Connections for Learning: Unifying the Social and Academic Curriculum in Minneapolis Public Schools

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE VIVA MINNEAPOLIS TEACHERS IDEA EXCHANGE

Prepared for: Minneapolis Public Schools Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson and Lynn Nordgren, President of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers
Prepared by: Members of The VIVA Minneapolis Teachers Idea Exchange
Delivered: May 20, 2013

Abstract & Summation: Empowered by an innovation in crowd sourcing technology that we call WikiWisdom™, teacher volunteers who had participated in the VIVA Minneapolis Idea Exchange spent hundreds of hours together online sharing ideas about how to build positive school and classroom culture throughout Minneapolis Public Schools. Rooted in their professional practice, a group of five teachers, still working exclusively online, distilled the group’s collective experience into eight recommendations to give all of us a better understanding of the excellent and effective practices needed for creating positive learning environments in every classroom. Their recommendations give new insights for understanding how the social and academic curriculum overlap, and interrelate to foster a school-wide culture of learning.

Partners: Minneapolis Public Schools and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers

www.vivateachers.org
Introduction

The VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) Teachers Idea Exchange invited 5,000 K–12th grade teachers and education support professionals from Minneapolis public schools across the state of Minnesota to share their perspectives and experiences about maintaining a successful learning culture while addressing behavioral and discipline issues in their classrooms.

The online VIVA Idea Exchange uses WikiWisdom™, a combination of technology and peer collaboration, created by New Voice Strategies. Facilitated by a professional moderator, the conversation is open to peers seeking a safe, productive and easily accessible avenue for joint problem solving and action.

The VIVA Minneapolis Teachers Idea Exchange began on March 1, 2013 and concluded on March 27, 2013.

The VIVA Minneapolis Teachers Idea Exchange was conducted in three phases:

During Phase I, volunteer teachers and education support professionals from the Minneapolis public schools were invited to share their ideas in response to this question:

“What are the most effective strategies you’ve used that have had a positive impact on student behavior? What would best help students who grapple with behavior issues? What changes need to be made at the building level? What kind of support or professional development should the district provide so individual teachers can build a positive learning environment in their classroom?”

In response, 286 members added 70 new ideas and shared 146 comments with one another.

During Phase II, five teachers who emerged as thought leaders in Phase I, as measured by proprietary participation analytics, were invited to join The VIVA Minneapolis Teachers Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize them into insights and suggestions for how public education administrators can apply the teachers’ experiences in teaching character to their students.

Phase III of the process began on May 20, 2013, when the members of the Writing Collaborative presented their ideas to Minneapolis Public Schools Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson and Lynn Nordgren, president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers.

At New Voice Strategies VIVA Teachers, we believe in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. We are inspired by the ideas and perspectives of close to 300 teachers who participated in the VIVA Minneapolis Teachers Idea Exchange. Many thanks to the VIVA Minneapolis Teacher Leaders: Rhonda Carlberg, Aubree Huso, Daniel Magnuson, Marcine Purinton, and Pia Shannon, whose profiles can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these teachers spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

We wish to thank the Minneapolis Public School District and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, our partners in this endeavor.
Overview

We have come together at the invitation of the Minneapolis Public School District and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers to examine behavior strategies in our schools in order to recommend the most effective strategies to achieve the goal of building a positive learning environment in our classrooms and buildings. Why? Because without effective behavioral frameworks and strategies, student behavior inhibits engagement in instruction and student achievement declines exponentially. As one wise educator stated referring to excellent instructional academic frameworks, “We’ll never get to Common Core and we’ll never get to the Focused Instruction if we don’t deal with the social environment in our classrooms. Every year it gets more and more toxic.” This, essentially, is why we’ve been asked to come to the table with recommendations for helping us to flush out that which is toxic and move forward with diligence, integrity and fidelity to advance social and academic techniques that have been shown to be effective.

We are making eight recommendations derived from this collaboration. They are:

• Select, implement consistently, and provide ongoing support for a set of district-wide behavior management systems: Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, PBIS, and ENVoY.

• Develop a comprehensive behavior framework that effectively meets the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students across all schools. Research the curricular instructional adaptations and teaching strategies that are most effective in reducing behavior issues. Prioritize those strategies that are most effective and make them accessible online.

• Attend to the social curriculum by allowing time for students to learn through play.

• Decrease fear among students and increase calm by incorporating nature into the curriculum.

• Provide stronger support for parents by initiating home visits and expanding parenting classes.

• Implement student-centered staff development that is socially focused.

• Explore how schools can more effectively use Educational Support Professionals (ESPs).

• Streamline due process.
In the final stages of this collaboration, we were asked to pick a symbol or visual to represent this body of work. We chose a Mobius loop, which has the mathematical property of being non-orientable, an infinite and continuous connection where a beginning and an end cannot be identified. The inside becomes the outside and the outside once again becomes the inside. We decided that a Mobius loop embodied not only our vision for a more unified school district, but also our message that the social curriculum and the academic curriculum are woven seamlessly together. One curriculum is not any more important than the other and each are critical components of healthy and effective schools.

MOBIUS LOOP

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that the social curriculum and the academic curriculum are woven seamlessly together.

— THE VIVA MINNEAPOLIS TEACHERS WRITING COLLABORATIVE
RECOMMENDATION 1

Select, implement consistently, and provide ongoing support for a set of district-wide behavior management systems: Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, PBIS, and ENVoY.

Statement of the Problem

The main problem gleaned from discussions and posts in the Idea Exchange is that we have district-wide behavior management systems that are not universally understood, consistently applied or supported.

Below is a brief description of each of our recommendations, including a summary of what was stated about them on the VIVA site and why we believe these choices will fit together to make a positive impact on behavior. These recommendations come from what we know and have learned, and would require proper administrative guidance, staff training and ongoing support to be implemented effectively.

Responsive Classroom/Developmental Designs are a part of Origins which is a non-profit organization whose mission as stated on its website is to promote an equitable and humane multicultural society through quality education for all:

- The Responsive Classroom approach is a widely used, research-backed approach to elementary education that increases academic achievement, decreases problem behaviors, improves social skills, and leads to more high-quality instruction.
- Developmental Designs is a middle level approach that effectively integrates social-emotional and academic learning throughout the school day.

(SW)PBIS is an acronym, which stands for School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports. The company describes itself as a decision-making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes.

In general, (SW)PBIS emphasizes four integrated elements: (a) data for decision making, (b) measurable outcomes supported and evaluated by data, (c) practices with evidence that these outcomes are achievable, and (d) systems that efficiently and effectively support implementation of these practices.

ENVoY is an acronym, which stands for Educational Non-verbal Yardsticks. The goal is to decrease our verbal management tendencies in our classrooms and increase attentiveness to our non-verbal messages. It provides training for implementing consistent and fair parameters while preserving the relationship between teacher and student.
The goal is to execute from a place of influence rather than power in order to win students’ attention and cooperation during instruction. ENVoY trains teachers in management techniques for getting student attention, coping with difficult transitions, general instruction, and for handling independent work.

The statements above illustrate the inconsistencies in the implementation of the behavior management systems. This issue is leading to inconsistent behavior by students and skepticism among staff about the effectiveness of those systems in place. The resulting consequences include a circle of misapplied systems, teacher and staff confusion, frustration, opting out, and eventually, the fading of any interest to continue to practice the management strategies. The situation is worse than if there was no system in place at all because district officials assume there is a policy and system in place when, in fact, it is not longer being practiced.

PBIS

Our school has set up PBIS and has found much success with it!”

Kaylin G.

I agree PBIS WORKS! It turned our building around from being a scary place to work and learn to a peaceful, respectful, and family-type safe place to be.”

Pam B.

PBIS can look very different. Not sure what he means. I was at a school where it did not work.”

Jessie K.

Responsive Classroom/Developmental Designs

Jessie K. “I highly recommend responsive classroom as professional development for elementary teachers.”

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ENVoY

B.R.: “I’ve taken ENVoY training four times and found it very helpful. As with other initiatives, MPS fails to implement it system-wide and with fidelity. However, ENVoY dovetails nicely with Responsive Classroom and it has strategies that an individual teacher can implement successfully in their own classroom, independently of other classrooms. ENVoY helps teachers build stronger relationships with students.

M.B.: “I did the classroom management and personal relationships legs of ENVoY, but unfortunately MPS did not offer the final leg.”

Laura B. “What works: community building, routines and procedures, second chances, being able to communicate with families, home visits, ENVoY, peer mediation. It would be nice if some of the procedures were done district-wide so students do not have learn an entirely new set of procedures for each class.”
The problem is in the application and support, not with the fundamentals of the system. In other words, it is not necessary to find a new system, but to improve how we support the current systems: PBIS, Responsive Classroom/Developmental Design, and ENVoY. Implementing these programs, particularly the foundational ones, requires consistent, ongoing training, monitoring and support. The first questions that should be asked when a building is having high rate of suspensions and behavior disturbances is, “Are we working the plan and what kind of support do we need to implement it with fidelity?” All of these systems have data that supports their success when used properly and given time to develop.

Proposed Solutions

1. The district should consider a district-wide restructuring and/or reorganization of the four behavior management systems already in place, outlined above. This would also have the potential to save the district money in the long run by limiting the number of initiatives offered.

   The following represents the recommendations for implementation, training and support. They are divided into two groups. The first group represents what may be termed Foundational (PBIS, Responsive Classroom, and Developmental Designs), which are systems which are the basis of our philosophy and/or structure, and the umbrella under which the other recommendations (ENVoY) function.

2. Conduct a review of the existing behavior management programs in the district and develop an approach that uses Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, (SW)PBIS, and ENVoY in a comprehensive way.

3. Build consistent and ongoing PD in all four programs.

4. Build adequate funding that will allow for continued to support training and monitoring over time.

5. Continue to ask for building-wide fidelity and accountability, similar to the current focused instruction model.

Narrowing the diversity of systems for classroom/school behavior management is important to long-term success because it allows for depth of implementation and training. It also honors the time and efforts of individuals. For this reason it is important to choose wisely using proven systems that can be implemented across the district.
Why We Believe These Will Work

Too many behavior/management systems and strategies will dilute the effectiveness across districts, schools and classrooms. Maintaining a commitment to proven behavior/management systems that have been in use makes sense for all of the reasons we have stated. Proactive systems that build relationships, hold students accountable and at the same time value individuals, and are non-confrontational, have been proven by researchers to be most effective over the long term. Systems should dovetail rather than conflict in approach and philosophy.

Teacher feedback has been overwhelmingly positive about the effectiveness in practice of the four recommended programs. While other district programs have many positive attributes, we believe it is better to concentrate on these four major programs by providing better training, support, implementation and continuous monitoring. These distinct programs complement and support each other.

A Word about Ongoing Training and Support

If we choose to go forward with these programs we must commit ourselves long term in order for them to be worth our investment both in time and funding. We must take time, committing consistent efforts, to support these methods in schools and classrooms for many years to come. We can have the best, most touted program ever recommended in place, but if it is not practiced with fidelity, it will not live up to its potential. Instead, it may be a detriment to success because discouraged staff members will lose confidence in the programs’ likelihood of success, making goal attainment much harder for everyone. In short, comprehensive implemented and ongoing support is essential for anything to succeed.
RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop a comprehensive behavior framework that effectively meets the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students across all schools. Research the curricular instructional adaptations and teaching strategies that are most effective in reducing behavior issues. Prioritize those strategies that are most effective and make them accessible online.

This common framework would influence each individual school building within the district and would provide uniformity in how all schools approach behavior management proactively and reactively. Such a framework would help schools establish a culture rooted in a distinct philosophy and a social curriculum that would embody that philosophy. To that end, administrators, teachers and other staff members at each school would then be able to evaluate how their philosophies collectively, differ from the behavior management strategies or approaches of individual teachers.

Statement of the Problem

School improvement plans (SIP) district-wide lack focus and consistency in how they address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of its students. Some schools have created SIPs that state that their entire school subscribes to the Responsive Classroom philosophy while plans in other schools may only recommend that teachers take an ENVoY course. Some schools take on more proactive measures (morning meetings/advisories, peer-mediation programs, recognition assemblies) to reduce problem behavior; create healthy climates; and establish clear, building-wide, discipline policies. Yet, the plans and policies at other schools are less clear and teachers may be using less effective approaches for reducing problem behavior. In some buildings, teachers may be using effective techniques, but what is absent is a clear building-wide social curriculum or philosophy centered on the social needs of the students. The Restitution curriculum builds on the work of William Glasser, and states that all students have four basic needs: the need for power, the need for belonging, the need for freedom, and the need for fun. If students’ needs are not being met in these four areas, then staff across the district are forced to react after students have already engaged in unhealthy and often disruptive behaviors when, instead, the focus should be on preventing the behavior in the first place. The district is experiencing a systemic problem with behavior and has been very vocal about the need to reduce suspensions, especially among African American male students. The number of suspensions is still far too high and reflects that too many schools are not addressing the basic social needs of its students.
Proposed Solutions

6. Social Curriculum—The following proposed solutions articulate what is needed to effectively implement a social curriculum in schools across the district.

A. Communicate to families, students, community members and leaders, and its very own teachers that the Minneapolis School District believes that the social curriculum is just as important as the academic curriculum. All the administrators, teachers and other staff members should be able to articulate clearly its school’s philosophy in meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of its learners.

B. Distribute financial resources equitably to better support the social curriculum. A financial commitment and reform, paramount to the district’s Focused Instruction initiative, is critical.

C. Create a district model for addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of its students. This model would require all buildings to select and adhere to a school-wide philosophy of their choice (i.e. Responsive Classroom K–5 or Developmental Designs 6-12) so that every building can adequately address the social needs of its students. This comprehensive framework would include:
   - The school’s Core Behavior Philosophy (School Beliefs) and related social curriculum used by all its teachers school-wide
   - A plan for training new teachers each year in its school’s Core Behavior Philosophy
   - A detailed description of how the supplemental strategies (i.e. Envoy, morning meetings, PBIS, etc.) tie in and support the overall Core Behavior Philosophy of the school—including triennial updates since new methods or strategies are always being added.
   - The requirement that schools must have a clear plan to address conflict resolution between students and incorporate some element of peer mediation.

D. Set clear parameters as to what constitutes a social curriculum, embracing distinct philosophies rather than mere research-based techniques or strategies to address behavior development. Having techniques or strategies alone is not working to reduce problem behavior or suspensions district-wide.

E. Make a list of all current social curricula being used throughout the district and then examine all other strategies being used (i.e. Response to Intervention [RTI] or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports [PBIS]). Design a framework for how these various resources fit together and support the overall philosophy of the buildings. Then, communicate this framework to schools. In this way there will be more uniformity across the district.

F. Identify which schools have a clear building-wide social curriculum rooted in a philosophy that meets the social and emotional needs of its students. Examine the behavior data and compare it with those schools that lack a clear building-wide vision. Study what the data say.
G. Make research-based behavior strategies more readily available online to teachers and staff. Teachers and social workers need quick access to behavior management techniques that the district deems effective. There needs to be an online format for sharing and presenting behavior strategies sorted by topic. These behavior management strategies or techniques could be presented using videos, flip charts, other visual aids, narratives and testimonials, for example.

H. Enlist the Information Technology (IT) Department to work with the Special Education department in selecting a behavior-monitoring computer application that all special education social workers, teachers, related staff, and Special Education Assistants (SEAs) across the district would use to make data driven decisions.

7. **Academic Curriculum** — The following proposed solutions articulate what is needed to effectively implement the academic curriculum in schools across the district.

A. Require schools or individual classrooms to engage in service learning projects - tied to their academic curriculum and selected by students. Emphasize service learning so that all students can see school as a means of support for their communities. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program provides an excellent service-learning model for classrooms to use in achieving this outcome.

B. Share and celebrate with the larger community the types of service learning projects being used in certain schools. For example, Anthony Middle School (IB-MYP) has multiple service learning projects in effect each year. Evidence of that school's progress shows that by connecting to a larger community outside of their individual school, students are more actively engaged in the learning process.

C. Train teachers to implement curriculum that is relevant to our culturally diverse student body. Students need to hear and see themselves in the curriculum that we teach. There is a lot of research that supports this perspective. Experts in this area include Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Eric Jensen and Alfred Tatum.

- Support teachers who may not be familiar with the backgrounds or neighborhoods of their students, in helping them develop more culturally relevant pedagogy as well as exploring the experiences and backgrounds of their students.

- Ensure teachers are holding high expectations for all students. Assist teachers in understanding that they must eschew assumptions that might cause them to expect less academically from students who are culturally different from them.

D. Ensure that culturally relevant curriculum is embedded in all Focused Instruction units.
E. Make research-based *instructional* strategies more readily available online to teachers and staff. Teachers need quick access to instructional strategies that the district deems effective. These could be presented using video, flip charts, visuals, narratives, testimonials, etc. Strategies that support students by increasing their engagement and ultimately reducing poor behavior include:

- Differentiated learning tasks
- Providing immediate feedback
- Understanding and addressing learning styles
- “Teach to mastery”
- “Repeated practice”
- Using technology to gather data and communicate data with students
- Using video tutorials (i.e. “flipped AH classrooms”)

**Why We Believe These Will Work**

The recommendations and proposed solutions in this section will support individual schools by providing a clear and comprehensive framework for addressing behavior, and in meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of its students. We need uniformity across the district to drive how schools approach behavior and in how funds are distributed to ensure buildings can adequately respond and support its students. A comprehensive behavior framework will hold schools accountable for selecting, communicating, and subscribing to a school philosophy. Monitoring students to see if they have or have not met classroom expectations is not enough. Teachers and students must understand the building’s philosophy related to behavior, including what the school believes is important, the rationale behind every rule, and how behaviors (good or bad) affect every student’s ability to meet his or her own personal goals, hopes, and dreams.

In addition, there are numerous, research-based teaching strategies that support students academically. Used effectively, these strategies can help minimize problem behavior, disengagement, disruptions, non-compliance, and avoidance. The district needs to research which of these strategies is most effective and ensure that they are accessible to all teachers and support staff. The use of technology, including video streaming, YouTube, Moodle, for example, can make these strategies available to teachers, social workers, and support staff within minutes.
RECOMMENDATION 3

Attend to the social curriculum by allowing time for students to learn through play.

Statement of the Problem

Students are not getting enough time to play or to engage in other positive activities that would effectively provide an outlet for their high levels of energy, according to a study by Playworks. Play and recess are necessary components of improving school climate and student behavior. Up to 40% of U.S. school districts have reduced or eliminated recess in order to allow for more time for core academics. Children with at least 15 minutes a day of recess are more apt to be more effective learners and have better behavior, yet only half of principals report that their students get between 16 and 30 minutes of recess a day. 1

Play is, and must be recognized as, an absolute necessity for young children. Current Minnesota K-5 Academic Standards do not include play as a required part of the curriculum, even though the stated goals in standards purport to focus explicitly on identifying the most essential and fundamental educational goals. Play is an essential, fundamental part of a child’s development, and is recognized as Developmentally Appropriate and Best Practice.

Play helps students understand differing perspectives, develops an understanding of rules, it enables social and emotional growth, it increases the ability to focus, and enhances cognitive and academic performance. 2, 3

Proposed Solutions

8. Expand Playworks by developing a district-wide implementation plan for all elementary schools. The program in Baltimore, MD, started in six schools in 2005 and expanded to 36 by 2009-2010. 4

9. Reinstate daily recess throughout the district and at all levels (K-12) and eliminate policies of depriving students of recess time as a form of punishment and means of instilling discipline. Organized play that occurs during recess often works to diffuse bad behavior. Some principals reported that recess is a time where some of the most challenging and problematic behavior occurs, which does add another level of difficulty to implementation. While this may be true, studies show that behavior can be diffused before regular classes resume. Playworks surveys showed that teachers were able to gain back 18 minutes per day of learning time because student behavior issues were no longer spreading from the playground into the classroom.
10. Incorporate more opportunities for play into the K–12 curriculum by:

- Ensuring at least 20 minutes of daily playtime (structured or unstructured) at the middle school secondary levels. Students need time to socialize and exercise and the 30 minutes provided at lunch is not enough.
- Considering the addition of numerous activity days as Anthony Middle School has done.
- Ensure there is a balance between child-initiated learning and direct teacher instruction in the curriculum at the elementary level.
- Ensure sufficient child-initiated play opportunities with an active presence of the teacher at the elementary level, in kindergarten especially. *The Tools of the Mind* curriculum would be one example to use as a guide. Chapter 7 of *Crisis in the Kindergarten* can also be useful. These authors recommend that 3 hours of a 6-hour kindergarten day should be spent in play, not 3 hours in literacy and math instruction. At all levels the authors of *Tools of the Mind* conclude that unbalanced, high levels of direct instruction and didactic teaching creates unintentional social and emotional consequences such as stress-induced hyperactivity, hostility, and other behavior issues.

**Why We Believe These Will Work**

Playworks has a proven track record and is already working effectively at Andersen United Community School, where it is in its first year of implementation. Similar results will also be found at the remaining six schools where Playworks has begun to be implemented. Research has demonstrated countless benefits from using play not only at recess but also in the classroom (see above). Similar examples of playtime can also be found in Play Matters, Overview of Cases found on the Playworks.org website under resources.
RECOMMENDATION 4

Decrease fear among students and increase calm by incorporating nature into the curriculum.

Statement of the Problem: Students spend a significantly smaller amount of time interacting with nature than previous generations despite mounting evidence of the health benefits. One researcher, Frances Kuo, concluded, “that green environments are essential to human health.” Another research paper written by two physicians makes the powerful point that our youngsters “will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors.”

Parallel studies also show an increase in a beneficial brain chemical, oxytocin, when individuals spend more time in nature. Oxytocin is linked to overriding the fear portion of our brains, helping us be calmer individuals and more capable of social interactions. This chemical is released as a result of many activities such as hiking in nature, eating fatty food, interacting with our pets and other domesticated animals, and hugging. Calmer individuals with less fear are more likely to learn and to have more quality social interactions.

Proposed Solutions

11. Implement a plan to include more opportunities for outside exploration in small groups, both guided and unguided, at all levels. This could include, field trips, attending local parks—even holding students accountable for the upkeep of local parks and school grounds—creating partnerships with other organizations (Three Rivers, city parks, outdoor clubs), and converting current playgrounds to natural playgrounds (See Natural Playgrounds Company).

12. Investigate methods of “greening” school playgrounds. Explore local natural playgrounds and consult with a company that specializes in natural playgrounds regarding the best ways to incorporate more nature into current playgrounds.

13. Implement an environmental/outdoor service learning class into the curriculum. This would provide opportunities for students to volunteer in the community and in other natural areas.

14. Reduce barriers (real or perceived) that discourage teachers from conducting class outside, such as lack of training or experience in the outdoors, safety, large class size, the belief that less “gets done” outdoors, and the lack of administrative support.

15. Brainstorm to develop ideas that combat the notion students would not be safe on outdoor trips into the community because of student to staff ratios. This problem—when it does exist—could be solved by recruiting parent volunteers, and college students through our partnership with U. of M. service learning course.
16. Explore and investigate curriculum methods being used by other schools, such as Boston and San Francisco, which are incorporating outdoor and environmental education into their curricula.

17. Encourage the continued use and future development of school gardens.

18. Develop methods to gain community support and educate parents of the importance of nature to improving the wellbeing and health of our students (and adults, too).

**Why We Believe These Will Work**

While some families recognize the importance of outdoor activities, a variety of factors (including money and safety) prevent them from spending time in nature. Other families do not value time spent in nature and instead emphasize the value of activities centered around computers and other technological devices indoors. A third group of parents value and provide time for their children to be outside, interacting with nature. Public schools must set an example by providing our students with exposure to nature, which will also serve to educate parents.

Current research shows that there are a myriad of positive benefits when children interact and play together outdoors. These include reducing incidents of bullying, bolstering creativity in the manner and diversity of the play, helping students become more resilient in the face of frustrating situations of conflict, and alleviating some symptoms of ADHD.
RECOMMENDATION 5

Provide stronger support for parents by initiating home visits and expanding parenting classes.

Statement of the Problem
Lack of parenting support beyond age five and lack of positive school/teacher/parent relationships perpetuates behavior issues. A strong partnership between families and school staff members leads to better communication and academic success with students. Home visiting and parent education provide additional opportunities for that partnership to grow.

Proposed Solutions
19. Assess the current home-visiting framework (who gets them and how often, why, which staff members conduct them, etc.).

20. Implement a schedule that would allow teachers to do home visits before the school year begins to welcome their students to their class. This will put parents at ease over what to expect for the year, form a connection between home and school before the year even begins, and give teachers insight about their students’ home environment. This approach should, in essence, put parents in the driver’s seat by allowing them to discuss their children’s character and issues. This approach is much more beneficial than the typical and rare encounters in which a teacher calls a parent into the school to talk to them about their children. After all, parents are the experts when it comes to their children and they must be used as a resource early in the school year and often throughout the school year.

21. Initiate a pilot program of home visiting (or modify and expand existing home visit programs), to extend beyond Early Childhood Family Education. In this way, administrators, teachers and other staff members will be taking the initiative in setting goals and standards rather than having to react to problems after they arise.

22. Use ECFE and Head Start home visiting and parent education models as a guide.

23. Expand on CPEO’s existing parent education program. This expansion proposal would include providing sufficient staffing, ensuring sufficient class offerings at appropriate times. Such education programs should be well advertised and incentives should be offered to increase attendance.

24. Offer online parent education via online forums tailored to a specific classroom or grade level. This would help ensure relevant information is still available for parents who are not able to come to parent education courses offered on campus.

25. Form partnerships with and increase awareness of other local groups that offer parenting support, such as Urban Ventures, Catholic Charities and the U. of M. Youth and Family Development Programs.
26. Allow teachers and support staff at all levels to conduct grade specific, family curriculum nights throughout the year in addition to parent-teacher conferences. This would provide an opportunity for age-specific parent education and support on child development, opportunities for parents to connect with other parents, and further outreach and communication between the school and parents. Because attendance at parent-teacher conferences declines as students get older, family curriculum nights could reinforce the message the parent involvement in their children’s education and development is vital.

**Why We Believe These Will Work**

Various outreach opportunities for families are essential in establishing relationships between school staff, students and families. Home visits and parenting classes open up communication channels between parents, teachers and students, thus enabling positive relationships of trust, understanding and respect to grow and strengthen throughout the year. Parent education and home visits can provide the guidance, support and access to social resources that many parents need. ECFE and Head Start have proven track records of positive family outcomes with student behavior and the school/family relationship. Similar programs modified for the K–12 system would surely result in similar outcomes.
RECOMMENDATION 6

Implement student-centered staff development that is focused socially and academically on the whole child.

Statement of the Problem
Teachers are encountering issues within the classroom that are interrupting the academic achievement of students. Teachers need to teach the whole child; therefore, it is important that they have continuous, staff development that reflects the diverse population of students in Minneapolis Public Schools. The much touted Achievement Gap will only be closed when we begin to teach the whole child and engage them with curriculum which is relevant to their needs. When we don’t, conflicts arise and students become disengaged. These are often issues which can be addressed in continuous staff development and training of teachers/social workers. We have touched on each of these recommendations at some point in professional development sessions, but never have received the depth of training needed to thwart these ongoing issues. We believe that investing in the professional development of teachers will increase student achievement as well as improve the climate of the building as a whole, and of individual classrooms.

The professional development of classroom teachers and social workers is essential to the academic success of our students in Minneapolis Public Schools. Classroom teachers and social workers need continuous professional development, which is not only relevant, but extremely essential.

Proposed Solutions

27. Functional Behavior Assessment: Teachers need training to learn how to identify the reasons for certain behaviors exhibited in the classroom. We believe teachers will benefit from training in functional behavior assessment. The functional behavior assessment is a tool typically used by school psychologists during their observation evaluations of students in different settings around the school. It does not take very long to administer, and it provides teachers with useful knowledge to help them develop strategies to deal with specific behaviors.

28. Cultural Competency: Invest in continuous professional development to strengthen teachers’ capacity for cultural competence.

Cultural competency relates to the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully teach and successfully relate to students from diverse cultures. In order for teachers to provide effective and engaging instruction, they need to be educated about the four cultural competence skill areas: valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge by adapting curricula that acknowledges diversity.
Professional development needs to bridge the cultural gap that exists between teachers, students, and among diverse students. Teachers continuously are finding themselves in diverse classrooms trying to develop relationships with students who are from different cultural backgrounds and have had distinct experiences that differ from their peers and teachers. To foster respect and productivity, teachers need to be mindful of their students’ backgrounds. This, alone, would help to reduce conflict. The relationship between the teacher and student must be viewed as a positive partnership for the purpose of learning, not an adversarial relationship based on fear, misunderstanding and mistrust. Students need to be able to identify with the curriculum of the classroom and pedagogy used in the classroom. Cultural competence will help foster the districts’ goals of improving student academic achievement, improving the effectiveness of teaching, of meeting accountability requirements, and improving family communication.

29. **Fund and provide training in Peer Mediation, Peer Conflict Resolution, and Restorative Justice.** These are all methods used to de-escalate conflict amongst peers. Professional development in these areas would be useful for classroom teachers and social workers, who deal first-hand with peer conflict when it occurs in classrooms. Once teachers establish a healthy community, the classroom will become a healthy environment, free of conflict and conducive to learning. Peer Mediation involves a trained mediator (adult/student) who helps students to mediate conflict before it evolves into violence. Peer conflict resolution places the emphasis on students working together to resolve issues and conflicts. When trained properly, teachers are better able to facilitate such mediations by teaching students how to cope with conflict when it arises, and diffuse emotion-fueled problems before they turn violent. Restorative Justice originates from the Native American culture and emphasizes the healing of the victim, community, and perpetrator. A restorative justice program would empower the students, with the help of teachers, to deal with their issues in a manner that includes healing and forgiveness. All of these strategies are student centered and dovetail with and support Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, PBIS and ENVoY.

30. **Train teachers to understand how to identify behavior versus mental health Illness.** Allow time for teachers to regularly connect with mental health professionals in the building. It is critical that teachers be trained to recognize that mental illness may be underlying a student’s poor behavior. There has been an increase in the numbers of students entering our classrooms with mental health issues, but teachers are not trained to recognize those symptoms/signs. Teachers need time to collaborate with the mental health professionals within our buildings in order to solve student problems, which need immediate attention. The time is not always available to intervene immediately due to staff and teacher meetings, and other events.

31. **Facilitate the creation of a healthy community in the classroom via implementation of Responsive Classroom (K–5), Developmental Designs (6–12), and ENVoY.** The professional development associated with these programs would enhance the district goal of ensuring that every student feels safe and welcome. Establishing a consistent (building to building) district behavior philosophy is imperative.
PBIS was implemented as the behavior model framework, but implementation of these methods across the district will establish a comprehensive behavior model district wide. ENVoY stands for non-verbal strategies to manage classroom behavior. Responsive Classroom (K–5) and Developmental Designs (6–12) promote healthy emotional, social, and academic environments that are developmentally appropriate for students.

32. Build time for social workers to meet regularly with colleagues within the district to inform each other of available resources. Provide time for social workers to form their own PLC’s to meet and connect to discuss issues and resources. Social workers also need consistent, continuous training so that they can effectively locate resources and connect with families. The knowledge of resources, which could assist students and families with emergency situations, currently is dependent upon the resourcefulness of each individual school building’s social worker. There needs to be a systematic effort to provide uniform resources and establish guidelines for best practices so that each social worker will be equipped with the most up-to-date information.

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) has adopted a school social worker model, which places the family in the center of their work.

According to the SSWAA, these are the primary duties of the school social worker:

- Improve academic and behavioral outcomes
- Ensure delivery of scientifically supported education, behavior, and mental health services
- Promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence
- Maximize school based and community resources

They also state that school social workers:

- Are trained mental health professionals
- Provide services related to a person’s social, emotional, and life adjustment to school and society
- Are the link between home, school, and community in providing services to students, families, and school personnel
- Promote and support students’ academics and social services

In the introduction to SSWAA’s School Social Work National Model Behavior brochure, the authors state:

“The roles and responsibilities of school social workers vary significantly across schools, districts, states, and countries. The purpose of the School Social Work Practice Model is (1) to articulate the skills and services that can be expected from school social workers, and (2) to promote consistency in undergraduate and graduate social work education, credentialing, and professional practice, with the goal of improving academic and behavioral outcomes.”
There are a variety of factors that influence the percentage of time school social workers allocate to these different roles. The most obvious factor is the ratio of Full Time Equivalence to the number of students served. For all of the practices and key constructs in this model to be implemented effectively, a full-time social worker is required, which is approximately a 1-250 school social worker-student ratio. This estimate will vary depending on several factors, such as the percentage of high-risk students, the experience and expertise of the school social worker, and the availability of other services in the school and the community. Other factors that may affect the job description of school social workers are the priorities and expectations of the school/district.”

Why We Believe These Will Work

We believe that professional development in these areas will significantly improve the climate in the buildings, relationships between students and teachers and school families, and contribute to increased student achievement in the classroom. These areas of professional development are essential to educating the whole child in an inclusive, engaging, and holistic style.
RECOMMENDATION 7

Explore how schools can more effectively use Educational Support Professionals (ESPs).

Who are ESPs?
From the 2011-2013 ESP Contract—The Board of Education recognizes Local 59 as the certified exclusive representative for all Educational Support Professionals, including but not limited to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aide to the Principal</th>
<th>Community School Coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Educator</td>
<td>Educational Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(with the following class options):</td>
<td>Child Care Helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Behavior Resource</td>
<td>Child Care Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bilingual</td>
<td>Health Educator II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community Resource</td>
<td>Instructional Technology Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpreter for Hearing Impaired</td>
<td>Instructional Technology (Support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Media Resource</td>
<td>Minneapolis Kids (Assistant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PDP Mentor</td>
<td>Minneapolis Kids (Coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Special Education Bilingual</td>
<td>Program Aide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Title I Computer Resource</td>
<td>School Community Liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transportation Resource</td>
<td>School Success Program Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Truancy</td>
<td>Special Education Assistant (SEA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Program Assistant</td>
<td>Special Education Assist Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant</td>
<td>Transportation Resource Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Physical Therapist Assistant</td>
<td>Media Aide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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7
Statement of the Problem

The VIVA Project asked teachers to address several questions pertaining to behavior in our schools, such as what is working, effective strategies, what would better support students, changes we need at the building level, and support or professional development needed from the district. The vast majority of respondents spoke favorably about ESPs, but expressed a need for improvements in how the district is managing and training its ESP workforce. Currently, there is no substitute system in place to cover for absent ESPs in school buildings. For example, when SEAs are absent, special education programs have to operate short-staffed and scramble to find adequate coverage (which is rarely available), rearrange instructional groups or plans, cancel community outings, and work with fewer staff members to respond to behavioral crises. These challenging working conditions result in an increase in problem behavior among some students.

Proposed Solutions

33. Request VIVA Project to begin a second mission, separate from our current mission on “behavior”, to explore what changes are needed in how buildings effectively use Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) so buildings can best support students socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically.

34. Develop a comprehensive ESP plan (district and Local 59 working closely together) that outlines the best practices for using ESPs in buildings, ESP ongoing professional development, and the building models proven most effective district-wide. Models should be available online and presented using visual organizers or flowcharts.

35. Establish an ESP Substitute System.

36. The cuts to ESPs (Special Education Assistants) have dealt a significant blow to special education programs. The district MUST re-establish the standard that, at a minimum, two SEAs are required for every special education classroom. Additional staff would be the standard for programs with greater behavioral or cognitive needs.

37. Establish consistency in ESP position requirements and a method for evaluating ESP performance. Determine what evaluation tool will be used and who will administer the evaluation.

38. Determine a clear plan (district-wide) for behavior teams and how ESPs should best respond to behavior crises and support teachers in implementing the social curriculum of their school. If schools have a Behavior Room, determine how it should be managed and most effectively evaluated. Determine how long a student should remain in a behavior room, and what must be accomplished there before a student returns to the classroom.

39. Develop a district-wide plan for regular (perhaps weekly) meetings between administrators, social workers, teachers, and ESPs so they can address school-wide issues, special programs and concerns about students. It should be noted that some buildings have SEAs come in early and leave early once a week to make the time for staff to meet together without students present. This kind of plan could be a starting point, although it is not ideal.
40. Increase the number of building days ESPs work during the August workshop week so that teams can have adequately time to meet, discuss student needs, train, prepare and collaborate. Special Education Assistants should be present in buildings for FOUR, uninterrupted days to prepare for the year ahead. Currently, SEAs are given just ONE full day in buildings (A second day is provided to attend trainings off-site). This is not nearly enough time for staff to plan together and prepare.

41. Increase the level of professional development offered to ESPs, especially trainings that pertain to behavior strategies and the implementation of the social curriculum:

- Responsive Classroom (K–5)
- Developmental Designs (6–12)
- ENVoY
- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Conflict Resolution Techniques
- Leading Peer-Mediation Programs

**Why We Believe These Will Work**

The district is not making the most effective or efficient best use of its ESP workforce. The solutions proposed above would resolve the most significant issues regarding managing ESPs, training ESPs, and providing substitute ESPs to buildings when they are needed to cover for absent ESPs. The VIVA project is representing the voices of over 300 Minneapolis teachers and these teachers want the district to acknowledge and address these ESP concerns for the sake of the students. These ESP concerns are factors contributing to increased student behavior problems, increased suspensions, and the inability of buildings and special education programs to adequately meet the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of its students.
RECOMMENDATION 8

Streamline due process.

Organize a task force of special education teachers, social workers, related service professionals (Speech, OT, PT), ESPs, general education teachers, and/or administrators to improve and streamline due process paperwork. The goal should be preparing due process paperwork that is easier for families to understand; easier for staff members to complete; and detracts less from important classroom planning and instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Special education teachers and social workers are spending too much time and energy attending to due process matters, leaving them less time to plan and improve their lessons and deliver to their students high quality classroom experiences.

The result is that students are not as engaged, are not getting their social or academic needs fully met, are not challenged, and are slipping further and further behind. Based on federal, state, and district policy, special education teachers are left feeling like their paperwork is considered more important than delivering high quality instruction, and this is causing a high rate of “burn out” among these teachers. Special education teachers are relying more and more on their support staff to run their classrooms so they can complete their due process duties during the day. Exacerbating the issue is that a large percentage of families are either unable to read these due process documents or, for whatever reason, are not reading them at all. Teachers are left wondering, “Why are we spending 50% or more of our time attending to due process matters when this time could be devoted directly to addressing the social and academic needs of our students?” This is a national problem. The Minneapolis School District could become the nation’s leading pioneer in solving the special education paperwork crisis by implementing some of the solutions mentioned above.

Social workers, too, need their due process duties streamlined so they can have more time to connect with students and families, AND have the time needed to effectively seek out community resources. The paperwork load is distracting social workers from the attention they need to give to students who are most at risk, and therefore, in need of social workers’ full, undivided attention.

Proposed Solutions

42. Change the software within EasyIEP to allow social workers to select objectives from a list rather than creating custom objectives. If teachers want to customize statements, they should be allowed to, but this would save teachers and social workers valuable time that could better be invested in serving students’ immediate needs.

43. More prewritten, district approved and designed language, needs to be available for IEPs and Evaluations within EasyIEP to reduce the time it takes to complete paperwork. For example, teachers and social workers should be able to simply check off the student’s name, grade, instructional levels, and so on, when beginning a due process document. Then, that information would automatically appear within every statement within the document. Current IEPS or evaluations require comprehensive and detailed written
descriptions from teachers and social workers. On many IEPs or evaluations, for example, teachers and social workers have to type a student’s name 100 times before they are finished. The time it takes to type a student’s name 100 times is about how long we should spend completing the entire document.

44. Appoint a task force to investigate the latest data management software that allows for the greatest level of streamlining and efficiency. Teachers are spending hours upon hours of their own time at home and away from their loved ones completing the EasyIEP paperwork.

45. Consider an initiative to require IEPs every three years. If this is a matter of changing Minnesota law, then let MSP and MFT be the forerunners in advocating this change in the spirit of what’s best for students.

46. Reinstate the policy of requiring progress reports twice a year. Special education teachers are professionals and already are putting just as much time into their grades as regular education teachers. Progress reporting needs to be dramatically streamlined and simplified (mostly checklists) so teachers do not have twice the workload of regular education teachers during the four grading periods each year. Some special education teachers are only able to complete the grading process the day before grades are do because their entire allotment of Record Keeping Days is needed to complete due process paperwork.

47. Redesign Classroom for Success or CFS (the section for Curriculum Based Reporting and Progress Monitoring data entry). For example, teachers should be able to enter all of their reading progress monitoring scores from one screen (like teachers do when entering grades in Gradebook) instead of having to move through several screens to record one score for each individual student. This would reduce the time for entering scores from 30-40 minutes to one or two minutes. Data entry is requested from teachers multiple times every month, so this would result in significant time saved over the course of the year.

48. Enable Social Workers (who are typically the special education IEP team members who make calls to families to set up meetings or address urgent matters regarding students) to automate the way we reach families. Imagine an IEP team has decided on a date for a meeting. Due process law requires the team to make at least three attempts to reach families to set up these meetings. The social worker could then create just one message over the phone that would be delivered three times until a response from families was given. The message could be delivered in one of many languages (English, Spanish, Somali, Hmong, Oromo, etc.). The phone system would also be connected to EasyIEP or other computer software, eliminating the need to manually enter this information in the contacts log.

Why We Believe This Will Work

Streamlining due process would give social workers the time to facilitate the needs of small groups of students who require direct instruction in social skills, self-regulation techniques, or anger management strategies. We need our social workers to have a profound impact on the children, families, and community they serve. This will only happen once the over burdensome paperwork load is reduced.
Conclusion

By adopting a comprehensive, research-based social and academic curriculum, we move away from the notion that Minneapolis Public Schools “…throws everything, but the kitchen sink at a problem to see what sticks.” We know that our classrooms and schools need to focus one hundred percent on the academic success of our students, but to get to that end we must act as a united district to focus on the social needs of our students. Like a never ending Mobius loop, the social curriculum and academic curriculum are infinitely linked. Minneapolis needs to adopt a comprehensive, research-based social and academic curriculum that reflects the needs of our students as well as creates a healthy, non-toxic learning environment in our schools.

The social curriculum and academic curriculum are infinitely linked.
Endnotes


3. *Making the case for Play Policy: Researched-Based Reasons to Support Play-Based Environments*, Dolores A. Stegelin, YC Young Children (March 2005) 60, 2; ProQuest Education Journals, p. 76


6. CNW, p. 41


Rhonda Carlberg is an Education Support Specialist in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) who works with developmentally disabled students, 18 to 21. The students Rhonda works with are somewhat independent in tasks of daily living but because they are socially challenged, they will need support throughout their lives. Rhonda, who was an environmental educator prior to joining MPS almost a decade ago, believes passionately that including subjects about the natural world would be of a substantial benefit to students academically, socially, and emotionally.

Aubree Huso, an early childhood educator in her fifth year of teaching, believes that language is obviously a fundamental skill that students must learn, but some are learning more than one at the same time. Aubree works in a dual language program at Early Childhood Family Education in MPS. Her favorite work includes making home visits and encouraging the families of her young students to maintain their home language and culture. Aubree is a member of the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children and will soon complete her Masters in early childhood.

Daniel Magnuson was in his second year of college when he discovered that he was meant to be a teacher. He could think of nothing more important or meaningful than doing work that would change the lives of youths for the better. Daniel completed his student teaching and started his teaching career in New Zealand in 1996. He has been a Minneapolis teacher for 13 years. Since 2003, Daniel has served as a special education teacher at Anthony Middle School in Minneapolis. Daniel is currently serving on the Focused Instruction Writing Collaborative helping to create an online literacy resource for Minneapolis K–5 English and Language Arts teachers. Daniel is also a member of the Little Kids Rock Foundation which brings guitar instruction into the classroom.
The Teacher Volunteers

Marcine Purinton, a K–5 special education teacher in MPS, is passionate about teaching and continuing education. After a long career as a Certified Medical Assistant, then as a school Technical Support Specialist, Marcine became interested in the field of special education. Her interest in education and students prompted her to return to school in her mid-50s to gain a master’s degree in education. After graduating from Augsburg College she began teaching and is now in her in her seventh year. She believes strongly that her experience as a life-long student has helped shape the solid teaching skills she now uses every day at MPS.

Pia Payne-Shannon comes from a long line of educators and political activists who taught her that education was the key to success. As a child who was raised in a low-income community, her mother stressed that the only way to change her circumstance and to stop the cycle of poverty was through education because it can never be taken from you. Pia became a teacher because she was raised to give back to her community, which has given so much to her. An English teacher now in her 23rd year of teaching, Pia has been paying it forward ever since. Pia is a member of the National Council of Teachers of English and the Association of Staff and Curriculum Development. On her nightstand at the moment: “Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People’s Children” by Lisa Delpit.

Our Moderator

Tina R. Nolan, Ed.D.

Dr. Tina Nolan, moderator for this VIVA Teachers project, has spent nearly 20 years working with teachers and teacher leaders in schools, cultural institutions and community-based organizations across the country. Prior to joining VIVA Teachers in 2011, she was Associate Director of Partnerships at National Louis University and Director of Education at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago. She serves as Editor in Chief for the Journal of Museum Education.
RECOMMENDATION ONE
Select, implement consistently, and provide ongoing support for a set of district-wide behavior management systems: Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, PBIS, and ENVoY.

Proposed Solutions
1. Consider a district-wide restructuring and/or reorganization of four behavior management systems already in place: Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, PBIS, and ENVoY.
2. Conduct a review of the existing behavior management programs in the district and develop an approach that uses Responsive Classroom, Developmental Designs, (SW)PBIS, and ENVoY in a comprehensive way.
3. Build consistent and ongoing PD in all four programs.
4. Build adequate funding that will allow for continued support training and monitoring over time.
5. Continue to ask for building-wide fidelity and accountability, similar to the current focused instruction model.

RECOMMENDATION TWO
Develop a comprehensive behavior framework that effectively meets the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students across all schools. Research the curricular instructional adaptations and teaching strategies that are most effective in reducing behavior issues. Prioritize those strategies that are most effective and make them accessible online.

Proposed Solutions
6. Social Curriculum — The following proposed solutions articulate what is needed to effectively implement a social curriculum in schools across the district.
   A. Communicate to families, students, community members and leaders, and its very own teachers that the Minneapolis School District believes that the social curriculum is just as important as the academic curriculum.
   B. Distribute financial resources equitably to better support the social curriculum.
   C. Create a district model for addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of its students. This model would require all buildings to select and adhere to a school-wide philosophy of their choice (i.e. Responsive Classroom K–5 or Developmental Designs 6–12) so that every building can adequately address the social needs of its students.
   D. Set clear parameters as to what constitutes a social curriculum, embracing distinct philosophies rather than mere research-based techniques or strategies to address behavior development.
   E. Make a list of all current social curricula being used throughout the district and then examine all other strategies being used. Design a framework for how these various resources fit together and support the overall philosophy of the buildings. Then, communicate this framework to schools.
   F. Identify which schools have a clear building-wide social curriculum rooted in a philosophy that meets the social and emotional needs of its students. Examine the behavior data and compare it with those schools that lack a clear building-wide vision.
   G. Make research-based behavior strategies more readily available online to teachers and staff.
H. Enlist the Information Technology (IT) Department to work with the Special Education department in selecting a behavior-monitoring computer application that all special education social workers, teachers, related staff, and Special Education Assistants (SEAs) across the district would use to make data driven decisions.

7. Academic Curriculum—The following proposed solutions articulate what is needed to effectively implement the academic curriculum in schools across the district.
   A. Require schools or individual classrooms to engage in service learning projects—tied to their academic curriculum and selected by students.
   B. Share and celebrate with the larger community the types of service learning projects being used in certain schools.
   C. Train teachers to implement curriculum that is relevant to our culturally diverse student body.
   D. Ensure that culturally relevant curriculum is embedded in all Focused Instruction units.
   E. Make research-based instructional strategies more readily available online to teachers and staff.

RECOMMENDATION THREE
Attend to the social curriculum by allowing time for students to learn through play.

Proposed Solutions

8. Expand Playworks by developing a district-wide implementation plan for all elementary schools.
9. Reinstate daily recess throughout the district and at all levels (K–12) and eliminate policies of depriving students of recess time as a form of punishment and means of instilling discipline.
10. Incorporate more opportunities for play into the K–12 curriculum by:
   A. Ensuring at least 20 minutes of daily play time (structured or unstructured) at the middle school secondary levels.
   B. Considering the addition of numerous activity days.
   C. Ensure there is a balance between child-initiated learning and direct teacher instruction in the curriculum at the elementary level.
   D. Ensure sufficient child-initiated play opportunities with an active presence of the teacher at the elementary level, in kindergarten especially.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR
Decrease fear among students and increase calm by incorporating nature into the curriculum.

Proposed Solutions

11. Implement a plan to include significantly more opportunities for outside exploration in small groups, both guided and unguided, at all levels.
12. Investigate methods of “greening” school playgrounds.
13. Implement an environmental/outdoor service learning class into the curriculum.
14. Reduce barriers (real or perceived) that discourage teachers from conducting class outside such as: lack of training or experience in the outdoors, safety, large class size, belief that less “gets done” outdoors, lack of administrative support.
15. Brainstorm ideas to reduce student to staff ratio on community trips which have a planned emphasis on the outdoor education.

16. Explore and investigate curriculums methods being used by other schools, such as Boston and San Francisco, that are incorporating outdoor and environmental education into their curriculums.

17. Encourage the continued use and future development of school gardens.

18. Develop methods to gain community support and educate parents on the importance of nature to the well-being and health of our students (and adults, too).

RECOMMENDATION FIVE
Provide stronger support for parents by initiating home visits and expanding parenting classes.

Proposed Solutions

19. Assess current home visiting framework.

20. Implement a schedule that would allow teachers to do a home visit before the school year begins to welcome their students to their class.

21. Initiate a pilot program of home visiting (or modify/expand existing home visit program), to extend beyond Early Childhood Family Education.

22. Use ECFE and Head Start home visiting and parent education models as a guide.

23. Expand on CPEO's existing parent education program.

24. Offer online parent education via online forums that can be specific to a classroom or grade level.

25. Form partnerships with/increase awareness of other local groups that offer parenting support, such as Urban Ventures, Catholic Charities and the U of M Youth and Family Development Programs.

26. Allow teachers and support staff at all levels to put on grade specific, family curriculum nights throughout the year in addition to parent-teacher conferences.

RECOMMENDATION SIX
Implement student-centered staff development that is focused socially and academically on the whole child.

Proposed Solutions

27. Functional Behavior Assessment: Teachers need training to learn how to identify the reasons for certain behaviors exhibited in the classroom.

28. Cultural Competency: Invest in continuous professional development to strengthen teachers’ capacity for cultural competence.

29. Fund and provide training in Peer Mediation, Peer Conflict Resolution, and Restorative Justice.

30. Train teachers to understand how to identify behavior versus Mental Health Illness. Allow time for teachers to regularly connect with mental health professionals in the building.

31. Facilitate the creation of a healthy community in the classroom via implementation of Responsive Classroom (K–5), Developmental Designs (6–12), and ENVoY.

32. Build time for social workers to meet regularly with colleagues within the district to inform each other of available resources. Provide time for social workers to form their own PLC's to meet and connect to discuss issues and resources.
RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

Explore how schools can more effectively use educational support professionals (ESPs).

Proposed Solutions

33. Request VIVA Project to begin a second mission, separate from our current mission on “behavior”, to explore what changes are needed in how buildings effectively use Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) so buildings can best support students socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically.

34. Develop a comprehensive ESP plan (district and Local 59 working closely together) that outlines the best practices for using ESPs in buildings, ESP ongoing professional development, and the building models proven most effective district-wide.

35. Establish an ESP Substitute System.

36. Re-establish the standard that, at a minimum, two SEAs are required for every special education classroom. Additional staff would be the standard for programs with greater behavioral or cognitive needs.

37. Establish consistency in ESP position requirements and a method for evaluating ESP performance. Determine what evaluation tool will be used and who will administer the evaluation.

38. Determine a clear plan (district-wide) for behavior teams and how ESPs should best respond to behavior crises and support teachers in implementing the social curriculum of their school.

39. Develop a district-wide plan for regular (perhaps once a week) meetings between administrators, social workers, teachers, and ESPs so they can address school-wide issues, special programs and concerns about students.

40. Increase the number of building days ESPs work during the August workshop week so that teams can have adequately time to meet, discuss student needs, train, prepare and collaborate.

41. Increase the level of professional development offered to ESPs, especially trainings that pertain to behavior strategies and the implementation of the social curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

Streamline due process.

Proposed Solutions

42. Change the software within EasyIEP to allow teachers and social workers to select objectives from a list rather than creating custom objectives.

43. More prewritten, district approved and designed language, needs to be available for IEPs and Evaluations within EasyIEP to reduce the time it takes to complete paperwork.

44. Appoint a task force to investigate the latest data management software that allows for the greatest level of streamlining and efficiency.

45. Consider an initiative to require IEPs every three years.

46. Reinstate the policy of requiring progress reports twice and year.

47. Redesign Classroom for Success or CFS.

48. Enable Social Workers (who are typically the special education IEP team members that make calls to families to set up meetings or address urgent matters regarding students) to automate the way we reach families.
New Voice Strategies

New Voice Strategies is a nonprofit corporation founded by a group of seasoned professionals who believe in an individual’s ability to make our world better, fairer and more productive. New Voice Strategies created WikiWisdom™ to offer leaders a new way to communicate with their stakeholders. Our innovation—the VIVA Idea Exchange, an online peer collaboration platform—plumbs the wisdom of committed people with front-line experience to create consensus on a variety of actionable recommendations. We believe in the power of authentic experience and provide committed people with an avenue to make a difference.

Our passion is to make their voices heard. In its first 18 months of operation, VIVA Teachers has engaged 5,000 committed classroom teachers in peer-to-peer collaborations. Along with 1,000 of their peers who joined our network, VIVA Teachers offers unvarnished insights into professional visions and priorities for strengthening Americas’ public schools from coast to coast.

Board of Directors

JILL BASS taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master’s in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge’s National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

ANNA BURGER is an Advanced Leadership Fellow at Harvard University and served on President Obama’s Economic Recovery Board. She was Chair of Change to Win and the first woman to head an American labor Federation. Burger retired as Secretary-Treasurer of SEIU, the nation’s fastest growing union, after serving from 2001 to 2010. In 2006 and 2009, Burger was named one of Washingtonian magazine’s 100 Most Powerful Women.

TOM COSGROVE, ex officio, co-founder of New Voice Strategies, brings strong experience as a message and communications strategist to our work. He has designed and implemented successful communications and grassroots campaigns for more than three decades as an environmental activist, campaign manager, political media consultant and advisor to businesses and nonprofits.

ELIZABETH EVANS is the Founding CEO of New Voice Strategies. She has over 25 years of professional experience in community-based organizing and policy advocacy, strategic communications, law and policy. She is a recognized national leader for building unconventional alliances, gathering community-based input and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems, focusing on education policy for the last 12 years. Previously, she spent 10 years as a courtroom litigator for the United States Securities and Exchange Commission.

JOHN HUSSEY is Chief Strategy Officer at Battelle for Kids. John provides organizational and strategic oversight for Battelle for Kids and the organization’s clients in the area of innovation, technology, communications, development and strategic planning. Prior to joining Battelle for Kids, John enjoyed a 30-year career in education and technology. He previously served as the regional manager for SchoolNet, Inc., helping create Web-based products to help teachers access student data and curricular standards via the Internet for use in instructional planning. He was also a middle school science teacher and technology coordinator in several Ohio school districts.

KIPLUND “KIP” KOLKMEIER is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Coie, LLC & Kolkmeyer Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the following law firms: Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

ASHLEY WARLICK, Chair, teaches elementary school in the Cambridge, Mass., Public Schools. She has a concentration in teaching students with special needs and brings a strong interest in the arts to her work. She serves on the Board of Directors of her school’s affiliated nonprofit organization, which brings urgently needed resources to the students at the school.