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PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CODE OF BEHAVIOR PROCESS

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PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE CODE OF BEHAVIOR PROCESS

BY

S. KAI CAMERON

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN
PARTIAL FULFLLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
COMMUNITY PLANNING

THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

1998

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE CODE OF BEHAVIOR PROCESS

MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING
RESEARCH PROJECT
OF
S. KAI CAMERON

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee

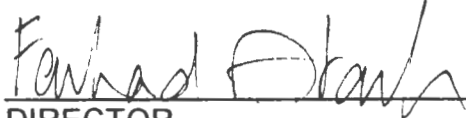
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1998

ABSTRACT

This project analyzed the secondary school discipline code for the Providence Public Schools with respect to parent participation and involvement. The discipline code exists in three (3) versions: (1) a multi-page text, which is the Davies-Bricknell School Board Policy # 5144, e.g. the *current* code; (2) a summarized version of the *current* code and (3) a **proposed** code. The *current* code was originally approved in 1978 and has been revised over the past twenty years through the amendment process. The summary of the *current* code was crafted in 1987 and distributed system-wide as a “letter to parents “. The summary serves as a convenient reference for students and parents. In 1992, the Providence Superintendent of Schools and the President of the Providence Teachers Union agreed to establish the School Safety Committee, to address safety and security issues in the Providence Secondary Schools. In May, 1997, the School Safety Committee submitted a draft of a proposed code of behavior for Grades Six through Twelve to the Providence School Board for approval. The draft document is the **proposed** code referred to in this project.

Each version of the code was examined with respect to the passive and active involvement of parents. The examination included assessing the role of parents in the development, implementation and dissemination of the code.

The analysis found that there is minimal passive involvement of parents in the implementation of the code and there is no active participation of parents in the development and dissemination of the code in each version. The analysis concludes with specific recommendations to the Providence School Department for involving parents through active participation in the three stages of the discipline code process. – development, implementation and dissemination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank first and foremost Almighty God for giving me the strength and guidance to keep going in the face of adversity. This work is dedicated 'in memoriam' to my mother/grandmother, Alice D. Barrows, (April, 1997) and my Godfather, Charles Thomas (May, 1998), who both taught me the importance of education.

I would also like to give thanks for my wonderful supportive husband, Stan, who I love very much. Thanks to my four very special children who always support me and never forget to call. I love you all.

Special thanks and love to my friend Phyllis, who is always there.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“... To be both good and fair, schools must work as partners with families, with community groups and with students.”

From Community Action for Public Schools (CAPS), an initiative of the Center for Law and Education, 1997

Providence Public Schools Districtwide Code of Behavior: Grades 6-12

PREFACE

John Friedmann, a planning theorist, suggests that planning attempts to link scientific and technical knowledge to processes of societal guidance. This kind of rational planning is important to a social planner, who believes that planning and social policy can and must be rational (Gans, 1993). Planners are required to obtain information, organize the information and communicate that information (or ideas) in order to perform a professional task. Social planners are usually assigned the role of designing policies that influence 'the way we live'. In this process, however, the social planner acknowledges that planning and 'making' policy are carried out from bureaucracies and systems that operate from a *top-down* perspective. However, the astute social planner recognizes that effective planning and policy-making must be performed from the *bottom-up*, using both the professionals and the citizenry.

Unquestionably, an issue of major concern to today's social planner is education. Education affects who we are, what we think and where we live. In a recent Providence Journal-Bulletin article, (May 6, 1998) that reported on a legislative discussion about charter schools, the Speaker of the RI House, Representative Caruolo, (D-E. Providence) commented,

"Let's work on our schools. If the schools go in the tank, property values go in the tank. If property values go in the tank, community values go in the tank. Go look at Detroit. It's a war zone."

The work that needs to be done in education, in the schools is a task for the social planner. However, to perform this task, the planner must engage the community and particularly the parents in order to legitimize his/her work.

For the city social planner, an effective means of policy design requires active, community participation (Gans, 1993). In the Providence School system, the effective design of a school behavior code, a component of the education process, depends on the participation of parents. In this paper, the design and construction of the *current* and **proposed** code will be examined and assessed for parent participation and involvement, which should serve as the “heart” of school governance.

BACKGROUND

The literature establishes that parent participation in schools produce a safer, quality learning environment. (Lasley and Wayson, 1982; Hollinsworth, Lufler and Clune, 1984; Stephens, 1995) James Comer, an education expert from Yale University, believes creating a sense of community in school is important to establishing discipline in schools. To build community, Comer suggests creating a school governance and management team that includes students, teachers, parents and administration. ¹

The aim of the US Department of Education’s sixth National Education Goal is “to make every school in America free of drugs and violence and fostering a disciplined environment conducive to learning by the year 2000.” Current research shows that drugs, violence, and discipline are related problems and are influenced by factors in the schools, in the community and the relationship between the two. The President’s 1998 agenda for education further claims that ‘strong academic goals, clear discipline standards that are fair and consistent, and good staff-student relationships can improve school climate and help create an environment conducive to learning’. Clearly controlling misbehavior is an important factor in furthering effective teaching and learning.²

As parents, teachers and students express more concern about safety and discipline policies in school, the community also wants schools that are safe, supportive and where students have the opportunity to learn.

“Discipline should be a learning process, where individuals learn to behave in a manner consistent with stated expectations - a school discipline policy”

This concept as expressed by the Prince Arthur Junior High School (Canada) discipline policy, lays the foundation for a behavior code that is inclusive of the learning process.

In late May, 1995, the Senate and General Assembly passed a school violence bill that would require all schools to establish school discipline programs in the form of codes of conduct. As a result of subsequent state legislature, Rhode Island has required that each school district produce a comprehensive code of conduct. In Providence, the updated discipline policy is near completion. The policy document has been rewritten, expanded and re-formatted. There are some changes - in content and in context. Yet, somehow, in the process, the involvement of parents has been negligible and mostly overlooked.

The mission statement of the Providence School Department reads,

“Students of all ages in the diverse cultural mosaic of the Providence community will be enthusiastic, life-long learners, workers, and citizens, each with marketable skills achieved relative to his/her ability. These outcomes will manifest themselves in a nurturing environment driven by excellence in educational opportunity.”³

What is not stated, however, is the importance of initially placing the students in the ‘nurturing’ environment and preventing negative behaviors and attitudes from interfering with the educational opportunities. Given that parents, teachers,

administrators and students themselves seek a safe, secure learning environment, there is the need for some kind of structure or plan for the maintenance of this space. Discipline can provide this structure. As a policy, the behavior code is an integral part of the learning environment, as well as the learning process. Students need to be in school (i.e. attendance) to learn and have to conduct themselves in a manner (i.e. behavior) that will allow the learning process to take place.

The research is consistent in defining a discipline code. A discipline code should clearly identify school rules and acceptable student behaviors. The discipline code is not only a set of rules to follow, but it also informs teachers, parents and others, exactly what kind of behavior is expected in a particular school. A national violence report documents that “successful school codes are written with student input and clearly define the roles, rights and responsibilities of all persons involved in the school.”⁴ However, in addition to these expectations, the inclusion of parents in the development of the code is under-emphasized.

Parents cannot be left out. The learning process must be inclusive, emphasizing parental and community involvement. Parents must serve as informed participants, meaningfully involved in decisions about outcomes and policies that concern the success of schools.⁵ Providence school parents have recently expressed concern and are vocal about what needs to be done to improve schools. In the past year, the Providence Journal-Bulletin has published several articles about parents in the Providence public schools and their specific concerns. (See Appendix)

In the city of Providence, the Providence Blueprint for Education (PROBE), Commission, a major independent study of public schools, in 1992, surveyed several thousand parents in its extensive work to provide the Providence School Department with viable recommendations to major school reforms. In total, over six hundred (600) parents completed a written questionnaire designed to elicit

responses about parent involvement, the quality of school-parent communication and parent overall satisfaction with the school system. In assessing the satisfaction of the schools, the two key areas were school environment and discipline. As with parents nation-wide, within the context of the school environment, the main concern is with the physical condition and security of the school building. Concerning the question of discipline, Providence parents were already expressing concerns for equity and understanding. More than a quarter - 26%- indicated dissatisfaction with the way discipline was applied in their schools. Although 58% were satisfied, (and 16% had no opinion), this concern was expressed more extensively in the informal interviews and focus groups also conducted by the PROBE staff.

Through the efforts of PROBE, initial work began to make schools accountable and to involve both parents and the community in these efforts. Two years ago, PROBE in partnership with the federal program, Americorps, established the *Parents Making a Difference* program. The program is presently responsible for fifty-eight (58) parents staffing Family Centers in eighteen schools. These parents served a variety of functions that included translators, tutors, mentors, mediators, conductors for workshops and sources of information. Although much of the work of PROBE ultimately focused on parents, there is still a void in the critical involvement of parents that is associated with decision making and policy setting. Even with parents, who are trained in asking the 'right questions', there is still much to explore.

The intensifying of parent involvement can result in 'deeper' parent and community involvement. Increased parent participation can lead to increased parent and community representation on site-based councils or district curricular and oversight committees. For example in Pattonville, Missouri, their 'parental involvement' allows parent and community members to take on a long-term role in school governance and decision making. Parents and community members

play important roles in key decisions about the district. Parents and students serve on the councils to share responsibilities for advice on policy matters.⁶

For Providence, the time is ripe to continue and cultivate the opportunities for increased and deeper parent involvement. Using the 'Parents Making A Difference' program and the School Improvement Teams as vehicles, the venues for more parent involvement have already been created. Parent participation is the beginning of the process where parents can become involved in the decision-making and policy setting of the school system. Parents can participate as advisory board members, conflict mediators, interpreters, or information 'specialists'.

This examination begins with an overview of the *current* and **proposed** discipline code. The overview will include a review of the contents of the code, how it works and what changes have been made. Each section of the code will be compared and contrasted with respect to the inclusion of parents. The methods or strategies to include parents will be measured and noted. The last chapter will present a discussion of what steps can be initiated or considered which would substantially involve parents in the development, implementation and dissemination plans for the **proposed** code to achieve that end.

CHAPTER TWO: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARENT
PARTICIPATION IN THE CURRENT AND PROPOSED CODE OF
BEHAVIOR

Rhode Island State Law 16-21-21

'Each school committee shall make, maintain and enforce a student discipline code. The purpose of the code is to foster a positive environment which promotes learning.'

Comparative Analysis of the *Current* and Proposed Code of Behavior for the Providence Public Schools and the Inclusion of Parents

BACKGROUND OF THE CODE:

Discipline for the Providence School Department is governed by Davies-Bricknell Policy #5144 which clearly outlines expectations for students, the discipline process, and the parameters of punishment - suspension, exclusion and expulsion. The section entitled: *Students- Discipline and Punishment/Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion*, serves as the foundation for the construction of the behavioral code. The *current* code exists in two forms: (1) the complete (full) policy which was approved in July, 1974 and includes various amendments (as noted) and (2) a summary version that was printed in November, 1987. The complete policy, along with other approved school policies, is available at each school. The summarized version of the policy is distributed as the *current* code of behavior to students and parents. The **proposed** code (version #3) was drafted in May, 1997. Each version of the code will be noted accordingly in this analysis. (Refer to Table One, p.17)

In March, 1994, important amendments were added to the *current* discipline code. The resolution was submitted by a School Board Sub-committee, with the input of school administrators, to improve the implementation of the Davies-Bricknell Policy 5144. The amendments reinforced the parameters for police involvement by eliminating exemptions and redefined the mandates for exclusion, (especially for assault) by specifying shall exclude for students, grades 6-12 and inserting may exclude for students in grades K-5. In May, 1996, a resolution was passed to reflect the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, (RIGL 16-21-18;16-21-19;16-21-20), by providing for 'stricter enforcement of the rules and regulations pertaining to the possession of a firearm in a school by a student'. The law (also referred to as the Zero-tolerance for Weapons Law)

allowed for the 'exclusion of a student for a period of one hundred eighty days -a calendar year- subject to a case by case basis'.

Table One

| COMPARISON FOR BEHAVIOR CODE: CURRENT AND PROPOSED : THREE VERSIONS | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| | FULL CURRENT CODE | SUMMARY CURRENT CODE | PROPOSED CODE | FINDINGS |
| INTRODUCTION | Reinforces the mission; sets the tone; refers to state laws; introduces the concept of safety | Addressed to parents, students, administrators re: responsibilities to code | Intro. paragraph about the rights and responsibilities of all involved in PPS, i.e. students, teachers, staff, administrators | The concern for responsibilities of all involved is addressed 'up front' The addition of staff appears to make the proposed code more inclusive |
| ATTENDANCE POLICY | Cites definition per state law; describes acad. penalties; describes procedures for unexcused absences (for 1-5 days and 6 or more days); discuss in-school plan, which includes alt pgm. | Three line paragraph addressing the law, the fine and student expectations | Four subtopics addressing the law, required documentation and administrative responsibilities | States the process of 'paper' documentation; references to alternatives from the current code have been eliminated, removing parents from process |
| BEHAVIOR | Two categories: obstructive & disruptive . Obstructive 'interferes with order' or is a felony; disruptive is 'misbehavior obstructing the educational process' | Two categories: obstructive & disruptive ; no changes in definition. | Groups categories of offenses I, II, III, i.e. suspension and/or exclusion, mandatory suspension/poss. exclusion, mandatory | In the proposed code, expanded list of sanctionable acts, category I contains 12, Cat II = 7; Cat III = 13. Concern for extending scope of prohibited behavior; no oppor for mediation process |
| SUSPENSION | Considered under 'definitions'; removal by sch. adm. 1 to 10 days; inc. in-school suspension. | No explanation of suspension | Defined under in-sch suspension/focus rooms and suspension, max. 10 consc. sch. days, can appeal to principal | Inclusion of term "focus rooms" in the proposed code, but discretion exerted by principal, no parent input |
| EXCLUSION | Considered under 'definitions'; removal of 10 to 180 days; | No explanation of exclusion | Action defined in accordance w/ code of behavior, discretion of Supt, recomm. of principal - 10 to 180 school days | The fact-finding conference description is incorporated in an extensive outline in the proposed code; references to alternate solutions are missing Only reads if necessary". appeal to Supt or designe, then to School Bd-no clear direction |
| EXPULSION | Considered under 'definitions': "permanent separation from rec'ving educational services". | No explanation of expulsion | Referred to as permanent exclusion, for convicted/adjudicated juveniles, 16 and older for offenses of drug trafficking, poss /use of deadly weapon, murder, rape, etc. | Re-entry appeal for exclusion/expulsion is stated in current code, not proposed |
| DESCRIPTION OF ACTS | Obstructive behvr: chronic disrpt behvr, phys assault, fighting, theft, vandalism, arson, verbal abuse, extortion, poss /use of weapons, drugs/alchl use or sale, false alarms, incite riot. Disruptive behvr: insolence to teachers, disobedience, obsc. language, littering, defacing furniture, refuse to disperse. | Students found guilty of acts = exclusion and reported to police; ex. phys. assault, use of weapons, poss /use of drugs/alchl; extortion, arson, incite riot; no oppor to intervene. | An extensive grouping of offenses by category, with acts reflecting different concerns as smoking, gang paraphnl., sexual misconduct, etc. | Proposed code includes a nine page listing of glossary terms to aid in the description and definition of the numerous acts and behaviors |
| RIGHTS | For bldg. adm., defined as "guiding principles". | Four sections describing students rights: due process; non-infringmt. of rights of others; must comply with Title IX; notes procedures for intervention from sch. Adm. Only | Entered as preface to ea. Section: student, parent, tch., staff, adm, immed informed of discipl acts and right to appeal | The concept of rights is broader, yet the process remains 'narrow', i.e. basically the same, no means noted for intervention or proactive steps for parents |
| DUE PROCESS | Fact-finding conference: informal meeting to determine (1) hearing for exclus/expuls; (2) alt resolution with agreem of all parties; (3) alt. resolution w/o agreem of all parties and inc. rights to appeal. Exclusion/expulsion procedures: investigation by principal, notify parents and SRO; right to legal counsel and witnesses. Supt.'s hearing for exclus. or expuls. Requires tape recording of hearing and written copies of findings/recommend to all involved parties | Single statement: rights to due process, inc. notice and the right to a hearing for suspen., expulsion, "AND ETC." | Under 'Parent Information' disciplinary rights-notice by phone, by mail, mtg w/ prin., incident report, appeal proced info. Non-suspend/non-expell disputes resolved by SRO Procedure for suspen investigation, oppor. for written rebuttal, judge by principal. | For exclus, insertion of "where required" as referred to a right to a hearing, determination of expuls. placed with Sch. Bd |
| SIGN-OFF | None referred to | None referred to | Attached: back cover of the document | (Discussion of this addition is included in the text) |

Source: 1. Providence School Department, Davies - Bricknell School Discipline Policy, #5144, 1978
 2. Providence School Department, Code of Conduct (Summary), 1987
 3. Providence Public Schools, District Wide Code of Behavior, Grade 6 - 12, 1997

COMPARISON OF THE INTRODUCTION TO THE CODE:

In each version of the discipline code, there is an introduction or preface which serves to explain the overall purpose of the code, which also sets the culture for the 'educational responsibilities' of the school system itself. In each of the versions, the introduction, however, takes different approach. The full *current* code features a long narrative that begins with "each teacher in the Providence Public Schools should strive to maintain a classroom in which pupils are happy and in which each one is learning". The paragraph continues by affirming that teachers can achieve these goals by attitudes and practices that exemplifies the "best principles of teaching and classroom management". In addition to teaching and classroom management as a way to educate students, education is also dependent on "safe, orderly classrooms and corridors". The concept of safety is the cornerstone of any discipline policy.

The subsequent fourteen paragraphs of the introduction briefly address the major concepts of the *current* code: (a) the legal powers of the School Board and Superintendent; (b) the individual rights of the students to education; (c) 'prompt and appropriate' punishment for certain acts; (d) readmission; (e) the governing state laws; (f) the rights and process of appeal; (g) length of periods for exclusion/expulsion; (h) distribution of the code and procedures and (i) specific references for Special Education Students. Near the end of the narrative, parents are mentioned:

"Parents must be charged with having a critical role and responsibility to support the implementation of all plans and programs to deal with student discipline and to stress to their children the need to obey rules in order to maintain an atmosphere in our schools conducive to meaningful teaching and learning."

The language is direct in assigning a role for parents to be involved in this whole process.

The introduction of the summarized version of the *current* code begins 'Dear Parents' and reads as a two-page letter to parents. The first line instructs the parents to read and discuss the code with their children. The following paragraph then states that this code is "a summary of the Providence School Department Policies and Regulations for Discipline and Punishment/Suspension and Expulsion." In the paragraph, the students are admonished that "students who violate these rules are subject to suspension, exclusion and/or appropriate action by the Administration and School Board". The reader is informed that "the Policy and Regulations #5144 is posted in its entirety in all schools and accessible to parents and students". The subject of responsibility on behalf of the student is addressed by simply declaring that the students should "seek all available help in the school department as an alternative to trying to solve a problem or disagreement in a way which may lead to more serious difficulty or exclusion." Despite the sentence's confusing grammatical formation, the obvious intent of the statement is for the students to actively pursue, or request a means for intervention or resolution to the problem that they are experiencing. (Note: For the **proposed** code , there also is a one page summary, which will not be analyzed for parent participation. However, the summary gives the background of the code, its purpose, definitions, its application and consequences. There are four (4) major definitions with the appropriate authority responsible listed - suspension, in-school suspension, exclusion and permanent expulsion. The offenses are listed in three (3) major categories, with consequences grouped for each sanctioned act. Refer to Table Two, p.30 for details.)

In the **proposed** code's introduction, the first few lines declare the basis of 'rights' for all involved with the Providence Public Schools. Rights are considered to be shared by all and a bolded sentence declares that 'students, parents, staff

members, teachers and administrators have the right to be treated respectfully by one another'. The subsequent sentence adds that all involved with the Providence Public Schools have "the right to a safe, orderly environment in which to work, learn or entrust their children". (It can be noted that the concept of mutual respect is missing from the *current* code.) The incorporation of students and teachers' behavior with the expected behavior of parents, staff members and administrators will be an addition to the current code, as reflected in the **proposed** code.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CATEGORIES OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIORS:

In the *current* code, there are two terms for unacceptable behavior - 'obstructive' and 'disruptive'. Obstructive behavior is defined as an act that 'interferes with the orderly operation of the schools and is considered felonious under Rhode Island law'. Following this definition, which lends itself to a variety of interpretations, a series of acts are listed that include chronic disruptive behavior, theft, vandalism, physical assaults, fighting, verbal abuse, extortion, arson, inciting to riot, drugs/alcoholic use or sale, possession or use of weapons and false alarms.

The other unacceptable behavior constitutes 'disruptive behavior':

"Disruptive Behavior is misbehavior which contributes to the obstruction of the orderly continuance of the educational process and should not be tolerated"

The behavior described includes "insolence to teachers or staff, disobedience, use of obscene language, defacing furniture and littering school property".

There are some differences in the definitions and descriptions of behavior between the full *current* code and the summarized *current* code. The definition of obstructive behavior remains the same, but the acts now include 'chronic

disruption, theft, vandalism, physical assaults, fighting, verbal abuse, fire alarms, **and etc.**' (The listing of these acts does not appear to be in any order of topical category or seriousness of the offense and could appear to be selected arbitrarily.) Disruptive behavior is shortened to "interferes with the educational process and will not be tolerated" The definition continues by describing 'insolence to teachers, disobedience, use of obscene language, defacing furniture, refusal to disperse, and etc.' as examples of disruptive behavior. In this section, particularly, there is no language used with regards to the outcome of the behavior. It is possible (or probable) that a behavior may result in two different (or same) sanctioning. One kind of behavior or act -(e.g. verbal abuse) as obstructive, is considered a felony, which assumes court involvement, while a disruptive behavior or act (e.g. insolence), the severity of the sanction is left "wide-open" for interpretation. Based on the intended use of the code, there is an assumption that the acts of disruptive behavior would result in some form of suspension. However, there is no language that specifically makes that statement.

In the **proposed** code, student behaviors are incorporated with sanctions in the chapter entitled, Code of Suspension, Expulsion and Removal, Grades 6-12. The chapter begins by explaining the four general sanctions, (i.e. *in-school suspension, suspension, exclusion, permanent exclusion*) and notes the appeal process. Each term is defined in fair detail and expanded to address possible exceptions and/or additional constraints.

As an example, consider the explanation for 'in-school suspension'. The definition is stated as, "in accordance with the Code of Behavior, and at the discretion of the principal, a student may be denied the right to attend regular classes and assigned to an approved alternative classroom setting within the same school." After giving the maximum period of sanctioning, ten (10) days, the definition continues to include the directive that 'students will continue to do assigned work' and that in-school suspension may be used in lieu of suspension

at the discretion of the principal and in accordance with the Local School Behavior Plan. Then, the definition is further extended to include the disclaimer, “except in cases where the offense leading to suspension is listed as an exclusionary offense.” The definition also contains the clause, that at the discretion of the principal, the suspended student may be denied the right to participate in extra-curricular activities, “if the school behavior plan allows”. This ‘expanded’ language should serve to clarify the circumstance of suspension, but it appears to add the potential for conflicting guidelines and administrative bias. For instance, who will approve the alternative classroom? or what is the content of the local school plan? or what is the limitation of the ‘principal’s discretion’?

This **proposed** code chapter also includes ‘scope of prohibited behavior’ and the distribution process. The paragraph on the ‘scope of prohibited behavior’ gives the definition of unacceptable acts. (The actual acts are listed separately under the “sanctioning” categories. Refer to Table Two.) The unacceptable behaviors are described thus:

“These acts are prohibited before, during and after school, in school buildings, on school premises, at other locations while attending school-sponsored activities, or while engaged in school-related conduct, including going to or from school. Conduct is school-related if it involves other school students, property or personnel, or if at the discretion of the principal, the student’s continued presence in school will disrupt the educational process or threaten the welfare of the school community. The rules appearing in this Code of Behavior also pertain to behavior on RIPTA buses and/or school buses/vans which convey students to or from school.”

By extending the ‘scope of prohibited behavior’, the code will have a more restrictive impact on the behavior of youth by expanding the number, types of behaviors and places where they can occur.

The remaining portion of the section names and lists three (3) major categories with a projected sanction and a list of corresponding behaviors or acts. Each category is prefaced by an explanation of the responses from school personnel and the extent of the possible consequences to the student. Much of the

discussion is confused due to its multiple possibilities. For example, in Category I: Suspension and/or Possible Exclusion, the Student Relations Office promises to annually publish an approved list of alternatives to suspension and establish a procedure for schools to receive approval for other alternatives as developed.

The next sentence reads:

“A student **may be assigned** in-school **or** out-of-school suspension **or be removed** for committing, attempting to commit, aiding or abetting the commission of, conspiring to commit, or participating in any manner, even though unaccomplished, in the commission of any offenses designated in this section.”

The paragraph concludes with the statement that “a student **may be recommended** for exclusion for chronic and/or aggravated offenses of Category I behaviors.”

Under the Category I, one of the first behaviors described is “unruly conduct”. This description serves as an example of the expanded version of the definition of an unacceptable act or behavior. Here is the definition in total:

“A student will not be insubordinate nor refuse to comply with the directions of authorized school personnel during any period of time when the student is under the authority of the school. Not obeying the classroom-related instructions or directions of a teacher is unruly conduct. Refusing to open a particular book, write an assignment, work with another student, work in a group, take a test, not obeying bus rules or do any class or school-related activity not mentioned here constitutes unruly conduct. Any electronic devices including, but not limited to, pagers, phones and games are not allowed in schools.”

These definitions and descriptions lend themselves to confusion and “blurred lines”, with respect to the boundaries of student behaviors and discretionary decisions by administrators. This section mentions the ‘Glossary of Terms’. Based on the examples reviewed in this section, most parents would minimally require a supplement, such as a glossary, to assist them in the understanding

and interpretation of the code. Therefore, in the **proposed** code, there is listing of ninety (90) words and/or phrases to assist parents.

In review, the language seems clearer in the full version of the *current* code. The definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion is concisely stated in the current code. Listed as separate topics, each definition names the parties responsible for the act, the sanction of the act, its variables and subsequent consequences. The terms, suspension, exclusion and expulsion are presented in consideration of their overall severity. The definitions are presently described as follows:

“Suspension is defined as that act by a school administrator that removes a student from school for one (1) to ten (10) school days for a breach of school or school department regulations.”

“In-school suspension is defined as that act by a school administrator that removes a student from one (1) or more classes during the course of the school day..... Under these circumstances, the student remains at school for the remainder of the school day, under the supervision of school personnel.”

“Exclusion is defined as that act by the School Board that removes a student from school with his/her name removed from the register for ten (10) to one hundred eighty days (180) school days for a breach of school or school department regulations.”

“Expulsion is defined as that act by the School Board whereby the student is permanently separated from receiving educational services from the Providence School Department. Expulsion would result from serious and aggravated acts against persons on school property or at school sponsored functions.”

The issue of suspension, exclusion and expulsion potentially becomes more complicated in light of the amendment addressing the RI Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (RIGL 16-21-18; 16-21-19;16-21-20). The amendment, as referred to in the section, BACKGROUND OF THE CODE, prompted the Providence School Department to adopt a policy statement in May, 1996 that reads:

“The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (automatic exclusion of a student for a period of one hundred eighty days (180) (calendar year) for possession of any gun, look-alike gun, or weapon falling into any category listed below. Constitutional due process rights will be adhered to, police will be called, and parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified immediately.”

Attached to this policy statement is a listing of the categorical descriptions of what constitutes “weapons”.

- Any gun (loaded or unloaded), look-alike gun, or weapon (including starter pistol, blank gun, signal, BB, etc.) which will ,or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive; the frame or receiver of any weapon described above; any firearm muffler, or firearm silencer;
- any destructive device, which includes: any explosive, incendiary, or poison gas, bomb, grenade, rocket having propellant charge or more than four ounces (4 oz.) missile having an explosive or incendiary charge of more than one-quarter ounce (1/4 oz.), mine or similar device;
- any weapon which will ,or which may be readily converted to , expel a projectile by the action by an explosive or other propellant, and which has any barrel with a bore of more than one-half inch (1/2 inch) in diameter;
- any combination or parts either designed or intended for use converting any device into any destructive device described in the two immediately preceding examples, and from which a destructive device may be readily assembled.

In the policy statement, there is no reference to parent participation in its construction or implementation. Understanding this complex and lengthy

description of weapons is a challenge for both student and parent. Therefore, the already complex current definitions for unacceptable behaviors, now connected with specific instruments associated with violence acts, become more complicated. Clear, concise and uniform definitions need to be present. These definitions should be developed by the School Board, administration, faculty, parents, students and community groups. (Cotton and Wikelund, 1997) Additionally, the definitions should be adopted by all the schools and then be used to formulate district wide policies and discipline actions. By developing the definitions at the school level, there is the mechanism for direct parent and community involvement.

EXCLUSION/EXPULSION IN THE CODES:

Perhaps the clearest explanations or limitations of disciplinary actions are expressed when discussing the issue of "removal". In each version of the code, the language of the exclusion/expulsion policy is straight-forward. The full version of the code cites the definition in a paragraph (see above). In the summary of the code, the definition encompasses the acts. Similar to the description of the acts attached to behavior, but qualified by the circumstance of being found guilty, six (6) acts are listed as being punishable by exclusion and also "reported to the police department." These situations are:

1. Physical assault on a teacher or staff member
2. Possession and/or use of weapons (knife, gun, nonchucks, mace, etc.)
3. Extortion - to make demands upon other students for money
4. Possession and/or use of drugs or alcoholic beverages
5. Arson
6. Inciting to riot

In the **proposed** code, the issue of suspension, expulsion and removal is covered in an entire section. There is exclusion and permanent exclusion. The

extent of the sanctioned period for exclusion remains the same as the former code - ten (10) to one hundred eighty (180) days. This sanction is reinforced by including the sentence, "if the balance of the current school year is less than the term of exclusion, the remainder of the days will be served in the next school year".

Permanent exclusion (or expulsion) "may be sought by the Board of Education of a student sixteen (16) years of age or older who is either convicted in criminal court or adjudicated delinquent by a juvenile court" for specific offenses that occur on school grounds or at school functions. They are possession, use or sale of drugs, alcohol or weapons; aggravated assault including attacks resulting in murder or manslaughter; and sexual acts, such as rape, gross sexual imposition or sexual penetration.

In the area of addressing the discipline procedures for the "special needs" student, the process is structured and regulated. The discipline of a disabled student is a particular and precise process, governed by explicit guidelines that require strict accordance to state and federal laws. However, it is significant to note that the I.E.P. (Individual Education Plan) Team, as designated from the Providence School Department's Special Education Department, will determine whether the offense(s) was the result of the handicapping condition. *If not*, the school district's disciplinary policies shall apply.⁷

THE RIGHTS OF ALL:

In a survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (August, 1995) to determine the methodology of constructing a discipline code, a favorable code of conduct was defined as containing provisions for students, teachers and staff, as well as parents and visitors. "These provisions may be in the language of rights and responsibilities. Most importantly, the provision should not only include what

are the consequences of a negative action, but also what are the consequences of a positive action.”

While all versions of the code refer to the rights and responsibilities of all involved parties, there is little to reflect the concept of anticipating negative situations and setting up circumstances to prevent them from happening - an indication of a successful discipline policy.⁸

ANALYSIS OF THE DISTRIBUTION/SIGN-OFF COMPONENT OF THE CODE:

In the Rhode Island state law 16-21-21, Student Discipline Code, parents are advised that ‘each student and his or her parent, guardian or custodian shall sign a statement verifying that they have been given a copy of the student discipline code of their respective school district.’ In the State of Virginia, to ensure that parents receive and review their school discipline code, they enacted a law that required parents, under penalty of a fine to sign and return a copy of the school rules. Even as the code is required to be at least be reviewed by parents, there is also suggested by the signature, that the parent is responsible for the behavior of the student and pledges to support the school system in its punishment.

According to the Providence Schools **proposed** code, the districtwide code of behavior will be printed verbatim annually, with additional sections of explanation, expansion or clarification as the Superintendent may deem appropriate. It will then be distributed directly to every student enrolled in the system. Here at last is a prime opportunity for the active involvement of parents. The implementation of a dissemination plan will be crucial to the successful and smooth effective use of the code. Since each student is required to take a copy of the code to their parent to sign, the understanding and interpretation of the code must be a prerequisite.

The Providence **proposed** code includes a 'cut and return' receipt of the code of behavior that requires the parent's signature. The form includes the student's name, the name of the school and a signature line that follows a pledge. The pledge reads:

"I have read the Providence Public School District's 1995-96 (sic) Code of Behavior. I have discussed this code with my child. I shall do everything possible to support my child's education and work with my child's teachers to make this a successful school year."

The finding of this analysis presupposes that parents be included in the process, but does not explain where and how they do so.

CATAGORIES OF OFFENSES AS LISTED IN THE PROPOSED CODE

Table Two

| CATEGORY | SANCTION | OFFENSES | RESPONSIBLE BODY |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| I | Suspension and/or Exclusion | Unruly Conduct; disorderly conduct; profanity and/or obscenity to a student; smoking; defacement of property; fraud; forgery; false identification; trespassing; gambling; theft/possession of stolen property; gang paraphernalia/dress | Principal and/or School Board |
| II | Mandatory suspension/Possible Exclusion | Fighting; profanity/obscenity to staff; violent disorderly conduct; destruction of property; breaking & entering; sexual misconduct or sexual harassment | Principal and/or School Board |
| III | Mandatory exclusion | Possession, use or sale of alcohol/drugs; physical assault; possession, use or sale of dangerous weapons, instruments or objects; false fire alarm or bomb report; tampering with fire alarm system; sexual assault; robbery; extortion; fire starting; possession, use or sale of fireworks/explosives; inciting a riot | School Board [Principal - to notify police] |

Source: Providence Public Schools, Districtwide Code of Behavior, Grades 6-12, May, 1997

CHAPTER THREE: PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL
DISCIPLINE PROCESS: AN ANALYSIS

"Discipline is not an isolated issue....." State of Michigan Education and Employment
Secretary, Gillian Shepard, September, 1995

Concerns in the Code of Behavior and the Role of Parents

INTRODUCTION OF CONCERNS:

There are many issues involved with the development of a discipline code. The discipline code is not only a set of rules to follow, but also sets the standard of behavior that is expected from students. The code should also inform teachers and others about those expectations. But, most importantly, in the code, discipline and its consequences should be based on fairness, equity and due process. In the Providence School Code, two issues - attendance and due process- are considered in each version of the code. This chapter will examine the role of parents in these two major categories of the discipline code.

THE ATTENDANCE POLICY:

In the discussion of a standard of behavior, the subject of attendance is appropriate. Integrated into the discussion of school discipline is the attendance policy. Each of the codes include a section on the attendance “rules”. Yet, in each version of the code, the positive engagement of parents is rejected, and instead emphasis is placed on the punitive actions that may result for students and parents. Each version of the code details the regulations and the consequences of violations, but offer no pro-active advice or support to assure that the students are in school regularly. Unfortunately, we know that the second most common characteristic of at-risk students and potential dropouts is ‘chronic unexcused absences’⁹

In the *current* code, the attendance section, (Section VII), covers:

- definition, as determined by RI General Laws 16-19-1
- academic penalties, which references ‘guiding principles’ of the regulation;

- unexcused absences, which discusses length, paper documentation of the occurrence, review process and suggestions for remediation;
- lateness, including definition and ways to resolve the problem and
- class cutting, which specifies definition and procedures.

Each of the topics, definition, academic penalties, unexcused absences, lateness and class cutting are presented in some detail as numbered subtopics. In this section, there are a few suggestions for the involvement of parents. Under Unexcused Absences, parents are 'encouraged to call the school to explain student absences after three (3) days of absence'. Even though this appears to be a very simple suggestion, this is an opportunity to establish a one-to-one, personal relationship between the home and school. Personal relationships between staff/administrators and parents are aids to adherence to rules and regulations (Cotton and Wikelund, 1997). With regards to 'chronic unexcused absences', the school personnel is directed "to develop with the parent and student a plan for ending the abuse." It is possible that the plans developed may not work, but the invitation to the parent as part of the process is crucial.

In the summarized version of the *current* code, which was distributed as a letter to parents, the policy is written as an outline. The first topic discussed is 'attendance'. The contents of the attendance policy is established in two subtopics. The first (1) subtopic states that "children are required to attend school until their sixteenth (16) birthday" by order of state law. It also mentions that parents are subject to a daily fine of fifty dollars (\$50.00) for violating this stature. The second subtopic (2) declares that 'all students are required to report to school and classes on time'. In the summarized version of the *current* code, there is no description of responsibilities of the parties involved, no explanation of the required documentation for the violations and no specific overtures to parents for their assistance in the matter.

The topic of attendance is included in the **proposed** code. The attendance policy is located at the end of an elaborate description of rights and responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators . Compared to the *current* code, the attendance policy, while still brief, is described in four entries. The state law statute is again quoted first, but with the disclaimer that “unless excused for certified medical or other reasons”. The next lines denote the specific paper requirements and responsibilities for students in ‘non-compliance’ of attendance rules. A written note of excuse is required from the parent explaining a student’s absence upon their return to school. If a student is absent five consecutive days or exhibits a pattern of absences, the school has certain reporting responsibilities. An attendance report form (A-8) must be completed by an unnamed person designated by the principal and a home visit report should be communicated to the principal and/or guidance counselor - by an unspecified person. The home visitor will be notified and a referral to Student Relations Office will be made if the absences continue, again by a person remaining unnamed. The text continues with instructions for the administrator that, ‘all the records of the absent student should be accessible for the administrator to determine future actions’. It further states that these records must be accurate as they can be used in legal proceedings. This is the first reference to possible court-involvement. For the teacher, the responsibility of maintaining the homeroom ‘attendance/computer register’ is noted.

DUE PROCESS

Laws, court decisions and school district regulations give student certain civil rights that may not be violated. Of course, a student’s civil rights are not unlimited and should be carefully balanced with respect to the school’s obligation to provide a safe and secure environment. Due process, both procedural and substantive, should ensure that the student be treated fairly by school authorities when school actions or rules may infringe upon student liberty, property or

access to education. This situation alone is substantial enough for the careful, consistent and clear inclusion of parents in the discipline process.

In the *current* code, the 'procedural' due process begins with two simple meetings. One is the Student Services Fact-finding Conference and the other is the Superintendent's Hearing. The Fact-finding Conference is called to determine the facts of the case. It is conducted by the administrators within the Student Relations Office, (i.e. the Student Services Administrator and the Hearing Officer) and can be conducted fairly informally. Witnesses can be called in this meeting to pursue the facts and the Hearing Officer must review all the submitted information. The results of the conference are forwarded, in writing, to the Superintendent and the involved parties. One of the following outcomes are expected from this conference:

1. A recommendation to the Superintendent that a hearing for exclusion or expulsion be conducted;
 2. An alternate resolution implemented with the agreement of all parties;
- or*
3. An alternate resolution implemented without the agreement of all parties. In this case, rights to appeal have been guaranteed by the general policy.

The Superintendent's Hearing on the other hand is convened to determine whether a student is to be excluded or expelled and for what period of time. This hearing is taped and the copy of the findings and recommendations are sent to the student, his/her parents, the complaining witness, the principal and all other parties to the incident within five days of the hearing.

Procedures for suspension and exclusion/expulsion are specific. There are definite responsibilities for the Superintendent, Principal and Student Relations Office. However, in these procedures, the 'action steps' for the student and

parent seem limited to being responsive rather than being proactive and constructive to prohibiting or revising the unacceptable behaviors.

Due Process Procedures for Suspension in the Current and Proposed Codes

Table Three

| Responsible Person | Action Steps | Responses | Findings |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Principal</i> | *initiate investigation; *determine need for suspension; *can refer stu. w/ "chronic misbehavior" to SRO | *signatures req'd on all notices of suspension | *aside from focus rooms, procedures for suspensions should inc. opportunities for alt. Plcmnts outside of schs, e.g. comm.-sponsored plcmnts. |
| <i>Student</i> | *can write rebuttal, <i>after</i> accused | | *oppt. for interv'tion as parent, comm. mediator or advocate @ initial investigation stage |
| <i>Parent</i> | *notify of suspension by phone & in writing | *if fail to appear @ hearing, susp. continues & hearing resched. (if hearing doesn't happen, student is reinstated). | *notice inc. info. on hearing date, name of hearing officer, leng. of susp.; hearing inc. sch. Persnl., parent, stu. (no mention of "outside' intervention.) *oppt. for parent advocates as "stand-ins" for unavail. or disadvntgd parents. |

Source: Providence School Department, Davies-Bricknell Policy #5144 (amended 5-96)
Providence Public Schools, Districtwide Code of Behavior, Grades 6-12, (5-97)

Due Process Procedures for Exclusion/Expulsion in the Current and Proposed Code

Table Four

| Responsible Person | Action Steps | Responses | Findings |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>Superintendent</i> | *to rec. written report of findings/recommnd on 6th day of suspension *if recommnd for hearing at his ofc., to notify all indiv. Involved. | *to tape proceedings; *sched. Sch. Bd. Action for expulsion as required | *document states "attention shall be called to the rights of all parties"; *upon exclus., may approve request for alt. educ. W/ approvd agency - should be considered prior to exclusion |
| <i>Principal</i> | *initiate investigation | *determine need for suspd, refer to SRO in 3 dys w/ rpt. | *report contains bkgrd. info., witness stmts, any eval. or outside agency summary rpts. |
| <i>Student Relations Office</i> | *sched. fact-finding conf. in 5 dys.; *conducted informally | *to contact all witnesses | *if not ref. to Supt., submit in writing to Prin. (becomes part of stu. record); *no mention of follow-up or resource/support to student |
| <i>Student</i> | *submit written rebuttal during initial investigation | | *no adult advice for student initially *w/in 5 dys, after rec'ing findings: *parties should be advised of their right to appeal" |
| <i>Parent</i> | *notified of suspension | *notified of conf. dates w/ charges, name of hearing ofc. *notify of expul. hearing inc. copy of Policy 5144 (discp. code) and advisement of right to appeal | *system of stu. Advocates not identified or available |

Source: Providence School Department, Davies-Bricknell Policy #5144 (amended 5-96)
Providence Public Schools, Districtwide Code of Behavior, Grades 6-12, (5-97)

In the **proposed** code, under the title of 'Parent Information', the disciplinary rights of Parents/Guardians/Advocates are actually listed. According to this document, if the principal has found your child guilty of committing any of the offenses in the three major categories, you have the following five rights:

1. To be contacted by phone as soon as possible to learn that your child is involved in a possible suspension or exclusion;
2. To receive written notice of suspension by mail;
3. To request and receive a meeting with the principal to discuss the incident;
4. To request and receive a report of the school's investigation of the incident;
5. To receive appeal procedure information from the principal.

In the **proposed** code, the role of parents is still reactive. In Step #1, the phone call appears to serve the purpose of notification of information about a situation as opposed to stating directly that your child has been suspended. The actions of Step #2 and Step #3 should be automatic and not required through a request. In Step #5, it is not clearly stated at what point this information is shared. As each of these actions occur, there is no mention of outside or supportive intervention to assist the process, but certainly there is the opportunity for it.

A possible reference to 'outside' intervention is suggested by the paragraph that addresses 'dispute resolution', which is attached to this section. The statements read:

"All efforts should be made to resolve disputes not involving suspension or expulsion at the school level. Disputes that are not resolved at the school level may be mediated through the Student Relations Office."

Even though this statement with regards to includes options for conflict resolution or mediation, there are not details or steps attached to this section. What actually follows this section is the same due process procedures for suspension

and expulsion as included in the *current* code. (See Table Three and Table Four, pp.37-38)

There are some differences in the description of the appeal process for parents between the *current* code and the **proposed** code. In the full version of the *current* code, the rights of parents are addressed in the last paragraph of the Introduction:

“All parties involved in a disciplinary incident or actions related thereto, including parents and school personnel, have the right to be represented and to seek redress of their rights through appeal of any decisions to a higher level, including the superintendent and the School Board.”

In the summarized version of the *current* code, the rights of parents are not mentioned.

CONCLUSION:

In the examining three (3) versions of the Providence schools discipline codes (the full and summarized version of the *current* code, and the **proposed** code) there are two major findings: (1) there is no parent participation in the development of the codes, and (2) there are no adequate recommendations for changing behavior aside from suspension and/or expulsion.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“All concerned parties--students, parents, teachers, and administrators--should participate in the development of the school discipline code.”

from 'Developing a School Discipline Code', Pathways Home Page, 1998

Findings and Recommendations for the Continued Development and Implementation of a Proposed Code of Behavior for the Providence Public Schools:

INTRODUCTION TO THE FINDINGS:

James Comer, a world-renowned sociologist and expert in educational issues, at Yale University, believes that creating a sense of community in a school is the first step to restoring discipline.¹⁰ Extending that sense of community outward to embrace the larger community certainly should serve to maintain discipline.

The findings of this analysis indicate that the role of parents is ignored or minimized in both the *current* and **proposed** discipline code. For example, in the *current* code, there is no provision for parents to be included in the initial investigation of a disciplinary incident, except for verbal notification. In the summarized version of the *current* code, which is distributed directly to parents by the School Department, there is no explanation of the process for suspension, exclusion or expulsion. In the **proposed** code, there is no means to resolve situations or change behaviors of students except by suspension or exclusion. Also, in both codes, there is a clear absent is any mention of an intervention or method to alleviate or ameliorate the problem of serious, consistent patterns of absences.

For full parent involvement for the schools of the future, 'family involvement' needs to be part of written school policy and daily practice. Instead of schools merely recognizing the rights of families, policies should be developed with and approved by parents. Policies should "spell out" how parents will be partners in the education process. (Lewis and Henderson, 1997)

Parents and the community should become critically involved in the decision-making and policy-setting of the school district as a whole. The crafting and implementation of the district-wide school behavior code is an ideal 'project' to explore and demonstrate this process. Up to this point, parents have not been clearly invited or involved in the process. Additionally, the opportunity to create a system of mediation and resolution, parent-led, should not be overlooked.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

There are several recommendations to achieve parent participation in the discipline code process.

1. Revise the **proposed** code to include parents at every step of the process;
2. Revise the **proposed** code to provide positive remedies to encourage and enhance learning rather than promoting punitive actions to negative behaviors;
3. Design a dissemination process inclusive of parents. However, prior to the dissemination process, the booklet that has been prepared to distribute the **proposed** code needs substantial revisions.

Recommendation # 1: The Issue of Parent Participation and Community Involvement:

The issue of parent participation and community involvement is tantamount to the effectiveness of the code. The system needs to adopt a cooperative philosophy of 'community control' to make this happen. Community control need not be mutually exclusive of 'centralized control', which the system operates under presently. The Providence Schools Violence Report, which measured school violence in middle schools and was requested by the Providence School Department from the URI Urban Field Center, states "increasing community

control includes decentralizing the disciplinary procedure, judging each case on a school level and as an independent incident, involving students and parents in the disciplinary process not as observers but as empowered and equal members.”

The implementation of the code is a natural integration with the efforts for ‘site-based management’, which is presently being promoted in the Providence school system. Since the groundwork has been laid for this system-level reform, the development and implementation of the code is an excellent vehicle to demonstrate the effectiveness of this structure. The Urban Field Center report confirms that involving “the community and each school by developing advisory committees which would assist in the formulation of standardized discipline policies and procedures”. Therefore, the committees already in existence would be a good place to reinforce the idea of community control. For example, a more effective means of stabilizing attendance rates could be achieved by establishing clear and specific responsibilities for the persons involved as well as including input from parents. At the Patrick O’Hearn School in Dorchester, MA, the school achieved dramatic results in increasing attendance rates, due in part, to the establishment of School-Based Management Council and family outreach program.¹¹

Promoting the concept of community control is also an excellent opportunity to involve students in the process. Preliminary comments about the proposed code noted that the rights and responsibilities of the teachers and students were “unbalanced”. ‘Forming committees which include students to review infractions at each school’ makes sense.¹² Also, in the process of implementing the proposed code, students can take on more responsibilities. They can (1) attend required proposed code of behavior sessions; (2) establish opportunities to review and respond to the proposed code of behavior in a booklet or manual form; and (3) require each student to ‘sign-off’ to verify their awareness and knowledge of the proposed code and its responsibilities. (A detailed schedule

should also be established for the review and return of the proposed code by students and parents.) In addition to these possible activities, students could be identified (through existing youth leadership programs) to design or work on a media campaign. A media campaign could engage other students by partnering with a community group(s) to conduct workshops and/or focus groups to promote a clearer understanding of the proposed code and its ultimate purpose - to maintain a safe and positive environment in which to learn.

Recommendation #2: A Strategy or Plan for Dissemination and Implementation:

Nationally, discipline codes agree that each school district should have a clearly defined discipline code that is communicated to students and parents each year (eg. Boston, Chicago, Prince Arthur, Texas). Equally important, the codes emphasize that the discipline code should be enforced consistently and fairly.

A key component of parent and community participation is the degree of power that the participants possess. In a 'high-level' of parent or community participation, the participants have degrees of power that accord them partial or full control of important decisions that affect their children.¹³ Beyond the actual development of a code that meets the criteria of substantial parent participation, there needs to be a plan or strategy for distribution to students and parents. Working in cooperation with the Providence School Department Administration, the identification of parents to become involved with the School Safety Committee is highly recommended. The development of school-based Parent Teams as trainers to disseminate a Code of Behavior Manual to the students and community could be another strategy. Additionally, these parents could be trained to answer questions and concerns about the discipline policies and be on-site advocates or mediators. Some of the parents could also serve as translators to work with LEP parents and students. The idea of training is

endorsed by the Urban Field Center report, which proposes to “hold training for parents, teachers, school administrators and students to review the discipline policies and provide clear and concise consequences for violating the district’s policies.”

Recommendation #3: Need for Immediate Revision of and Dissemination for Proposed Code ‘Booklet’

The **proposed** code is currently in the form of a ‘booklet’. In this form, there are several areas that need improvement to enhance its effectiveness and engage parents. Since the state’s mandate for the code stresses that ‘the purpose of the code is to foster a positive environment which promotes learning’, there should be an integration of a statement or concept of behavior as a preface from the Providence School Department’s mission, which promotes the same purpose. The vision of positive learning environments coincide and should be promoted as such.

Overall, the “look” of the booklet should be visually engaging and ‘user- friendly’. The language in the code has to be consistently clear, simple and direct. Given that most of the language under the headings of “Rights and Responsibilities” is straight-forward, the subsequent sections listed under the “Code of Suspension, Expulsion and Removal”, describes so many categories of offenses that it would benefit greatly from photos or illustrations. Examples of ‘real life’ situations could be inserted to explain the violations and rules more clearly.

As examined earlier, the sections describing ‘due process procedures’ are complicated. Currently, the code specifies procedures that make references to parents after the ‘damage has been done’. The issue of what is ‘due process’ and how it operates is extremely important for parents to comprehend. The insertion of a ‘flow chart’ of specific steps to follow or short scenarios of possible situations could simplify this section. Another section entitled “Students with

Disabilities Policy” is complicated and detailed in content. Granted, the issue of dealing with special education students is by nature complicated, but parents need some way to clearly and simply understand the rights of their ‘special children’.

There should be more inclusion of language that addresses mandatory compliance with the state’s strict attendance requirements. In its proposed form, the code does not address this issue adequately, omitting much of the responsibilities placed on the parents and the severity of sanctions when they are remiss.

Subsequent to the inclusion of parents in the development and implementation of the code, parents must also be included in dissemination strategies. There are a several approaches to this issue. The use of community-based resources in the discipline process should be reinforced to assist both child, parent and school personnel. The Providence community offers a wide assortment of programs and agencies to use as resources for parental support. (For example, the Parents Making a Difference program, the Urban League, CHisPA, and the RI Family Engagement Network.) This new process could initiate a ‘working’ system of advocacy for students, teachers and parents. This system could provide support for teachers to intervene on behalf of students, improve communication between parents and teachers, provide accurate interpretations for parents, both linguistically and socially. But, more importantly, this system could serve as a ‘safety net’ for students impacted by the code.

Undoubtedly, there needs to be intentions and resources to translate the code booklet into the different languages of the school community. Sixty-four languages are currently recognized by the Providence School Department as spoken by its students. There also should be readily available translators committed to work within the school system.

A code of behavior, as a whole, is certainly needed throughout the school system and desired by the community at-large. However, the distribution of the booklet needs to be carefully planned and implemented as a community-sponsored endeavor. The crucial information contained in the code needs to be disseminated through community-led workshops, community-based training and community site distribution points and by community people, particularly parents.

Recommendations to the Providence School Department for Future Planning Opportunities involving the Community:

The introduction of the **proposed** code is a prime opportunity to incorporate all aspects of conflict mediation and resolution strategies within the school system. At the individual school level, there are opportunities for peer mediation and resolution between students and students, as well as between students and teachers. Already there are several strategies and programs operating within the Providence School system. It would be feasible to design vehicles to promote valid and consistent use of these programs.

Recommendation One:

Constructing a centralized Parent Training/Advocate office, designed specifically for parent participation to train parents as advocates for students within the system, or recruiting on-site, trained parent advocate/mediators within the individual schools could be a start to this initiative. The proposed code of behavior could be used as a catalyst to identify, promote, utilize and reinforce these creative and quality conflict mediation programs. Also, there should be more of an emphasis on 'dispute resolution' in the beginning of the code booklet and, as a principle, the concept should be woven throughout the sections. Clearly, there should be a concentrated effort to develop and coordinate conflict

mediation strategies at all school levels. It is recommended that the School Department needs to 'develop more peer mediation programs, train administrators, students and teachers and staff in what are the effective strategies when dealing with conflicts'¹⁴

Recommendation Two:

The formation of a Citywide Parent Council to review, consider and coordinate all issues that directly or indirectly affect the children could greatly serve the school system in the future. This council could report directly and be responsive to the School Board, Central Administration and the community agencies. Additionally, the members of the school-based Parent Teams (as referred to in Recommendation #2) would be natural designees to this council. In order to secure and stabilize all the parent/community involvement projects, an institutionalized system should be developed in-house that would ensure continued outreach to parents and community-based groups.

In summary, to provide a safer, secure and quality learning environment for students, parents and community must play a role. "Working with the community to develop solutions, expand alternatives to suspension and to keep students in a school setting, it is imperative for Providence to maintain a safe school system"¹⁵ With this in mind, and with the development and dissemination of the code of behavior as the instrument, this will lead to an improved school culture and a more positive role for schools in stabilizing the community.

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APPENDIX

Parents forum on education set for tonight at Chad Brown

By KAREN A. DAVIS

Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — What is your vision for our children's future?

It is among the questions that members of a parents' group will ask members of the School Board at an open forum tonight.

The forum is scheduled for 7 p.m. at the Rudolph S. Tavares Community Center, located in the Chad Brown Housing complex. It is being sponsored by the Housing Authority's Family Advisory Council.

The forum is not the first such informational workshop sponsored by the advisory council. Since January 1997, the group has held four such workshops designed to better inform parents about how the school system works and what programs are available for their children.

Kai Cameron, an honorary member of the advisory council, said the parent-led group decided to hold the informational sessions after realizing that they lacked the information they needed to help guide their children's education.

Some parents felt "there were many problems and they really didn't know how to negotiate the system," Cameron said.

Last school year, the council invited principals to speak to parents at Hartford Park and Manton Heights. The school system's alternative learning programs were

showcased at a workshop at Chad Brown. And last fall, parents met with Supt. Arthur M. Zarrella.

"They wanted to not only know who the school principal is, but to know the right questions to ask and where to go for answers," Cameron said. "This is about parent empowerment."

Past workshop panelists have encouraged parents to call administrators and work with educators to make sure that children are learning.

The Family Housing Council, a three-year-old organization, estimates that 1,242 families, and 4,000 residents, live in the city's seven public housing complexes. More than 1,500 of the residents are school age and 94 percent are minority.

While all the families are low-income, 91 percent are female-headed households.

Cameron said the council set out to change statistics that predict that children who come from such households will struggle or fail in school.

One of the keys in making that change is engaging the parents and providing them with the information they need to advocate for their children, she said.

Housing Authority officials found that the greatest barriers to parents getting involved have been lack of information and a fear of dealing with an outside authority.

Parents critique draft of school behavior code

■ School officials are told that the proposed code should reflect input from students and parents.

By KAREN A. DAVIS
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Calling it “the most important document ever sent home” to parents by the Providence School Department, a community outreach worker has implored school officials to revise a district-wide “code of behavior” to include input from parents and students before they begin distributing it.

Nick Husband says he is not alone in his dissatisfaction with the 29-page document presented in draft form to the

PROVIDENCE

School Board last week. Husband, who does outreach work with families who live in public housing, said he and a fellow outreach worker surveyed 40 parents, who described the document as “unclear and excessively punitive to students, among other things.”

The School Board voted Nov. 24 to accept the behavior code in draft form, as presented by Asst. Supt. Paul Vorro, only after committee member Aisha Abdullah-

Odiase proposed forming a subcommittee of board members to review the code and recommend changes.

Abdullah-Odiase said she had talked with some parents who believed the code lacked community input and did not provide due process to students accused of violating the rules.

The code of behavior, is intended to spell out parameters of behavior for Providence students in grades 6 through 12. All school districts are required to develop codes and make them available to parents, as stated in a law passed by the Gen-

eral Assembly in 1995.

The last page of the drafted code of behavior requires the parent or guardian to sign the page — acknowledging that they have read the code and discussed it with their child — then return it to the school.

Vorro told the School Board that the draft was developed by a “safety committee” created four or five years ago. That committee, which comprises teachers and school administrators, has not called any community meetings to solicit parent or

Turn to **CODE**, Page D 7

Code

(Continued from Page D 1)

student input.

However, Vorro said, school officials plan to work with parents and community organizations to “refine” the draft document. Vorro said his committee has deemed the draft behavioral code “a living document, so we can keep working on it.”

Work is what Husband said he believes the draft document needs.

Last September, he and another outreach worker, Kai Cameron, attended a behavior code committee meeting — to which they had not been invited — and voiced parents’ opposition to the behavior code.

“We told them we would not endorse it in its current form, but we would work with it,” Husband said. “We will review and critique it and make recommendations about its implementation.”

Early reviews found that the document is repetitive and hard to

read, Husband said. In fact, nine pages of the code are the glossary section, defining the meaning of dozens of words.

“You send a complicated document to a parents’ house and chances are they’re just going to sign it for fear that their child will face retribution if they don’t,” Husband said.

And while two years ago school officials said they would produce the code of behavior in two languages, community members so far have only seen it printed in English. Husband said his group believes it must be translated into Spanish and Cambodian if school officials expect all parents to review it.

Another complaint is that while the document spells out in detail what behavior will lead to suspension, expulsion or removal, provides no detailed reference to a mediation or arbitration process.

Several parents said they believed mediation steps should be included and that students should have adult representation at the

school before a decision is made to suspend or expel them.

Husband said he believes the half-page on attendance de-emphasizes its importance and that the code should make note of what a student or parent should do if they are hit by a teacher, which Husband said he has heard of happening “plenty of times.”

School Board member Abdullah-Odiase said she wants the school code to be a “living document” in the sense that people are actually living by the code.

“It’s very important that students and parents feel that they have some input in a positive way,” Abdullah-Odiase said. “We have to have established rules. . . . We need rules in order to provide a safe atmosphere in which education can take place. (But) I see this as a positive opportunity to bring people together.”

Abdullah-Odiase plans to meet with board members Juan Lopez and Simon Kue and Husband next week to review the code and discuss

community concerns.

At the School Board meeting, Abdullah-Odiase said she believes student leaders from each school should be recruited to review the code and voice their ideas, as well. So while all groups are working together to establish the code, students are also developing their leadership skills, she said.

Husband said his group is seeking information about how much the School Department plans to spend to implement the code of behavior. He cited an implementation plan used by the Boston school system, which assigns a parent advocate at each school to act as a parent liaison to that site-based school system. In Providence, such a person could be paid \$20 a week to answer questions about the behavior code and defend the rights of a parent, Husband said.

“I see this as an opportunity to bring people together to benefit the kids,” Abdullah-Odiase said. “It’s a chance to establish a relationship where everyone feels that they’re respected.”

**Providence Public Schools
Districtwide Code of Behavior Booklet**

PARENT WORKSHEET

Part One

INTRODUCTION:

Name: (optional) _____

of children presently in the providence Public Schools: _____

of children previously enrolled in the Providence Public Schools over the past 15 years: _____

Highest grade you have completed: _____

Primary language spoken at home: _____

Part Two

(The following topic headings will correspond with the sections identified in the TABLE OF CONTENTS)

Section One

Part A

Rights and Responsibilities - p. 1-4

For each specific group, how would *you* rate the information presented:

A. = The information presented was stated simply, easy to understand, complete in its explanation, and addressed the topic area appropriately.

B. = The information was stated simply, but some of the information was not easy to understand; some of the explanations were not clear and/or the topic area was not addressed completely.

C. = The information presented was stated simply, gave adequate explanations, but I didn't understand most of it.

D. = The information presented was complicated, not clear, incomplete and I did not understand it.

Circle the letter that best describes your reaction to the information presented for each specific group.

Student Rights and Responsibilities:

A B C D

Parent Rights and Responsibilities:

A B C D

Teacher Rights and Responsibilities:

A B C D

Staff Rights and Responsibilities:

A B C D

Administration Rights and Responsibilities:

A B C D

Section One

Part B

Attendance Policy p.5

Please circle the statement that *best* describes your response to this section.

A. I understand the explanation of the attendance policy and agree with the stated process and procedures.

B. I understand most of the explanation of the attendance policy, the process and procedures. but need more description about this section.

C. I understand some of the explanation of the attendance policy, process and procedures.

D. I did not understand the explanation of the attendance policy and I do not agree with the majority of the process and procedures.

Please write your concerns, suggestions, or questions about this section here:

Section Two

Code of Suspension / Expulsion and Removal - Grades 6-12

Part A

Disciplinary Actions - p.6-7

Please circle the statement that *best* describes your response to this section:

A. I understand the description and explanation of disciplinary rights of parents and agree with the stated process and procedures.

B. I understand the description of the disciplinary rights, process and procedures, but need more explanation about this section.

C. I understand some of the explanation of disciplinary rights, process and procedures.

D. I did not understand the explanation of the disciplinary actions, and I do not agree with the majority of the process and procedures.

Part B

Disciplinary Actions: Category I, II and III - p.7-11

In this section, did you find the definitions and explanations presented to be: (Circle one, please)

A. Clearly stated , easy to understand and complete in content

B. Clearly stated, but somewhat difficult to understand and incomplete in content

C. Clearly stated, but I didn't understand most of it

D. This section was not clear and I didn't understand it

For each category of disciplinary actions , please make some specific comments as to the definitions, consequences and examples.

Category I :

Category II :

Category III :

Section Three Parent Information - p.12-19

(Circle one response, please)

A. I understand the description and explanation of disciplinary rights of parents and agree with the stated process and procedures.

B. I understand the description of the disciplinary rights, process and procedures, but need more explanation about this section.

C. I understand some of the description and explanation of disciplinary rights, process and procedures.

D. I did not understand the description or explanation of the disciplinary actions, and I do not agree with the majority of the process and procedures.

Section Four Glossary of Terms - p.20-28

Circle *your* answer to each question:

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| Are the words chosen appropriate ? | Yes | No | Not sure |
| Are they easy to understand? | Yes | No | Not sure |
| Are the examples clear? | Yes | No | Not sure |

| | | | |
|---|-----|----|----------|
| Are the definitions clear and easy to understand? | Yes | No | Not sure |
| Are the sentences appropriate or relevant to the definitions? | Yes | No | Not sure |
| Is the format clear and well presented? | Yes | No | Not sure |

Please note any changes , alternatives or suggestions for this section here:

Section Five **Parent/Guardian Receipt of Code of Behavior** (last page)
Part A

Please circle *your* response to this question:

Is the idea of a receipt.....? A. Excellent B. Good C. Fair D. Poor E. No Opinion

Part B

(Circle one response, please)

- A. I did understand the receipt completely and would sign
- B. I didn't understand the receipt fully, but I would sign
- C. I didn't understand the receipt at all, and would not sign

Part C

Please circle *your* response to each question:

Did you feel that this is an appropriate way for parents to respond to the booklet?

Yes No Not sure

Is this page clear and easily understood?

Yes No Not sure

Do you think further information needs to be added to this contract?

Yes No Not sure

Do you have any other comments or concerns with regard to this page?

Part D

Overall, how would you rate this Booklet? (Circle one)

- A. Excellent B. Good C. Fair D. Poor E. No Opinion

Please use this section to make any suggestions or overall comments on this Booklet.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!

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- ¹ *School Violence Alert: Practical Strategies for Maintaining Safe Schools*, LRP Publications, v.2, issue 9, September, 1996, p.2
- ² *Programs for the Improvement of Practice*, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, DC, 1993, p.14
- ³ Providence School Department, *1995-1996 Annual Report*, "Providence Schools On The Go", p.1
- ⁴ Kadel, Stephanie and Follman, Joseph. *Reducing School Violence*, March 1993, p.25.
- ⁵ *Educating ALL Our Children*, a report of the 21st Century Education Commission, March,1992,p.vi-9
- ⁶ *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*, Report from the Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education, 1998.p.43
- ⁷ Providence School Department, Davies-Bricknell Policy #5144, Section VIII
- ⁸ Per Prince Arthur Junior High School discipline policy, (Canada)
- ⁹ *The Providence Dropout Prevention Plan: strategies and programs for K-12 at-risk students*, Providence Dropout Collaborative, November,1987, p.16
- ¹⁰ *School Violence Alert: Practical Strategies for Maintaining Safe Schools*, LRP Publications, v.2 issue 9, September, 1996, p.2
- ¹¹ Lewis, Anne and Anne Henderson ,*Urgent Message: Families Crucial to School Reform*, Center for Law and Education, Washington, DC, 1997, p.21
- ¹² *Report on Providence School Department Youth Violence*, URI Urban Field Center, February, 1998, p.17
- ¹³ Chavis, David and Paul Florin, "Community Participation and Substance Abuse Prevention: Rationale, Concepts and Mechanisms", (paper presented to Prevention Office, County of Santa Clara), May, 1990, p.5
- ¹⁴ Lewis, Anne and Anne Henderson ,*Urgent Message: Families Crucial to School Reform*, Center for Law and Education, Washington, DC, 1997, p.32
- ¹⁵ Ibid