

Audit and Risk Management Advisory Committee
Jefferson County Public Schools
May 31, 2023
Stewart Auditorium

ARMAC Members Present: Chairperson James Rose, Co-Chairperson Rhonda Mitchell, Pedro Bryant, and Dr. Eric Russ

JCPS Staff Present: Dr. Katy DeFerrari, Dr. Dena Dossett, Dr. Alicia Averette, Dr. Michelle Sircy, Tovah Mitchell, Dr. Rashawna Mullaney, Kevin Brown, Jodell Renn, John LeMaster, Chalynn Comage and Shari Mattingly

Board Members Present: none

Public Present:

Chair Rose called the meeting of the Audit and Risk Management Advisory Committee (ARMAC) to order at 2:05 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Chair Rose requested a motion to accept the minutes of the March 1, 2023 meeting, which was made by Co-Chair Mitchell and seconded by Dr. Russ. The minutes were approved by a unanimous voice vote.

Chair Rose reviewed the agenda items for the meeting and reminded the committee of Ms. Renn's upcoming retirement at the end of July.

Vital Signs Update – Dr. Dena Dossett, Chief of Accountability, Research and Systems Improvement

Dr. Dossett reviewed the most recent statistics from the Vital Signs data. The data is shared with schools, the Assistant Superintendents and Cabinet. The Board also reviews Vital Signs data as topics arise. Most recently the Student Handbook was covered. An area of concern that has seen a decline in results is ELL (English Language Learners). There are over 130 languages spoken within the district, and a new Assistant Superintendent position for ELL has been created to address these learners and their concerns. They will oversee revising credentialing for teaching of ELL, which will benefit all schools along with providing early intervention. Since Covid, an additional 17,000 EL students have been added to the district. Mr. Bryant asked if these students include kindergarten and first graders, and Dr. Dossett confirmed that is correct.

Chair Rose inquired about College and Career readiness and Dr. Dossett anticipates those graduation rates to continue to grow. Dr. Russ asked how JCPS compares to similar sized districts. Tuda is used to measure the District against other large urban districts and ranks JCPS at or above in graduation rates. Mr. Bryant asked how this is viewed by policy makers, if interests are aligned with those of JCPS, being so large a district. The District has an Executive Administrator of Government and Community Relations, Chuck Truesdell, whose job is to ensure the District's interests and concerns are addressed with lawmakers. The Committee also asked about other states that have similar populations, how the District can learn from them. Dr. Dossett explained that the Council of Great City Schools consists of many districts of similar size to JCPS, which provides an opportunity for the District to gather that information.

In relation to African American students, Mr. Bryant noted that classroom suspensions are twice as high as for other students. Is this partly because faculty and staff make assumptions, are there inquiries as to why and can this data be requested collectively? The District has found that although all students and their parents receive the Student Handbook, many parents do not understand why their kids get suspended. Working with student suggestions, JCPS created a link that can be used to access the Handbook. The District will continue work to help parents understand its stance on discipline.

Chair Rose inquired how the District can relay the importance of academics/Backpack League. Dr. Dossett explained that the Backpack League is one of the three pillars. When kids can engage with each other and have authentic experiences, they have greater attendance and less behavior issues.

Future State Update – Dr. Katy DeFerrari, Chief of Staff and Dr. Dena Dossett

The Committee requested the current state of progression at a high level, for example School Choice and new technology/IT structure, along with understanding risk areas to assist as an advisor. Co-chair Mitchell asked who all the information rolls up to before getting to the Board. Dr. DeFerrari explained that Dr. Pollio and Cabinet, along with Ms. Renn as Director of Internal Audit, are updated weekly. Dr. Dossett meets with Wallace Grant monthly, providing oversight to the workforce component. A new funding formula to increase staffing at high poverty schools is already seeing results.

Backpack League has enrollments of over 9,000, with expected enrollment to be around 13,000. The Elev8 program will provide extended learning opportunities for students during the summer. Boys and Girls Clubs are also supporting kids during the summer including meals and transportation. A dashboard is currently being tested to show all extended learning opportunities. Tutoring will also be available.

Mental Health Overview – Dr. Alicia Averette, Assistant Superintendent Student Support Services

Dr. Averette introduced two members of her team, Dr. Michelle Sircy and Tovah Mitchell, along with Dr. Rashawna Mullaney, from the Exceptional Child Education group. The areas of responsibility are Comprehensive Mental Health Supports, Tiered Supports, Crisis Work and District Suicide Prevention.

Mental health supports for students consist of Mental Health Practitioners (143 positions), School Counselors (299 positions) and School Psychologists (48 positions), along with School Nurses. Each support area has their own responsibilities, but these overlap with the other support areas. Training and professional development are provided by Student Support Services, who also monitor data, new hires and provides mediation as needed. Dr. Russ inquired as to the metrics, which are 60% of time is required to be spent with students. One challenge is that some school administrators will use mental health professionals to assist with administrative responsibilities, ex: lunchroom duties. Tiered support varies by the level. Tier 1 targets all students with universal strategies and is in a classroom setting. Tier 2 consists of strategies for early intervention and provides more support (family outreach, wellness check-ins, group counseling). Tier 3 is targeted intervention (trauma focused, individual counseling, community partner services). Crisis Support is large scale and provided when a traumatic event has occurred such as a death. It can be for one day or for as long as there is a need.

Hiring of mental health supports was discussed. Principals are their direct supervisors and work with HR and Dr. Averette's group when a vacancy opens. Not sure of the turnover rate, but currently three counselors have been hired since January. Some transition to other counseling roles, others retire or leave the profession completely. Co-chair Mitchell asked what disabilities students can be evaluated for. Dr. Mullaney explained that all disabilities are evaluated for and these are 90% of Special Ed's job. They determine if students qualify for an IEP / 504 special accommodations. Dr. Russ asked if the MHP are all licensed; 85% are licensed and 15% are certified.

Community partners also assist with counseling services so that students are not left waiting for services. Seven Counties is one partner, along with Care Solace, which is an online service that matches students with therapists. If students can get scheduled for services with parents taking them after school, then they do not lose class time, which is the best scenario. The ratio of students to counselors can be as many as 600 students per counselor to 200 students per counselor. Compared with other comparable districts, JCPS is very understaffed at the district level. This results in mental health professionals experiencing burnout or having no time for self-care.

Internal Audit Update – Jodell Renn, Director of Internal Audit

Ms. Renn's presentation was postponed due to time constraints and will be added to the next ARMAC meeting agenda. She will email her presentation to the Committee members.

New Business

The Audit Plan needs to be presented to the Board before Ms. Renn retires. She requested a zoom meeting with ARMAC to review the Audit Plan for July 13th. Ms. Renn is hoping that her replacement will be hired prior to her leaving. The Board does not have to approve the IA Director job posting.

Chair Rose would like the Committee's feedback on what topics to discuss next. Co-Chair Mitchell would like to know how the cabinet level is managing ARMAC's findings, are they self-reviewing? How much deeper does Cabinet go than ARMAC?

Ms. Renn has continued to build on her risk assessment and Co-Chair Mitchell believes Cabinet should not duplicate the risk management by Internal Audit but needs a governance system for JCPS and teams. Ms. Mitchell would also like to look at all the groups ARMAC has met with over the past five years to ensure there are none missing, or if any follow up is needed.

Adjournment

Chair Rose made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Co-Chair Mitchell seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 4:42 p.m.