

April 23, 2014

My name is Thara Cooper. I currently teach Elementary Music, head my building's PBIS team, serve as an HEA building representative, as a representative on the district PBIS Team, and on our district's Fine Arts Council. Most importantly, I am a Highline parent of three. There is a lot of anxiety around one part of our strategic plan: no out-of-school-suspensions. It is my belief that a large part of this anxiety comes from a perspective of ignorance and a lack of training. We can fix that.

FOR FAMILIES: Highline needs a public and very clear definition of what PBIS is. It should be integrated fully into all information provided to students and families so that alternatives to suspension are fully communicated and understood in a meaningful way.

FOR STAFF: The district PBIS team should be fiscally empowered in an ongoing way. Education and practice are fundamental in training our staff members on Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions and how they can realistically make this part of the strategic plan feasible. Teachers, and, MORE IMPORTANTLY, classified staff members, who are our supervisors during less structured times, must be trained annually, and given resources to understand and implement PBIS with fidelity. Prospective hires should be routinely expected to have some knowledge of, and training in, PBIS, and show willingness to implement the system in their teaching and practice.

FOR STUDENTS: Realistic and consistent alternatives to suspension that include trained staff members who can deliver good instruction on the things these kids need. When a student doesn't perform division or fractions properly or appropriately for their developmental level, we do what any good teacher does: we diagnose the need, teach and assess, and continue a progressive cycle until the student shows improvement and has success. We know that behaviors benefit from the same approach. Students come to us with varied skill levels in everything. We diagnose, teach and assess. If our alternatives to suspension don't include a financially sound and consistently supported system, we are doing students a disservice. ALL students. Those who choose to behave inappropriately at school, and those who may be at risk for suffering from these misbehaviors.

This brings me to my real reason for speaking tonight. I want my kids safe. I need them to be safe. If anyone hurts them, I want to know for certain that the people hurting them will be receiving instruction and guided practice in making better choices in a meaningful, lasting way.

As someone who has been lucky enough to receive many hours of education on the subject, I understand that is possible with PBIS, but the majority of our families likely do not. And from recent discussions with colleagues, many of our staff, particularly our secondary staff, it is my impression that they lack understanding in this area as well.

I hope the board will consider improving our practices and communication on PBIS. It is absolutely essential to success in achieving the no-out-of-school-suspension goal.

Thank you!