This includes alerting teachers of meetings well in advance; being specific about staff expectations; reasonable turn-around time between inquiries & answers; PTSA decisions, dates, events; and concrete, specific info regarding student discipline. Clear, concise, consistent communication is critical to our success. Note also that some staff members feel the head administrator does not listen to others' ideas. **Middle school teacher***

*As a teacher, I cannot answer this survey truthfully. The principal has warned the staff not to speak negatively in any way or we could find another job. Until the threats and fear are removed, you will not get a truthful result with any survey. The life has been sucked out of a potentially wonderful school. A cloud looms over us. This is a shame, but nothing can be done about it without fear of retaliation. No one will listen. No one cares. Good luck with the survey and good luck to our school! **Elementary school teacher***

Recommendations:

- Regular and defined time for communication between all stakeholders within a school;
- It should be a goal to make sure that every student within a school has a quality relationship with at least one adult within the school.
- Teachers should be working with counselors, parents and students to determine future class schedules;
- Identification of students who need additional support or services and the personnel and process in place to provide it;
- Counselors should come out of classroom rotations so they can do counseling duties allowing school counselors to actually be counselors, building relationships with students and parents in order to cut down on discipline problems;
- Provide testing coordinators so counselors are not filling their time with testing requirements;
- Create a parents and students Bill of Rights;
- Review and update the GCS handbook to include a clear definition of district policies and procedures including all courses that are taught in Guilford County, where they are taught, and what the prerequisites, much the way a college course book is written;
- Technology should be utilized to create more efficient use of time and better teaching methods;
 - Training and meetings could be held utilizing conference calls and webinars;
 - E-mail distribution lists should be created of parents e-mail addresses so teachers, principals or administrators can communicate with mass groups of parents with one stroke of a key;
 - Teachers should have more access to projectors so they can use presentations over and over again without having to recreate them on a chalk board;
 - Language conversion utilities could be used to translate school communications so parents and students from different cultures are kept up to date in their native language;
- Schools should look for opportunities to hold meetings out in the community, especially in lower social economic or multicultural areas. Meetings should include interpreters for foreign parents when it makes sense;
- Survey parents, teachers and students on an annual basis so bench marks can be created and incentives can be implemented to improve school climate among the stakeholders;
- Training for principals, teachers and parents on;
 - How to deal with disruptive behavior;
 - Best in class processes and procedures;
 - Subject knowledge enhancement;
 - How to identify and work with students who may have a gang influence or be a member of a gang;
 - Proper internet usage and what to be aware of that students are doing today in a technology savvy generation;

- Rigor, Relevance and Relationships are the new 3 R's in education. Our schools must should provide students with the following;
 - Rigor: Challenging learning for ALL students where they learn to think critically and access new knowledge and information;
 - Relevance: Make sure students have courses and subjects that relate to their life and goals. This could include the increased use of technology;
 - Relationships: Schools must have more personalized instruction where teachers know their students and build relationships with them. Teachers serve as teacher-counselors. Smaller class sizes will help facilitate this practice;
- District level support to provide more direct on-site support for classroom teachers. This support could include but is not limited to; objective peer observations and feedback, modeling of lessons, small group training in best practices and reading instruction, preparing curriculum resources specific to the school or classroom teacher, and facilitating collaborative discussions with groups of teachers about their instructional practices;
- Principals should receive explicit training on how to encourage teacher growth, empowerment and leadership;
- Annual surveys of teachers, students and parents;
 - The Teachers Working Conditions survey should be continued annually with more school climate focused questions added;
 - The Student School Safety survey should also be continued annually with more school climate focused questions added;
 - GCS should add an annual parent survey;
 - Create benchmarks, goals and incentives for teachers and administration to achieve these goals;
- Reinstate social workers, there should be at least one social worker per school and two in larger high schools. It may be possible to team with non-profit organizations to provide this support;

To often the schools are reacting to situations instead of being proactive to prevent problems. The BOE should provide proactive solutions to help administrators and teachers. Some of these solutions include.

5. Frustrated principals and teachers who have too little time to plan and who are inundated with additional responsibilities that have nothing to do with teaching;

According to the Teacher Working Conditions report more than 50 percent of GCS educators do not feel they have reasonable class sizes that allow them to meet the instructional needs of all of their students. 52 percent do not believe they have sufficient non-instructional time during the school day.

Their dissatisfaction is attributed to a lack of individual and collaborative planning. This is time that can be used for lesson preparation and evaluation as well as mentoring and professional development. Because teachers are required to perform an increasing number of non-instructional tasks, time for instructional duties is limited.

Principals reported that they are pulled out of the school too often for meetings and spent much of their time at school herding and corralling students. We feel strongly that the strong leadership from the principal is imperative to a positive school climate. We need to find ways to provide our principals and teachers the support and time necessary to accomplish their goals.

Sample comments from the Teacher's School Climate survey:

*Teachers have too many non-instructional responsibilities. There is too much focus on testing and not enough on "discovery" creativity, and problem solving. Most teachers are creative, responsible professionals. It is counter-productive to dictate to them how and when they should teach what. Teachers are not leaving because of the pay. They are leaving because of disrespect and disempowerment issues resulting from a "production factory" mentality imposed by the system. **High school teacher***

*Get more security because one SRO cannot monitor this school by himself. Most teachers know that they have to fend for themselves if they're cornered or confronted. We need more security or support personnel whose sole mission is to bring a stop to students who are constantly walking the halls/skipping class and/or disrupting classrooms and the school environment. If 5% of the trouble makers and habitual skippers were put out of here, we could have school. **High school teacher***

*Eliminate the number of meetings we have in a week in order to provide us with time to plan and prepare to actually teach the things that we continually meet about. **Middle school teacher***

*It would be nice if we could be provided with longer planning times. I feel as if I'm constantly working at home on my schoolwork. As a working mother, I often feel guilty in that my own two sons don't get the attention that my students do. Most of my evenings and weekends are taken up with grading papers and planning. **Elementary school teacher***

Recommendations:

1. Structure the school day to allow sufficient time for direct planning, productive collaboration with colleagues, and overlapping time for mentors, all embedded within the school day;
 2. To the greatest extent possible, protect teachers from non-essential duties that interfere with teaching by creating a system that allows community members, administrators, or other qualified adults to assume some of the extra-curricular duties traditionally performed by teachers;
 3. Structure the school/district calendar to allow for meaningful professional development activities embedded throughout the school year;
 4. Create school processes and infrastructure that are responsive to teacher concerns about time and other impediments that limit available time to meet the educational needs of all students (class size and student loads);
 5. Add additional security personnel to high schools and middle schools so principals can spend time being leaders;
 6. Give high schools a discretionary budget to spend on security implementation, (ie cameras, metal detectors, etc).
- 6. An SRO program that encompasses a very large school system and three different law enforcement agencies, the Greensboro city police, the Guilford County Sheriff's department and the High Point city police resulting in different management styles, regulations, policies and inconsistencies.**

Some schools have little or no communication or control with what law enforcement and SROs do within their schools other schools rely too much on their SRO officers to discipline students.

Many SRO officers feel that their job is to enforce the law, which means arrest or not arrest. Consequently many students are entering the criminal justice system for minor infractions.

Students entering the criminal justice system for minor offenses are a growing concern. The Guilford County Teen Court provides trials for first-time offenders ages 9 to 15, pleading guilty to misdemeanors, who are referred by the criminal justice system, law enforcement, School Resource Officers (SRO's); and ages 16 and 17 referred by school resource officers for offenses committed at schools. While this service is already available to our schools, it has not been widely used.

School discipline involves dealing with students who break school rules as opposed to handling students who violate state statutes and local ordinances. We understand that there are numerous gray areas such as, is shoving to be treated by the SRO as a criminal matter (battery) or by the assistant principal as a violation of the school discipline code? Definition of rules, consistent enforcement for breaking rules and a process for dealing with disruptive students would iron out these areas before incidents occur. Additionally, an advisory committee should be established consisting of a school board member, teacher, SRO, parent, and community member; host monthly meetings to share information and develop new ideas and strategies.

SRO programs need to consider, although by no means always accede to, the wishes of the school administration in establishing the ratio of time the SROs spend on law enforcement, teaching, and mentoring. The relative emphasis the SROs place on the three basic SRO program components is affected by whether and how soon they develop teaching and mentoring skills. Training SROs in how to perform them can expedite by months the teaching and mentoring aspects of the program. After attending a COPS in Schools conference, which has a 90-minute segment on "classroom strategies," the SROs dramatically increased their teaching and counseling. Even though the SROs' specific responsibilities may change over time and may vary from school to school, it is essential to define roles and responsibilities. Additionally, a particularly effective approach to involving schools is through joint training attended by both the SROs and the local school administrators.

It is important to recognize that the Guilford County School system SRO program is a product of three separate law enforcement agencies and that we need to bring the school administration and all three agencies together so we have a consistent effective program that encompasses the whole county and the cultures that are represented within our schools.

Recommendations:

- Develop a partnership between the SRO and school administration county wide and at the school level which should include;
 - Policies and procedures for the SRO program must be developed in partnership with school administrators and all 3 law enforcement agencies and must be consistent for the entire school system;
 - Identify and distribute the roles and responsibilities of the SRO must be created and agreed upon by all 3 law enforcement agencies and school administrators for the entire school system and should be in writing;
 - In developing the written description of the SRO roles and responsibilities;
 - Narrow the leeway of what it means for SROs to engage in "law enforcement";

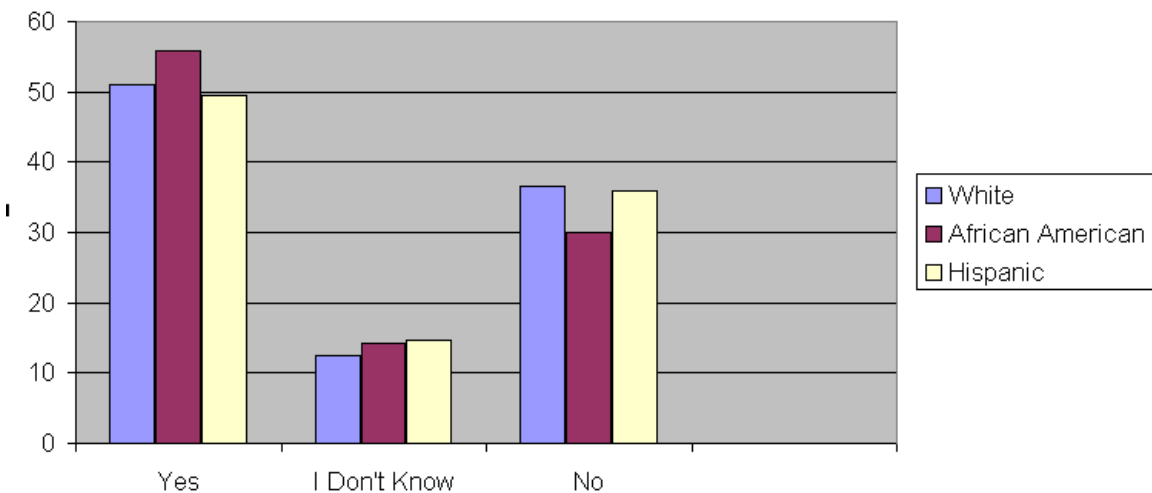
- Make clear whether and how SRO will be responsible for enforcing discipline;
 - Identify the three components (law enforcement, teaching and mentoring/counseling) of the SRO program and for each school culture identify the percentage of time the SRO should spend on each;
 - Identify how student conflicts will be resolved;
 - Identify how incidents that violate school policy will be handled;
 - Provide a mechanism for resolving disagreements between school administrators and SROs;
 - SROs should be evaluated by both their law enforcement supervisor and school administrator;
 - SROs should host meetings every 6 - 8 weeks at community centers or other appropriate locations (i.e. public housing community centers, City Parks & Rec. centers, places of worship) with parents and students.

7. A real concern about a growing gang problem within our schools.

Guilford County has a youth gang presence and it is growing. Gangs are located in all sectors of the community. As of May 2006 Guilford County had at least 65 validated gang groups and at least 255 validated gang members. Roughly 70 percent of those are under the age of 17. Those are just the ones police know about.

Gang activity has pervaded literally every high school in Guilford County. More alarming, it has filtered down to the middle schools and has even made inroads into some of the elementary schools. Law enforcement has been sounding the alarm for a full decade, and has been monitoring gang activity even longer, but only in the past year or so has law enforcement been able to cut through the wall of denial by the school administration.

Are there any gangs at your school



In the Student Safety Survey when students were asked, "Are there any gangs at your school?", about 50% of white, African American and Hispanic students agreed that gangs are in our schools, about 30% said they "didn't know" and 14% said gangs were not in their school.

When you separate the students by school level about 58% of high school students feel gangs are in their school, with about 28% saying they "didn't know" and 14% saying gangs were not in

their school. Middle school students responded with 47% saying gangs are in their school, 39% responded that they "didn't know" and 14% said gangs were not in their school.

Obviously Guilford County schools have a gang problem that cannot be ignored any more. There is a perception by some within the school administration that by providing more gang education, it would just single out more minority students for suspension.

This was evident when the task force met with Detective Ernest Cuthbertson, a 15-year veteran of the Greensboro Police Department and co-founder of the NC Gang Investigators Association, when the meeting got so confrontational between BOE members, school employees and Detective Cuthbertson, Detective Cuthbertson ended up walked out of the meeting.

Teacher's comments:

*Deal with student behavior. Misbehavior and defiance are becoming more commonplace because there are no real consequences. Many students already have real gang connections and behavior. Students are not motivated to achieve and many parents do not seem supportive of this. All of this is very frustrating for teacher morale. However, please understand that the teachers here love our students. We work very hard to do for them, motivate and encourage them. But, many of us feel beaten down. **Elementary school teacher***

I wish that the entire district would pass and enforce a tougher policy with regard to the safety of faculty, staff and students. A student who recently brought a knife with a nine inch blade, liquor (which he had been drinking on premises) and gang flags to school was suspended for 10 days. I do not feel comfortable having my other students near this child nor do I feel comfortable myself. There needs to be a place for such children that have constant supervision and counseling.

Middle school teacher

*We must figure out how to counter gang- and fight-fascination among an increasing number of students. What has happened at Page, Southern, and Grimsley High Schools this year--fights breaking out that attract a swarm of students--could happen at my middle school and probably most middle and high schools. A segment of our student population has no shame about being involved in such disruptive, even dangerous incidents. Many have no shame about cursing out teachers and showing overall disrespect. **Middle school teacher***

Recommendations:

- The first step in addressing this growing issue is educating parents, school personnel and communities about youth gangs;
- Increase number of after school and extra curricular activities;
- Open school buildings to community non-profit initiatives that are consistent with school policy, programs and student led clubs, particularly during the summer months;
- Provide transportation for students who are attending after school activities;
- Educate students on the consequences of gang membership and gang related activities (make it relevant to their futures);
- Establish a concise and all encompassing gang prevention and intervention policy (Proposed policy attached).

Summary

There was an overriding concern from many in the task force that it wouldn't matter what recommendations we came back with because nothing would change. With the current

atmosphere of mistrust between the constituents and our elected Board of Education and County Commissioners it is difficult to get anything done that will make a real impact on our school climate.

It is unfortunate that 69 percent of the teachers surveyed did not agree that their individual schools previously used the Teacher Working Conditions survey as a tool for improvement. The district, as well as individual schools, must make this data available for educational stakeholders to use to alter and improve the conditions in which teachers work and students learn. Administrative staff must use the information to meet the demands of those who have firsthand knowledge of student and teacher needs. It's time to make our students accountable for their actions. It is also necessary to supply the time, resources, and career development necessary to ensure that schools are teaching communities that are equipped for success.

Guilford County needs strong leadership to bring together a divided community and stop a downward spiraling school climate that is resulting in white flight from our public school system. In the 2000 census Guilford County was made up of a population that was 65% white, 29% African American and 4% Hispanic. These numbers are changing rapidly with the Hispanic community being the fastest growing minority in Guilford County. Current numbers show that the African American students are now a majority within our public school system. Private schools enrollment are rising rapidly as white parents look for quality education and a positive climate for their children.

I implore the Board of Education to continue to perform surveys of the stakeholders and make changes based on that information. Testing our students over and over is not the answer. Reducing the number of suspensions does not equate to better school climate. Incentives should be put into place to improve school climate and respect among the stakeholders.

I implore the County Commissioners to fully fund our schools. Why do we continue to give millions of tax incentives to lure businesses to our county but then cut and slash our school budget. How hard would it be to attract the best businesses in American if we had the best school system in America?

We cannot expect our teachers to produce the best students in American with substandard facilities, large class sizes, and a lack of materials, personnel and time to complete the most important task we face today, educating the children of Guilford County.