

## FAST 2009 EDUCATION ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

**The Problem:** Discipline is a major problem in our schools. A recent article in the St. Petersburg Times referring to the achievement gap and growing problem of discipline states, "There are far too many wounded, out-of-control kids, both black and white. And with the return to neighborhood schools, fears are mounting that those students are being concentrated in a handful of schools and disrupting them to the point of paralysis." Schools across this county are struggling with discipline. Teachers are spending so much time trying to maintain order in the classroom that it is getting in the way of educating our children. Teachers we met with have reported to us that they don't have enough tools or support to help them deal with discipline problems. Lack of discipline leads to more children needlessly placed in special education classes, lower test scores, more high school drop outs, and higher teacher burnout. **According to the latest district statistics, more than 25% of our children in this county will not graduate.**

In the first semester of the 08-09 school year, the number of suspensions **increased** 29.3% from the first semester of 2007-08, and the number of individual students suspended **increased** by 15.6%. Correspondingly, the 2008-09 student enrollment **decreased** by 1.7%. All together in this last semester 5,686 students were suspended in our schools. This means that discipline is becoming an increasingly serious problem in our schools.

There is data showing that student learning goes up when discipline problems are reduced. There are programs out there that, when implemented properly, are effective in transforming our schools. That is why we are pushing for effectively implemented school management programs to be put in place in our schools.

Foundations/CHAMPs and PBS (Positive Behavior Support) are two school wide discipline programs that we have examined. Both programs provide practical materials and guidelines of conduct designed to help schools improve safety and civility. We have seen other places where these programs were mandated county wide and aided in reducing discipline problems. We will ask for a preliminary expansion of these programs to an additional eight schools and a continued commitment that the district will work towards further expansion in the future to other schools with high suspension and referral rates. Since first beginning our work on this issue we have seen 37 public schools implement school-wide discipline programs. Twenty-three of these schools are part of the Foundation/CHAMPs pilot project. All of the schools in this pilot project last year saw a decrease in disciplinary referrals.

**Research Conducted:** In the last four months we visited Azalea Elementary, Melrose Elementary, Osceola Middle, Largo Middle, New Heights Elementary, and Dixie Hollins High School. We toured these schools, observing classrooms in session as well as some common areas like cafeterias, and we met with the principals. We met with the coordinator and project manager for both of the discipline programs we have been examining. We met with superintendent Dr. Jansen and some of her top administrators. We met with the district's directors of operations and the Chief Academic Officer to learn more about action that the district is taking in response to the problem of discipline.

### **The Solutions:**

**EVALUATION** – Last spring we received commitments from the school board to create, by November 2008, a formal evaluation of how the Foundations/CHAMPs program and the PBS programs are implemented in our schools. We congratulate the district for following through in creating the evaluation, however, we have yet to receive it. We want a report of the results and actions the district will take in response to the evaluation.

**IMPLEMENTATION** – We want a continued commitment that the district will work on discipline and ensure that the discipline programs are being implemented properly. We have met with directors of operations who stated that they monitor discipline data and coach principals, but that they did not know much about the programs in place in some of these schools, nor have they communicated with the program coordinators. We want the directors of operations, who are working on school discipline, to communicate regularly with the program coordinators to ensure that these programs are being implemented properly. We want commitments that the district will take the necessary steps in creating ongoing accountability and cooperation between these groups and the superintendent.

**EXPANSION** – We ultimately want these programs expanded to all schools with discipline problems, specifically those with a higher than 10% suspension rate. We have seen other counties in this state where these programs have been mandated county wide. In Polk County PBS is being implemented in all schools. In Duvall County (Jacksonville), CHAMPs/Foundations is mandated in all schools. For the 2009-2010 school year, we will be asking for a preliminary expansion of school wide discipline programs to an additional eight schools and continued commitment that the district will push to expand these programs in the future for all schools with high rates of disciplinary referrals and suspensions.

**We have asked Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Harry Brown, who oversees curriculum and operations, to represent the school district and answer our questions tonight.**