



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 6)

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Faculty Lunches](#)

Date : November 30, 2016



I blogged a few days ago on what Richard Whisnant and Peg Carlson shared about their work during the most recent installment of Faculty Lunches with the Dean. Chris McLaughlin and LaToya Powell were the other faculty members who shared something about their work during that lunch. This post summarizes the information they shared. I hope you enjoy hearing about the work of your colleagues as much as I do.



Chris McLaughlin

[Chris McLaughlin](#). Chris described an interesting project that he and Tyler Mulligan worked on with a national organization called the [Center for Community Progress](#). It is a nonprofit “solely



dedicated to building a future in which entrenched, systemic vacancy, abandonment, and blight no longer exist in American communities.” The City of High Point was selected by the Center through a competitive process for technical assistance “designed to support communities that are ready and willing to explore more innovative approaches to vacancy and abandonment.” The project generated a report with the following catchy title—[Implementing a Coordinated Approach to Address the Systemic Causes of Vacancy and Abandonment in High Point, North Carolina](#).

Chris and Tyler were pulled into the project to help the Center understand how code enforcement (Tyler) and property tax foreclosure (Chris) could be used in the fight against property blight and vacancy. “Given the complex and restrictive statutory environment in North Carolina, [the Center] requested the support of the UNC School of Government to serve as our in-state legal and policy experts” Tyler led a day-long policy workshop on code enforcement systems during one site visit by the Center, and Chris offered a half-day workshop on property tax enforcement systems during another site visit. The Center collected lots of data to better understand the scope, scale, and nature of vacancy and abandonment in High Point. Chris enjoyed the work partly because it was an opportunity to apply his legal expertise in a different context than usual. The School was paid \$10,000 for the work, which is nice, and Chris also thinks it can serve as a model for other local governments fighting the same problems.

The project involved more than 30 officials from High Point and Guilford County, and it also included representatives from other North Carolina communities who have engaged in similar efforts. The report includes extensive recommendations involving data systems, code enforcement, and property tax enforcement. It also recommends the creation of partnerships in addressing vacancy and abandonment that extend across all sectors, including academic institutions. The report noted that while the city had “occasionally tapped the School’s network of expert faculty members for assistance with municipal operations and policies,” this “engagement emphasized how valuable of a resource the School of Government can be for the City as it moves forward with implementation.” In particular, the report encouraged High Point to explore partnering with the Development Finance Initiative.



LaToya Powell

LaToya Powell. LaToya talked about important teaching and writing she has been doing on the so-called School to Prison Pipeline (STPP). This is a term that is commonly used to describe the criminalization of minor misbehavior by students at school. [Here is LaToya's blog post](#) on the subject if you want to learn more.

School policies and practices are pushing kids out of schools and into the courts. There evidently is a greater tendency for schools to use so-called exclusionary discipline for more kinds of misconduct, which means suspension, expulsion, and alternative school transfers. The majority of complaints (94%) that lead to exclusion are for relatively minor offenses—simple assault and disorderly conduct. For a number of reasons many school officials feel ill equipped to handle discipline themselves. It means that school resource officers are called upon to address routine misbehavior—including using cell phones or dress code violations—and students end up being charged in criminal or juvenile court. School-based complaints in North Carolina comprise a whopping 45% of all complaints filed with juvenile justice—and the percentage is much higher in some areas.

There is a reason this phenomenon is called STPP. Research has demonstrated that court involvement for low-risk juvenile offenders is much more harmful than in-school discipline or community-based discipline. Court involvement leads to higher recidivism rates, along with barriers to future employment, housing, and educational opportunities. The data also consistently show that STPP disproportionately affects minority and disabled students, who are suspended, expelled, and referred to court more often than their peers. The federal government has characterized STPP as a civil rights issue and it has [developed resources](#) to help school districts



reverse the trend.

LaToya got involved with the topic when she was asked by the district court judges to teach a session on STPP, which she co-taught with a district court judge. One reason judges are interested is because they are frustrated by seeing large numbers of school discipline cases that they believe should not be in court. STPP can be a controversial topic because some judges and others believe that the term itself is biased, and they believe that teachers are only doing what is necessary to keep order for the benefit of other students. Plus the topic inevitably involves issues of race, which makes some people uncomfortable.

LaToya has done a number of presentations about STPP because it has become a major policy issue. In addition to speaking at a conference for judges, she is being invited to local districts that are trying to address their own STPP issues. LaToya often talks to diverse groups of stakeholders in these sessions, including law enforcement officers, juvenile justice employees, judges, and school officials. One of the things she does is provide them with information about the law and reform efforts, including school-justice partnerships and school-based diversion programs. This important work by LaToya involves a wonderful example of our combining law and policy.