

# JACKSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

**Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction**

**Meeting Minutes**

**April 5, 2019**

**9:00 am**

**Council Chambers**

**First Floor, City Hall**

**117 W. Duval Street**

**Topic:** Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction

**Attendance:** Council Members Newby and Boyer; Colleen Hampsey – Council Research; Crystal Shemwell, Melanie Wilkes, Jessica Smith and Carol Owens – Legislative Services

For all Task Force Members and other attendees please see the sign in sheet

**Meeting Convened:** 9:09 am

This was the fourth meeting for the Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction. The Task Force Chair, Pastor Mark Griffin, called the meeting to order and welcomed the group. Chairperson Griffin reviewed the agenda and called for the first presentation from Duval County Schools.

Dr. Kelly Coker-Daniel, DCPS Assistant Superintendent, Accountability and Assessment, was in attendance to speak about graduation rates and various DCPS initiatives. Graduation rates have improved in the past few years, with 67.7% in 2011 compared with 85.1% in 2017. The graduation rates include all DCPS schools, including charter alternative and juvenile justice schools. Dr. Daniel indicated that there are multiple pathways to graduation beyond the traditional completion of 24 credits. Some students may opt for graduating with 18 credits, some may use their concordant SAT or ACT scores as replacements for standardized test score requirements. There are also many DCPS vocational programs that offer job training and skills. When asked how a high school might have higher graduation rates than literacy proficiency, Dr. Daniel cautioned the group to draw equivalency between the measures for literacy and graduation rates, as the 10th grade language arts FSA is only a snapshot of performance from one day and graduation rates are cumulative. DCPS also utilizes graduation coaches, social workers and other school based strategies to keep students engaged and graduate. Dr. Daniel mentioned that DCPS has several opportunities for volunteerism and mentors.

Dr. Diana Greene, DCPS Superintendent and Michael Edwards, Director of the Duval County School Police Department were in attendance to speak about school safety measures. DCPS has had its own police force since 2001 but has a cooperative relationship with the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office. All DCPS officers are trained in mental health first aid and all teachers will receive the training as well. There has been a decrease in school based arrests for violent crimes in the last year or so. When asked if that was a result of civil citations usage, Director Edwards explained that citations are only given for misdemeanors not felonies, so the decrease can be attributed to school based conflict resolution as opposed to arrest and removal/suspension. Additionally, there have only been 12 civil citations given this year district wide. When asked about the prevalence of guns and drugs on school campuses, Director Edwards said that those issues, particularly guns, are community problems which creep onto school grounds. He also emphasized the urgency for people to secure their guns at home to keep them out of children’s hands. Mr. Frazier echoed the concerns about gun safety as a broad community issue.

Dr. Greene talked about proactive steps schools have taken, including the installation of security cameras and threat assessment teams. Councilwoman Boyer asked about ways to identify potential threat risks in advance, possibly by using data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to target schools or individuals who need help. Dr. Greene explained that the survey is anonymous and the data is aggregated, so they can use the results to focus on certain risk behaviors (i.e. an increase in smoking or depression) but not individual students. Dr. Greene expressed her support for the mission of the Task Force and said that DCPS will do whatever they can to assist.

Joe Peppers, CEO Kids Hope Alliance, was in attendance to speak about children’s programs. KHA has: a budget this year of $45 million; employs a staff of 50; funds 82 after school programs and 100 summer camps; and 100 in school mental health therapists. There are approximately 130,000 DCPS students and 57% of them begin school “kindergarten ready”. KHA does not have the capacity to reach all children who may need assistance; particularly in the older youth population and youth involved in the juvenile justice system (currently they can provide services to only 3% of high school students and 19% of juvenile justice youth). Last year there were 4000 students who dropped out of school and 3000 students who reported as homeless. The homeless students have a 75% drop out rate, and children in foster care are also a high risk group for dropping out and homelessness. Mr. Peppers spoke about social stigma associated with mental health issues, as some of the school based therapists cannot get students to participate or get parental consent for continued visits. Early intervention is essential and currently mental health assessments are given to all justice involved youth but those assessments are grant funded, and those funds are not guaranteed long term. Mr. Peppers said that there may be a way to compare the names of those juveniles arrested last year for violent crimes to see if they received services to identify gaps.

Ronnie King, Chair of the Neighborhoods Subcommittee, spoke about Jacksonville’s violent crime statistics. Mr. King proposed a deep analysis into characteristics among those who were arrested in last 2 years to see what services they did or did not access, risk factors, where they lived, whether they had juvenile arrests or previous felonies. It was mentioned that the real cause for crime is poverty, but the discussion indicated that poverty alone does not lead to criminal behavior (not everyone in poverty commits crimes, and not all criminals are living in poverty). Mr. King hopes to find patterns in the individual stories of those arrested which will help lead to methods to divert other individuals from making the same choices. The actual criminal population is small percentage of the overall city population, so the expectation is that the risk and protective factors for that group will be identifiable.

Several members of the audience offered public comment about crime, poverty and gun safety. With no further business, the Chair adjourned the meeting. There will be a joint meeting of the subcommittee chairs Friday April 26, 2019 at 9:00am.

**Meeting Adjourned:** 12:05 pm

Minutes: Colleen Hampsey, Council Research

CHampsey @coj.net (904) 630-1498

Posted 4.11.19 5:00 pm

Tape: Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction- Legislative Services Division

4.5.19