

**STAFF RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE
HUMAN RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2008-2009**

In September 2008 the Board charged the Human Relations Advisory Committee (HRAC) to "...Review successes and concerns at selected school-based human relations committees (HRCs), and identify how to improve the distribution of what works at successful schools." The HRAC presented its findings in its presentation to the Board on May 28, 2009. The School Board referred the report to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) staff members for review and comment.

HRAC is to be commended for its efforts in responding to the 2008-2009 school year charge. The committee's report contains concise, comprehensive, and insightful information into school-based HRCs. The Committee's decision to explore and report school-based efforts separately (elementary, middle, and high) was most beneficial. This serves as staff's response to the HRAC's 2008-2009 school year report.

Response to Recommendations

As a result of its year long focus on school-based HRCs the committee made five recommendations and having considered them, staff finds the following:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Parents, staff, and students should know to whom they can present their concerns regarding human relations concerns. Therefore, the school-based HRC should serve as the coordinating point for all human relations issues at each school, and either (1) deal with all human relations issues at that school, except for those issues that must be dealt with administratively; or (2) be a clearinghouse assigning issues to other committees as appropriate for all human relations issues. Information on the HRC process should be frequently communicated to the entire school community.

RESPONSE:

The Committee's report noted inconsistencies and noncompliance with the regulation governing school level committees (Regulation 4910) which states in part ... *"As part of the efforts to implement the human relations policy and to promote good human relations in the school, the principal has the responsibility to do the following: 1. Develop and implement a human relations program that effectively promotes equal opportunity for all students and staff members..."* Staff maintains that principals and not HRCs must serve as the coordinating point for all human relations issues at their schools.

While the regulation outlines specific principal responsibilities, it does not limit them only to the actions listed. In fact, principals are afforded the opportunity to take whatever actions they deem necessary to promote good human relations in schools. As noted in the report, for many of the schools visited, these actions included combining committees. The reasons that led to the combinations vary. Staff acknowledges that the report rightfully identified the need for better utilization of HRCs. The Committee's recommendation however, extends the role of school based HRCs from advisory to responsible party. Efforts to improve the effectiveness of HRCs

should come in the form of clearly defined guidance from the principal. Staff will update the regulation to ensure it better reflects FCPS current operational needs and practices.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Designate the OFSP as the depository for innovative and successful human relations programs and activities; and encourage this office to expand the use of their many communications activities to disseminate information on human relations programs; and encourage parent liaisons, HRCs, and principals to notify OFSP of those programs and activities which are promoting respect for others and other cultures.

RESPONSE:

A staff member from the Office of Family and School Partnerships (OFSP) met with the HRAC's communications subcommittee chair and provided an overview on the various methods parent liaisons use to share information with parents. While their methods are a viable means of conveying information, the assistant superintendent of the Department of Communications and Community Outreach (DCCO) has requested that staff within the OFSP and the Office of Equity and Compliance (OEC) explore the most efficient ways to communicate successful parent/family involvement programs and activities within FCPS.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Reinvigorate and enhance organization of HRCs.

- The OEC, in consultation with HRAC, should develop recommendations on the expectations that FCSB has for the school-based human relations committee, and the composition of the school-based human relations committee. This includes giving consideration to expanding present policy or regulations, and to include representation from the business community and other community groups.
- Ensure more parent and support staff involvement in HRCs.
- Each school should develop a list of existing committees identifying the responsibilities of each committee. This list should be reviewed by the cluster offices to ensure that regulations and expectations are being met.
- The cluster offices should ensure that human relations matters are part of the school plan, and make the discussion of human relations accomplishments and concerns part of the annual evaluation process. [The HRAC understands that parents are usually invited to participate in the development of school plans.]

RESPONSE:

While many schools have established HRCs, the process governing them will be updated as noted in the first recommendation. In addition, input regarding the revisions will be solicited from the cluster assistant superintendents and principals.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Maintain and enhance other forms of communication of effective programs that promote respect for others and other cultures.

- Maintain or increase funding for the parent liaison program.
- Continue the use of the *Supergram* and the assistant superintendent for Human Resources' monthly email newsletter to provide information promoting respect for others and other cultures. Other methods of communicating and exchanging good ideas are presented in the section and/or appendix on information dissemination in this report.
- Consider allowing teachers time to visit other schools with especially successful human relations programs and activities.
- Consider holding annual conferences for HRC chairpersons.

RESPONSE:

- The parent liaison program received continued funding in the 2010 final budget proposal to the School Board despite current budget constraints, although FCPS was not able to increase allotments for this program.
- The *Supergram* and other newsletters, such as the Department of Human Resources *Principal Briefings* continue to provide information promoting human relations issues.
- Although this is an excellent recommendation, teachers are under contract during school hours to fulfill their duties teaching. Instructional time must be preserved when considering changes to teacher contracts.
- The OEC is in the process of revising guidelines and training for HRCs and although an annual conference may not be the most viable recommendation, it will be considered as an option during the planning for additional training.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Other suggestions offered to promote improved school climate and human relations:

- Consider use of stimulus funds for promoting inclusiveness of students with disabilities.
- Including English for Speakers of Other Languages programs at the kindergarten level.
- Acquire more computers for the Community Resources Centers and consider acquiring loaner computers for those who do not have them.

RESPONSE:

The Superintendent is considering use of stimulus funds to benefit all FCPS students, including students with disabilities, and all students that are in the ESOL programs.

CONCLUSION:

FCPS acknowledges the many efforts of school administrators, staff, and students to continue to maintain good human relations in all the schools. A review of the guidelines for HRCs by the OEC will help provide the leadership needed in these efforts. Streamlining and making more uniform the efforts of school HRCs, will ensure the continued success of these committees.

The concerns that were mentioned by the committee are unfortunately not new to FCPS or any school system. It has been and continues to be a national goal to increase parent involvement in students' education. Outreach to minority linguistic populations continues to be a challenge for FCPS and the parent liaison program has made great strides in addressing and meeting these challenges and concerns.

The methods of sharing information with other schools has been identified thoroughly by the HRAC and a collaborative effort between OEC and DCCO will help promote the most efficient ways to share the great things that FCPS is doing in the field of human relations.

As always the HRAC provides insightful recommendations as a result of their work and staff looks forward to working with them as they continue their work in the 2009-2010 school year.