



APPROVED BY THE BOARD 9/13/16

**BURLINGTON BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
DIVERSITY & EQUITY COMMITTEE MINUTES
September 6, 2016**

Attending Committee Members: Chair Seguino, Commissioners Stoll, Cina, Kleman & Berrizbeitia
Board Members: Commissioner Curry
Administration: Superintendent Obeng; Senior Director Nikki Fuller, Senior Director Paul Irish; Director Henri Sparks
Guests: Commissioner-Elect Kathy Olwell, Suzy Comerford, Infinite Culcleasure, Marcella Genge, Kdija, Adin Hajii, Betsy Ferries, Robert Appel

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

A. Motion (L. Berrizbeitia/M. Stoll) to approve agenda.

Amend agenda to move Item #6 to #4

Report from Superintendent on Board Resolution to Create Climate Plan - new Item #5

3. Public Comment: The Chair suspended the rules in order to allow informal discussion

4. Comments and Questions from the Public

1. Susan Comerford, parent of student with disability, addressed committee about students with disabilities and busing situation at high school. The high school agreed to pick up student at 6:45 a.m., which creates challenges around her child's particular disability. Thanked the Committee for work it does.
2. Infinite Culcleasure - organizer with Parents and Youth for Change. He requested information around selecting designated employees at each of the school buildings. In particular, he requested a change in how designated employees are being selected and is seeking a more democratic selection process of designated employees. Mr. Culcleasure asked what steps to take in this area. Could he offer a proposal to District or should he sit back and wait for District response? There was a suggestion to add this issue to Climate Plan discussion.

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3. Marcella Genge - CEDO AmeriCorps Program Director. She was interested and happy to see on-going work with Equity Team. She is writing a proposal for AmeriCorps grant for upcoming 3 years and seeking to partner on My Brother's Keeper in the future with the district.
4. Robert Appel - Attorney working with District for years on diversity and equity. He is aware of the Board resolution asking the Superintendent to develop a work plan to address problems related to racial tensions in the District and is curious about how the Administration and Board are moving forward. He recommended the District look into Brown University's New England Equity Assistance Center as a potential resource.
5. Diversity Rocks - Commissioner Berrizbeitia introduced history of Diversity Rocks and 2 members who are BHS alumni. Kdija & Aden Hajii shared their stories about their experiences at BHS, which involved negative encounters with teachers who exhibited stereotyping and bias regarding their behaviors and abilities. Among their comments:
 - New American students who are 18 but not necessarily proficient are getting referred to Vermont Adult Learning, which is not fully meeting their needs or offering the full scope of educational services needed.
 - Out of school suspensions result in kids staying home with nothing to do. There needs to be a plan in place to prevent out of school suspensions.
 - There were insufficient ELL teachers & resources to allow students who were able to perform at higher than basic level to obtain enough credits in a given year. Schedules included a lot of study halls one year when there were not sufficient teachers to offer enough classes at the higher ELL level.

Commissioners asked about social experiences. Students described divisions along racial and tribal lines. Suggested team-building activities.

6. Update on Diversity Staffing in District

The Superintendent congratulated the D&E committee on keeping the issue in the forefront. He is taking an approach of creating teams to do the work v. putting responsibility under a single person. The Equity Team will expand the circle going forward.

Two new team members include Bay Paul Foundation grant-supported staff Hal Colston and Equity Instructional Leader Rebecca Haslam, whose work will focus on instructional guidance for teachers. The goal is to integrate multiple pieces of work that have been underway in a siloed fashion.

Other team members include Henri Sparks, the Director of Equity, who will address issues like developing alternatives to out-of-school suspensions with a goal to keeping students in buildings, in classes, and engaged.

YAW OBENG SUPERINTENDENT

School administrators will be engaged through trainings and empowerment to own buildings and climate issues within. The work will involve using systemic, formal approach by putting formal protocols in place District-wide.

There is no impact on the budget of these changes. Rather, the goal is organizational changes to ensure broader reach and impact.

Commissioner Stoll reflected that she did not hear there is representation for students with disabilities. There are District employees with expertise in ability issues and many teachers with special ed experience have traditionally felt excluded, sometimes intentionally by other staff. Superintendent Obeng clarified that use of the word “equity” is all-encompassing and discussion is through multiple lenses, including ability, gender, etc. The team is looking at all of the data and will address specific cohort issues. Commissioner Stoll specifically requested representation and full participation on the Team from someone with this expertise.

Commissioner Seguino asked if Hal Colston is essentially the Team leader and if Rebecca Haslam is replacing former Director of Equity Bell. In response, the Superintendent indicated Hal Colston will provide leadership and integrate equity work from P4C into the Team. Director Bell’s position has been redefined so that there is more practical, instructional application that gives teachers needed tools.

Senior Director Fuller commented that HR office does a lot more work on diversity and equity issues than hiring & retention, to include managing Title VI and other employee-focused work. The office also addresses equity issues that staff face, which are in many cases similar to issues students face. HR Office will often receive OCR & AOE requests for information in response to complaints.

Safe & Inclusive Schools – In response to an issue that Commissioner Berrizbeitia raised about Designated Reporters for students to go to whom they feel safe with, the Superintendent reported this will fall under the work of Director Sparks and more broadly, the Equity Team.

Equity Team and Equity Council names will be changed/merged.

Public member Betsy Ferris asked a question about words “diversity & equity.” About 8 years ago, she did dozens of interviews with students about climate and inclusion. Biggest concern(s) expressed were around economics/social class. She asked if this is an equity issue as well. Commissioner Seguino clarified that Committee has five categories that it oversees and are being tracked through data to look at disparities.

7. Climate Plan Update

In response to the Board resolution that requests the Superintendent to develop a work plan on improving racial climate, the Superintendent requested Commissioner thoughts

YAW OBENG SUPERINTENDENT

on designing this plan. Commissioners noted that the plan should be designed in response to the issues raised in the complaint, and focus on climate issues. It was noted that the goal of the Equity and Inclusion Report was to have had a climate survey, and that such a survey could be useful in this work plan. In general, the commissioners identified areas that should be addressed in such a plan to include a safe and expedient process for resolving situations that would mirror restorative approach that we are taking with students.

An additional suggestion was to incorporate self-reflection and improvement into staff learning processes.

Public member Robert Appel spoke about history with District, which has historically lacked skill and will to break down racial and other barriers. He indicated this involves both restoration and accountability and recommended that the District put time frames in place to prevent drifting of issues.

Commissioner Seguino noted that the resolution requests reports and updates. A timeline for completion of the work plan and its progress would be helpful for Board moving forward.

8. Equity & Inclusion Report

Senior Director Irish presented the report for 2015-16 to the Committee. This report, he noted, also included a comparison with outcomes in earlier years.

Commissioner Seguino described the history of the report. Commissioners expressed serious concern that outcomes are going in wrong direction and disparities are greater now than 3 years ago in several categories.

One area where results are not comparable over time, it was noted, is standardized tests. SBAC tests have replaced NECAPs as the new basis for measuring achievement.

Other comments: Report provides good basic tool for District in monitoring progress. The results in the report reflect the toxic environment that kids are in and accountability is vital. Leadership is most important ingredient.

9. Restorative Practices Update

Director Sparks outlined progress on implementing restorative practices in the District. The goal is a complete transformation leading to systemic changes in policies and procedures that are uniformly applied across the District.

Training is being undertaken to promote trauma-informed decisions. There are also efforts towards a coordinated approach for elimination of out of school suspensions. The high school has ended in-school suspensions, and instead has created a staff and student

YAW OBENG SUPERINTENDENT

support room. The new administrative team at high school is fully engaged and supportive of this work.

This is a 5-year process, with opportunity for community conversations to get feedback and input. The process will include a plan for annual evaluations.

10. Student Voice Proposal – It was agreed that this item would be tabled, given the length of the meeting, and will appear on the October agenda.

11. Superintendent Goals - Indicators on Goals Related to D&E Committee

The committee requested the chair to work in conjunction with the Superintendent to identify indicators for D&E related goals.

12. Adjournment

A. *Motion (L. Berrizbeitia/M. Stoll) to adjourn at 9:45 p.m.*

YAW OBENG SUPERINTENDENT
