

Howard County Racial Equity Task Force  
Education Meeting Minutes **(APPROVED)**  
Chair: Karen Randall  
March 22, 2021

**Panelists Present** – Karen Randall, Mavis Ellis, Erika Chavarria, Patricia Silva, Bitia Dayhoff, Sabina Taj, Ying Matties, Jacky McCoy, Meina Liu. Ashley Alston (D2), Michael Harris (D2), Lauren Marra (Facilitator)

**Not Present:** Grace Ko and Natalie Pretzello (arrived after attendance)

**Opening:**

Karen Randall completed attendance and introduced the meeting.  
Karen Randall also acknowledged that they are meeting on indigenous land with a moment of silence.

**Discussion Points:**

Karen talks about the rise of attacks against African Americans and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and condemns all events of hate crime. Acknowledges the sexism and overall sexualization of African American and Asian American women. This groups stands in solidarity with our African American, Asian American, Indigenous, and Latin Communities.

Karen introduces Avery Berdit

- Avery introduces himself and background
  - He is the Assistant Public Defender in Howard County
  - He has been working with juveniles in the delinquency system for the last 28 and a half years
  - He wants to preface his remarks by suggesting that School Resource Officers (SROs) are not bad people or bad cops.
    - However, he is suggesting that police presence in schools continue to perpetuate the systemic institutional racism and continues a long trend of inequitable discipline for those of color and economic disadvantage in our school system.
- He begins the verbal presentation of data:
  - In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education surveyed 85% of the nation's students and found that 70% of students involved in school-related arrests were either Black or Brown children.
  - In 2015, the State Board of Education required local school systems to collect arrest data.
    - Since this data has been collected, it has been consistent that arrest rates have been 2 to 3 times higher for African American children.
  - In Howard County, student arrests in the past 4-5 years have dropped 300%

- He was suspicious of this data because the time that the arrest rate dropped, was the time that the statistics were first being kept by the Board of Education (BOE).
  - In 2015-2016, there were 242 arrests in Howard County schools. 75% of those were Black children. All the arrests came from the most diverse schools in the County: Home Wood, Harpers Choice, Hammond, Long Reach, Oakland Mills, Wilde Lake.
  - In 2016-2017, 114 arrests were made. Of that 114, only 20 White students were arrested
  - In 2017-2018, of the 88 arrests that occurred on public school property, 75% were Black and Brown students. 57 of those 88 arrests occurred at Wilde Lake, Long Reach, and Oakland Mills.
  - In 2018-2019, of the 72 arrests, there were only 10 White kids arrested. 46 of the 72 arrests, included children with learning disabilities (disabilities with IEPs).
- Overall, the data suggests that if you are White and attend a predominately White school, the matters of school discipline are being handled administratively rather than criminally. Ironically, it is in the affluent White suburban schools where the shootings occur.
- There's been no conclusive study that SROs make schools any safer. It is all a matter of perspective.
- The question we should be asking ourselves is why are officers in the school setting if they are not handling law enforcement duties in a racially neutral way?
- The positive experiences that some races and economic classes face are not shared by everyone, especially the kids that he represents.
- The implicit bias from the "super predator" narrative starting during the crack epidemic is alive and well and is perpetuated by the idea of law enforcement in schools.
- In 2015, there was a memorandum of understanding between the Howard County BOE and Howard County Police Department (HCPD) that delineates 3 primary roles for school police:
  1. Provide law enforcement services
  2. Counsel and advise students
  3. Serve as a resource for HCPSS Staff in areas law-related to education
  4. The law enforcement role would dominate the work the SROs perform in schools
- Police Officers are trained as law enforcement officers. They aren't trained in learning theories or reading developmental models. They aren't trained to identify the appropriate accommodations some students need to be successful in school. They are trained to investigate, interrogate, arrest and secure individuals that identify as perpetrators of crime.
  - In his opinion, when SROs exercise law enforcement discretion, they do not exercise it any differently with children than they do with adults.
  - Oftentimes, officers haste to carry out the situation and not deescalate the situation.
  - The kids he works with do not feel safe with SRO because they see the differences in their treatment.

- He cannot recall a time a child told him that a SRO went out of their way to cultivate a meaningful relationship with that child or family.
- Avery is not aware of any situation in Howard County where SROs have prevented any shootings or prevented impromptu school fights/disturbances
  - However, he is aware of situations in which his client was in a mental health crisis and was provoked by the SRO. He knows of situations in which officers provided their colleagues information that led to middle of the night search warrant executions, where nothing was found.
  - White students wearing bandanas or any other “gang affiliated clothing” are treated differently than Black and Brown students wearing the same thing
- He deals with offenses involving drug possession, school fights, and other disturbances
  - These things had previously been handled by administrators
- HCPSS has a threat assessment in crisis program in place that does not involve the Police Department

Lauren introduced the next speaker, Shelly Brown

- Shelly introduced herself and her background
  - Mother of a Black son
  - Resident of Howard County
  - Attorney and a child advocate
- She believes that the SRO program is detrimental to the children’s educational, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing
- SROs are police officers first, last, and always
  - Their primary function is to enforce the laws of Maryland. The false narrative that they are in schools as mentors, teachers, and counselors is not true.
    - The fact that is a consistent argument further illustrates the need for actual certified counselors in the schools.
- We need counselors not police officers
- Anything you say to a police officer can be used against you and your family in court.
  - The inability for the police to be impartial and keep information confidential further illustrates the fact that they cannot provide counseling to children. Therefore, there is a need for professional counselors in the school.
- Students are compelled to attend school until they are 18 or until they graduate
  - This means they are forced to have confrontational interactions with police daily. These interactions cause emotional distress and trauma as our Black and Brown students are singled out, harassed, and under police surveillance every day.
- Children of color are being pushed out of school into the criminal justice system
- There is already mistreatment in the equitable application of the law, misconduct, and targeted behavior by the police to the Black and Brown Community. It is no different within the schools.
- The argument that the program can be used as positive PR to change the relationship with the minority community and the police is misapplied

- Any police program should be voluntary and outside of school.
- Interactions inside the school are forced
- Shelly has represented hundreds of children over the past 25 years. It is clear that the negative experiences that people of color have with police are the same type of behavior that our kids suffer in school.
- This program is not conducive to learning and is an emotional nightmare for students
- Police officers have power to charge a child and go through the juvenile system without actually arresting a child.
  1. They can submit a police report to the Department of Juvenile Justice System(DJS)
  2. DJS has to review the police report
  3. From there, they can possibly have an intake conference if it is a misdemeanor
  4. Or Police can send it directly to the State's Attorney if it is a felony
    - This means that police have a discretion to charge it as a misdemeanor or charge things as a felony
    - Police have the ability to appeal the decision made by DJS
- The statistics Avery showed were about arrests decreasing, but the numbers do not show how many cases the Police have forwarded to DJS and cause cases to go to court when unnecessary.
- Shelly also works in the Montgomery County District, and they have a program through Health and Human Services called the Street Outreach Program.
  - This program is where individuals go into the schools, work with kids, and provide counseling. They also have after school programs.
  - These aren't police officers, so they are able to engage in meaningful relationships.
- Police are not all bad. They just cannot provide the appropriate resources to the schools given their roles and duties as police officers.
- From her expertise with representing over 600 children, she can attest to the fact that there is a heightened fear and anxiety with SROs from students and their families.
- We need counselors and street outreach workers

Lauren introduced Erika Chavarria

- Erika begins her presentation
  - *(Refer to presentation for full details)*
    - There is a re-characterization/criminalization of student behavior. It is seen within the Student Code of Conduct. We are criminalizing students before they even walk into the building because of this language being used.
      - Many of the arrests made in Howard County fall under these instances/categories
    - Erika showed a graph and a visual of the memorandum Avery previously talked about
    - Echoes Shelly's point that school is not the place to build relationships with the police. It should be voluntary and outside of school.
    - Schools are a place of learning not for law enforcement

- Erika shares some myths positively associated with the presence of SROs that are all debunked by research (or in some cases lack thereof, which further shows the claim is wrong)
  - Minor offenses are criminalizing the students of color; Broken Window Theory does not work.
  - Police “misconduct” is misleading and is often misreported because students and families do not know how to properly report and accountability of officers is not always seen.
  - Cops are in schools that have majority Black and Brown students

Lauren invited the next speakers, the two students, Dhruvi Mirani and Michelle Enomanna

Dhruvi began first and introduced himself and his background

- Class President for Class of 2022
- Junior at Glenelg High School
- Howard County SMOB Candidate
- Urges this subgroup to recommend the continued absence of SROs
  - With SROs:
    - Black and Brown students are subject to racial profiling at a young age
    - They perpetuate the school to prison pipeline
    - Affect students’ abilities to learn in a safe environment
  - Specific Data to Howard County:
    - In 2019-2020 school year, even with the pandemic, 28 students were arrested and 25 out of the 28 arrests were made by SROs.
      - 75% of the arrests were Black students, although Black students only make up 24.2 % of the school system’s population that year. This clearly shows the impact of racial profiling.
      - 21% of these students were physically brought into custody, while 79% were paper arrests
        - Dhruvi believes that 21% is still too high and doesn’t want us to undermine the damaging effects of paper arrests. Paper arrests can still require students to go through the juvenile system and facilitate the school to prison pipeline.
        - According to a 2015 MIT study, minors charged with a crime as a child are more likely to re-offend in the future.
          - This is especially an issue if SROs insist on “keeping an eye on students,” thus subjecting criminalization of students
    - According to the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding between Howard County and the Police Department, SROs are sworn police officers who first duty

is enforcement of the law, and will be required to enforce the law even with a student they have an existing relationship with.

- In the September 2020 to the Howard County BOE, it said that 1 role of SROs is to bridge the gap between youth and law enforcement.
  - He is shocked that anyone thinks that it is a gap that needs to be bridged.
- A 2010 meta-analysis of 178 studies of assessing the efficacy of different school disciplinary measures found that using police to handle school disorder “does not reduce the occurrence of problem behaviors in schools.”
  - Having SROs on location make them more likely to respond to offenses that they were not needed for, such as disorderly conduct and drug possession
- Alternatives to SROs:
  - Counseling and restorative justice are equitable practices that focusing on reforming student behavior and building connections
  - Counselors and staff trained in de-escalation can be utilized to stage interventions with students possessing drugs, or in cases of disorderly conduct.
  - Unarmed security assistants without the power to arrest can break up any violent encounters between students.
  - Restorative justice practices can build relationships and resolve conflicts effectively and efficiently without arresting or charging students
- In conclusion, SROs do not make schools safer and we must take a stand to be firmly anti-racist.

Michelle introduced herself and began her testimony as a Black student in Howard County

- Critical Racial Theory dictates that all institutions and systems in this country are inherently racist, and therefore, she believes that we must push for a more anti-racist county.
- Junior at Mount Hebron
- In the early part of her education, she was in on-grade level classes
  - Saw the other kids being pulled away and she felt inferior and insignificant
  - However, she was never given the opportunity to be in those classes
- She moved up to above grade level math in 6<sup>th</sup> grade
  - She was used to many Black and Brown students in her regular classes, but the first thing she noticed was how there were a lot less Black students.
  - The feeling of isolation was almost “embarrassingly overwhelming”
  - She began to question if she even belonged in that class
- Her story is personal, yet not too far off from many other Black students in this County
  - According to educationtrust.org, Black students make up 15% of all high schools nationwide, but of that 15%, they make up 9% of every student in AP classes.
  - Students show that when they get to the age of 8 they have already determined themselves as intelligent or unintelligent

- During her freshman year, her class was asked to make their meanest, scariest face. Michelle was drained and half listening, and then the teacher said that she had a “good mean face”
  - She took it as a compliment at first
  - She didn’t realize it then, but now, she realized that comment was a microaggression, stemming from the stereotype that Black women are angry, aggressive, and mean.
- There are countless other racial scenarios and knows that she is not the only student who has experienced this.
  - She was called an “Oreo” for how she talked and witnessed a fellow classmate being slammed by an SRO when they were only in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Michelle understands that conversations about the Black experiences in Howard County is the first step towards change
- Urges the Council to advocate for a more safe learning environment for Black students, stop the redlining of AP classes, and fight against anti-blackness and white supremacy in the classroom.

Lauren opened the floor for Q&A

- Mavis- Thanked the panelists and shares how this is something she has been fighting for the past 20 years as a pupil personnel worker. She has experience with the Street Outreach program in Montgomery County and is in support of not having SROs in HCPSS schools. Points out that she was the one who put forward the new business item that would focus on restorative justice practices.
- Patricia- Thanked everyone for the insightful presentations. Asks if this is what the State Department of Education requires for local school boards in terms of responding to emergencies. What do you all suggest as an alternative to having SROs in the schools?
  - Erika-
    - Safe to Learn Act of Maryland requires school systems to have either the continuous presence of SROs or an adequate coverage plan.
      - An adequate coverage plan is developed by the local school system in collaboration with community stakeholders and the Police Department to determine an emergency plan where law enforcement coverage was needed.
        - They are encouraging to very high degree that the plan be developed with all stakeholders, including a majority of folks who are the ones primarily affected by police in schools. This ensures that it is created with an equity and anti-racist lens.
      - We do know that the schools without SROs are already on adequate coverage plans, so the idea that it isn’t possible or it costs too much is not true. It is possible.
  - Shelly-
    - In addition to adequate coverage plans, we should have individuals like the Street Outreach program. They have mentorship programs too. Believes it is something that we could emulate here in Howard County and make it better.

- Children need mental health counseling, especially with this pandemic
  - Refer to Erika's PowerPoint for more alternatives.
- Jacky asked a question from the perspective of the "opposing" side. She asked about what would be the suggestion made if the police don't come quick enough
  - Avery- Police officers have not yet prevented the disturbances in school. Echoing Shelly and Erika and believes that it is the relationships that heal, strengthen, and help prevent shootings. There will be push back, but it is not necessarily based off of facts. It is based on a lot of people's fears. If issues arise, there are protocols in place and crisis management.
  - Shelly- There really is no proof that SROs protect schools from school shooters, especially since it has been proven that the school shooters have mental health issues. Addressing those issues before they become school shooters is what keeps everyone safer. Also, there is precaution measures put in place. For example, buzzing in the front office and providing identification.
- Karen asked if we are going to be training these police officers, not necessarily SROs, but all officers to deal with young adults and children.
  - Avery- He is not sure what exactly HCPD plans are, but there training is within the Police Academy. It would be great if the Police Department could implement adolescent friendly policies, but they haven't in the 28 years that he has worked there. Also, notes that a police officer is obligated to share whatever information they receive in school.
  - Lauren explained that the Personal and Public Safety subgroup had a meeting with the Police Department, where the Police shared a 29 page document answering all of their questions. She asks Karen to refer her questions to that document because it may be addressed there. If not, she could submit questions to that subgroup.
  - Shelly- Her concern is not with the police training but in their mere presence. Their presence is not appropriate in schools and any relationship with a child there will be basically questioning.
  - Erika- Wants everyone to remember that they were once kids too. Instead of working with them to be more responsible and handle conflict, they are being criminalized for childlike behavior. We should be treating them with compassion, love, dignity, and should be actively trying to help them.
- Lauren thanked the speakers for taking time out to present

Lauren transitioned the conversation to Meina and Natalie

- Meina talks about their inclusive curriculum survey in overview
  - Ying has also been helping with the survey
  - They would like to collect data from both students and teachers in regards to their perception of how diverse and inclusive their curriculum is.
  - Recently, the BOE has adopted the changes for the curriculum.



- So there's already language in place for adopting a more diverse and inclusive curriculum, but the question lies with whether there are gaps or discrepancies between the policies and how it is implemented.
  - Survey includes both quantitative questions and qualitative
    - Ask questions that will allow them to disaggregate data by demographics.
    - There are spaces for students to provide input if the questions are lacking
  - Would like to do a follow-up focus group for students
  - There is a student survey and a teacher one
- Ying- Basic question is more about how to use the survey in the group's recommendation. There are two solutions and asking the group for feedback:
  - Finalize the survey and send it out to the school system, collect the feedback, and use that data for recommendations
  - Recommend the school system to do a survey like this and to use their survey as a template.
    - Karen- There is an approval process for the survey to be sent out to the school system. Also, the data from the survey might not be back in time for when they start writing recommendations in April.
      - Natalie- Understands her concerns and also thought about the timeline as an issue
    - Lauren asked if Meina and Ying could write up a brief summary of both options and then everyone will send their feedback via email.
    - Patricia asked if this subgroup could request a school officially to respond to the survey.
      - Lauren- The problem with HCPSS in general is that all of their time, energy, and staffing is placed with the reopening of schools
        - Patricia- It is not impossible but will require some capital, but it works with her group Connecciones
        - Jacky- Could we use personal relationship as capital?
          - Mavis- You cannot do a survey of students without approval from the school system. She is also concerned that the school system is not as responsive as we would like them to be, but we all understand that the reopening of schools is a big task keeping them busy.
            - Lauren- There will be coordination via email with her, Karen, Ashley, and Michael to ask the BOE or if others have connections on the Board

Lauren goes over timeline

- Vote on all final recommendations during June meetings
- All draft recommendations done by May meeting

- Small working groups of a topical area and will work together throughout April and bringing in recommendations for May.
  - Mavis- She has a question about Special Education and that there is disproportional assignment of Black and Brown kids to having other health impaired (OHI) or specific learning disabilities (SLD). The State is monitoring HCPSS for the disproportionate representation of kids of color. Understands that we might not have time to address the issue of disproportional representation of Special education. Asks the group to refer to Page 9 of the Discipline report. She wants to go on record that this issue has been mentioned to this Task Force.
    - Lauren- They are allowed to meet in groups smaller than a quorum (can't meet in groups of 5 or more) to discuss other areas and develop the data and propose recommendations in that area.

Lauren goes over next steps

- They will send out a brief email to solicit people's first and second preferences regarding their topical area that they would like to work on.
- Small working group
- Content of recommendations will be in the next agenda

**Karen thanks everyone and adjourns the meeting**