



# **School Climate in Guilford County Schools**

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## Executive Summary

The School Climate Task Force was formed in July of 2007, made up of parents, teachers, principals, law enforcement, school officials, students, and community leaders.

The Guilford County Board of Education charged the task force to:

1. review the district's handling of student misbehavior;
2. review the Guilford County Disproportionate Minority Contact Report;
3. meet with teachers, parents, students and community stakeholders;
4. form a report by consensus back to the Board of Education.

The consensus report should include concrete steps that the Board of Education may adopt to:

1. reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions of Guilford County school students;
2. improve the relationship between law enforcement utilized in our schools and minority communities disproportionately represented in arrest records;
3. facilitate greater communication and understanding between the community, schools, parents, SRO officers and students;
4. improve the classroom education component of the SRO program and increase the safety of our campuses with an emphasis on the growing gang concern.

Members of the task force went out into the community and interviewed teachers, principals, parents, students, counselors and other stakeholders. We reviewed data included in the Student Safety survey (2006)<sup>1</sup>, the Disproportionate Minority Contact Report<sup>2</sup>, the latest Teacher Working Conditions survey (2006)<sup>3</sup>, data on suspensions and arrests of minors, and performed a Teacher's School Climate survey (2008)<sup>4</sup>. After eight months of meetings, reviewing data and discussion with stakeholders the following report defines our recommendations to improve the school climate in Guilford County schools.

The recommendations in this report address key findings that have contributed to a poor school climate including;

1. A lack of personnel, materials, technology and facilities to handle an exploding student population, many who come from difficult social or family situations and by definition are at-risk to drop out of school and enter the criminal justice system creating a pipeline from the play ground to our prisons;
2. Inconsistencies within the schools in relation to discipline, tenure of principals and constantly changing programs resulting in frustration and low morale among all the stakeholders;
3. A community with two diverse perspectives, one that feels that when students are disruptive or misbehave they should be suspended, the other, that students who are misbehaving need additional support and education and that no student should be suspended, this division falls mainly along racial lines;

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<sup>1</sup> School Safety survey May 2006, based on a statistically representative sample of 2572 students in Guilford County.

<sup>2</sup> Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact In The Juvenile Justice System, Guilford County Demonstration Project, September 2006

<sup>3</sup> Teachers Working Conditions survey Fall 2006, based on a statistically representative sample of 4236 teachers (70% of the GCS educators).

<sup>4</sup> Teacher School Climate survey January 2008, based on 771 response from teachers in GCS.