

December 19, 2012

Commission for High School Graduation Achievement and Success

RE: Policy Recommendation

I would like this letter to serve as my perceptions and additional feedback from yesterday's dialogue. I truly appreciate that I was able to state my opinions and positions and other members of the commission listened to what I had to say.

I continue to advocate policy changes that specify what the school districts should accomplish in order to address the dropout problem rather specifying specific procedures, programs, expenditures, and actions for implementation. The former is the definition of policy; the latter is administration. If the argument is the "the schools won't do this unless we direct them" the counter is "then make the schools more accountable for results." Understand also there is substantial federal and state policy already in play that addresses many of the ideas put forth by the committee. NCLB makes schools and districts accountable for achievement. Improving each student's academic performance in the freshman year will improve the school's overall academic and thus NCLB performance. The RtI initiative plays a role in several parts of the recommendations. At the elementary school level, RtI interventions should be directed at students who are not reading at grade level by third grade—in fact given the monitoring currently done in the early grades those interventions should occur earlier, at the beginning stages of when a student learns to read. RtI also invokes social emotional learning interventions at the high school level which should be applied to those with "one foot out the door." So again my argument is to make schools and school districts publically and legally accountable for making sure students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade and having a successful first year of high school which translates into entering the sophomore year of high school on track for graduation.

I appreciate learning from colleagues on the committee and from reports by persons working in the field about some of the issues facing the Chicago Public School students that are unlike any that occur for students in suburban or rural areas. Having students legitimately afraid to travel to or be in schools is a crisis of immense proportion; I believe this commission should make a statement that such is unacceptable and must be addressed. Perhaps this issue should also be taken into consideration as a factor in school closings which cause students to go into neighborhoods or school buildings where they are not welcome.

I have a question regarding the concept of "zero tolerance policies" as was shared at yesterday's meeting. If the Commission is to denounce zero tolerance policies, it would be appropriate to define what they are and are not. Zero tolerance policies are problematic when they result in a student who inadvertently kept his camping knife in his pocket being expelled from school.

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They are also inappropriate when they result in treating all actions and resulting disciplinary consequences as the same regardless of the factual situation involved—due process requires that each situation be considered individually. Alternatively, I believe there should be zero tolerance for students who sell drugs, bring fire arms to school, bully other students, or assault staff members.

Respectfully submitted,



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