

## MINUTES

Eugene School District 4J Equity Committee  
Parr Room—200 North Monroe Street  
Eugene, Oregon

April 28, 2009  
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Michael Carrigan, Jim Garcia, Alicia Hays, Sarah Lauer, Sarah Ross, Guadalupe Quinn, Jerry Rosiek, Twila Souers, Bruce Stiller, Surendra Subramani, Peter Tromba, Maria Thomas, Misa Joo, Sascha Cosio, Arbrella Luvert, members; Carmen Urbina, Carl Hermanns, Celia Feres-Johnson, Linda Smart, Cheryl Linder, 4J staff; Rebecca Flynn, guest.

### Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter convened the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

### Public Comment

Rebecca Flynn, with the Safe School for All Kids Campaign, asked for feedback from committee members about the efficacy of 4J's anti-bullying policy and any suggestions they might have for improving it. She said the campaign was working to have a strengthened anti-bullying law passed by the legislature, which would require all school districts to have an anti-bullying/anti-harassment policy in place and each district and school to have a designated individual to whom students and parents could report incidents. She said the law would also identify several categories of students who were disproportionately impacted by bullying: students of color, rural students, students with disabilities and gay and transgender students. She indicated that passage of the law was almost certain and districts across the State perceived 4J's policy as being a particularly effective model. She distributed a sign-up sheet for those who wished to become involved in the initiative.

Mr. Peter suggested that the May meeting agenda could allocate time for a more comprehensive discussion between Ms. Flynn and the Equity Committee on the subject of anti-bullying policies.

Mr. Stiller said most 4J schools were engaged in efforts to prevent bullying, but those efforts could be more effective.

Ms. Quinn encouraged Ms. Flynn and the campaign to solicit the perspective of families, particularly Latino families.

### Human Resources Conversation

Ms. Feres-Johnson provided information in response to the committee's questions about retention of staff with specific skills sets pertaining to high priority instructional goals such as bilingual, bi-cultural, technology initiatives and cultural competency. She said the committee had expressed concern about the potential loss of minority teachers who had been hired within the past two or three years. She said the district's fiscal shortfall would have a dramatic impact on teachers last hired in the district and her data indicated that the highest concentration of minorities was hired in the last two years. She was unable to say to what extent those teachers would be impacted and said several

factors were considered in displacements or reduction in force, including seniority, licensure, special qualifications, relevant district experience, increased level of training and affirmative action goals.

Ms. Feres-Johnson explained that contract provisions allowed the district to retain a minority teacher when the choice was between two similarly situated teachers with the same seniority date and the district had an affirmative action goal. She said in the last four months Human Resources had conducted a comprehensive review of existing recruitment practices and found that they had an unintentional effect of excluding minorities from the hiring process. As a result of that finding the district had developed a draft recruitment plan and Human Resources was requesting a subcommittee of the Equity Committee to assist with a review of the draft plan. She noted that a retention plan for employees did not currently exist and the draft recruitment plan would include a retention model.

Mr. Garcia, Mr. Tromba, Ms. Smart, Ms. Cosio, Ms. Joo and Ms. Souers volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to review the draft recruitment plan.

Mr. Garcia asked if the criteria considered in a reduction in force were equally weighted. Ms. Feres-Johnson replied that some factors, such as licensure, seniority and special qualifications, were given greater weight.

### **Update – Student Survey**

Mr. Stiller distributed copies of the *School Climate Survey* and asked for feedback on the form. He hoped to finalize the form and administer it to middle school students in time to obtain results by mid-May. He said staff was supportive of the effort to acquire more definitive data on bullying and harassment.

Mr. Peter suggested eliminating the word “physical” in question 11. He commented that sometimes offensive terms like “retard” and “gay” could be used, but not specifically directed at a student with a disability or who was gay. He said a list of terms that were regarded as offensive when used conversationally could be included in the survey.

Ms. Joo agreed that words like “retard” and “gay” in the lexicon of middle school created an unsafe environment, regardless of intent.

Mr. Stiller said he could add an item regarding offensive language to the survey. He asked committee members to email their suggestions to Ms. Urbina or him.

Mr. Garcia wanted to see a question in the survey that asked if students felt supported by the building culture and the existing policies were responding to them.

Mr. Stiller remarked that students did not necessarily want action when they reported an incident; they needed to be listened to, counseled and helped to deal with the event. He said parents more often were the ones who demanded action. He said there could be an additional question asking if the student’s school addressed bullying in a way that improved the situation.

Mr. Hermanns said the question should try to determine if the student felt the school culture made it clear that bullying and harassment were not acceptable.

Ms. Joo said her experience was that a student’s reluctance to have action taken meant they did not feel the climate was supportive, but when adults acted and students saw the process was working they began to welcome action. She said it was important that schools have the skills to act effectively on behalf of students in order to create a safe climate.

Mr. Rosiek suggested asking students if they would turn to the school for help if they were being harassed.

Mr. Tromba cautioned against making the form too lengthy or complicated to retain the attention of a 12-year old.

### **Update – Federal Race/Ethnicity Changes**

Ms. Urbina stated that school districts had received a federal mandate through the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to change data collection methods by 2010-11. She said the intent was to better capture data for the Latino community because it was currently under-represented. She said the new method would be a two-part question; the first part would ask if a person was Latino or Hispanic and the second part would ask the person to identify their race. She said federal race categories were American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, African-American, White, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander or declined to report. She said declining to report race meant that when the data was reported to ODE it was sent back to the district as an error.

Ms. Urbina said 4J currently captured primary and secondary race categories and that was how the equity report was structured, but when that data was reported to ODE it flagged those with a primary and secondary race as multi-racial instead of identifying the primary race category. That meant many students who were now identified in a specific racial category would only be identified as multi-racial. She said 4J, Springfield and Bethel school districts and Lane ESD were meeting to discuss how to address the problem. She said ODE was not in favor of the new methodology but had to comply with the federal mandate. Letters had been sent from superintendents to ODE, education organizations and the legislature explaining the problems and ramifications of the new race/ethnicity reporting requirements. She said similar efforts were occurring across the State.

Ms. Ross said one thrust of the multi-racial movement was to allow people to indicate race/ethnicity categories that were true to their heritage, but that could present problems with identifying and tracking development of certain populations.

Ms. Urbina commented that the 2010 census would ask separate questions about Hispanic origin and race and each question included a number of choices. She shared the district's current statistics related to students identifying multiple racial categories and noted that under the new system those students would fall into a multi-racial category and no longer be identified under specific racial categories.

Ms. Souers suggested sending a formal letter to the State Board of Education and raising concerns with national education groups.

Ms. Urbina encouraged the individual groups with which committee members were involved to also communicate their concerns. She would provide examples of the letters being sent by others.

Mr. Rosiek observed that separating ethnicity from race could be perceived as an effort to disrupt the political solidarity of Latinos/Hispanics.

Ms. Hays stressed the importance of educating decision-makers about the implications of the new reporting system.

### **Update – SPED**

Ms. Linder discussed the district's flag for disproportionality. She said the district recognized there was disproportionality among groups and there was an ongoing review of practices, policies, procedures, evaluation tools and all other aspects to determine if there was inherent bias in any of them. She related that the State had flagged the district as being significantly disproportionate in the area of Native Americans who were eligible under the category of emotional disturbance (ED), based on an analysis of the annual report of data on students who were eligible under the various categories for special education (SPED). She said there were 129 Native American students eligible for SPED and of those 13 students were eligible under the ED category, meaning that a Native American student in 4J was 4.5 times more likely to be declared eligible under ED.

Ms. Linder said her task was to verify the data and determine whether it was accurate. There appeared to be discrepancies between the ESIS student information system and the ODE data reporting system, resulting in discussions about how the district determined ethnicity. She said Education Support Services would pull the records on about 2,600 students and talk to parents to determine how accurately race/ethnicity information had been captured in the system. The implication for the district was that 15 percent of funds for 2009-10 had to be reallocated for early intervening services to assure that students were not being placed in inappropriate SPED categories.

Ms. Urbina announced that Larry Sullivan would attend the committee's May meeting to provide additional information on the issue.

In response to a question from Mr. Peter, Ms. Linder said there had been several iterations of the district's IEP system and by next year all of that information would be in ESIS. That would allow a more comprehensive analysis of data on an ongoing basis and give buildings the capacity to be proactive.

Mr. Peter asked if the district could maintain its current system of identifying students and still comply with new ODE reporting requirements.

Ms. Urbina said states had considerable flexibility in implementation and districts were lobbying ODE to allow them to retain two systems in order to capture the detailed data they needed on students, but report to ODE in the federally mandated format. She would provide the committee an update at the next meeting.

In response to a question from Ms. Souers, Ms. Linder said she had begun a review of information on the 129 American Indian students and thus far a comparison of how data had been coded in separate databases had identified two of the 13 students where information was discrepant.

Mr. Rosiek asked if there was an acceptable rate of misdiagnosis and how long it would take to get to the capacity where there was no longer disproportionate representation. Ms. Linder replied that ODE required 100 percent accuracy. She said the district was moving quickly to ensure that there was no misrepresentation in the data; moving into the ESIS system would eliminate some of the variables that occurred in the past. She said back-up systems would be developed to mitigate some of the inherent human errors.

Mr. Rosiek stated that it was morally unacceptable to make misdiagnoses of students from vulnerable populations that compromised their educational futures and until the capacity existed to assure that those students were diagnosed correctly, those diagnoses should stop. He said the rhetoric of disability had historically been used to inform racism and marginalize certain populations.

Mr. Hermanns said Mr. Sullivan could explain how the district approached the problem at the May meeting.

Ms. Smart questioned how students were identified in particular categories. She said the information provided by parents when they registered their children was often very inaccurate and incomplete.

Mr. Stiller described tiered intervention models that had been recently implemented. He said a factor that contributed to misidentification was a flawed perception of disabilities.

### **Equity and Diversity Strategies Input/Dialogue**

Ms. Luvert distributed a document containing recommendations for the district to develop a comprehensive equity/diversity plan. She also provided a Community Input Form to solicit feedback from committee members on the recommended strategies under each of the cultural diversity goals. She said the recommendations were the culmination of three years of work and analysis of the Tripod data, which represented responses from about 8,000 students in four high schools. She said a summary of findings indicated that at least 40 percent of Eugene students from all racial groups disagreed that race had almost no effect on how students treated each other. She reviewed the data and related findings and listed general conclusions:

- To varying degrees all racial groups perceive differential treatment from peers on the basis of race
- All racial groups, except white, agree that talking more about race and ethnicity would improve their schools; however, those that agree were not the majority
- Across all climate and youth culture questions presented, racial differences persist
- Black students experience the highest level of perceived differential treatment and feelings of alienation, black students report the highest level of agreement that people who got high grades think of themselves as too special, black students also exhibit more fears for their personal safety and lower levels of trust in other students

Ms. Luvert said differential treatment on the basis of race appeared to be a characteristic of the school climate in Eugene, but much deeper analysis was needed to draw more conclusions as to why. She said the cultural diversity goals were:

1. Review and update policies
2. Increase educational access systemically
3. Academic press for racial group equity
4. Training
5. Parent Involvement
6. Hiring, recruitment, retention

Ms. Luvert reviewed the proposed strategies related to Goal 1 and determined that the goal and strategies were supported by Equity Committee members.

Ms. Urbina proposed an additional meeting in May to continue the discussion of goals and strategies. She said she would send the Tripod data to committee members and poll for a meeting date.

Ms. Luvert encouraged committee members to review the documents and provide their feedback.

### **Update – Meadowlark/Buena Vista**

Mr. Hermanns reported that he had met with staff of Meadowlark/Buena Vista to discuss reports from parents that their multi-racial children felt uncomfortable with the school environment. He said the

principal felt an immediate response was essential and one of her actions was to put in place an exhibition from the Community Alliance of Lane County (CALC) called Shared Communities, Mixed Identities, which focused on multi-racial issues. He said the exhibit included pictures of a diverse range of people from the community with a short narrative by each person who was pictured. He said teachers reported that it was somewhat difficult for students to relate to some of the information because the narratives were written for an adult audience. He said more problematic feedback came from a group of parents who strongly objected to the picture of a transgendered person in the exhibit and the accompanying narrative with the terms “queer community” and “sexual identify.”

Mr. Hermanns said the principal recognized that she had not prepared the community or teachers well enough prior to installing the exhibit. He said the exhibit was temporarily placed at the Education Center while a workshop was conducted for staff and that would be followed by a meeting with parents. He said CALC had agreed to work with those depicted in the exhibit to rewrite narratives to be more appropriate for an elementary school audience.

Ms. Urbina said that CALC was fully involved in the process from the beginning and the exhibit would be replaced at the school with elementary age-appropriate information in mid-May. Representatives of the gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/transgender/queer (GLBTQ) community were also involved in discussions. She said a curriculum to help teachers interact with students was also being created.

Mr. Stiller commended Meadowlark/Buena Vista staff for working through the process and addressing their concerns about their relationships with parents.

Ms. Lauer thanked Ms. Urbina and Mr. Hermanns for their efforts to make the process transparent and inclusive. She said the situation had highlighted the importance of including GLBTQ issues in diversity training and the need to develop a common language for discussing those issues.

Ms. Hays commended those involved in resolving the situation and noted that Superintendent Russell had given a speech on GLBTQ and diversity that was very inspiring. She asked what role the Equity Committee might have in assuring that the efforts at Meadowlark/Buena Vista moved forward.

Mr. Tromba suggested that the committee could send a letter to the principal acknowledging her efforts.

Ms. Hays asked that the next meeting agenda include a discussion for how the principal could be acknowledged by the Equity Committee.

Ms. Ross remarked that her daughter was a teacher at Meadowlark and the exhibit had served to bring about a greater understanding of the GLBTQ community.

Mr. Rosiek and Ms. Souers also commended district staff for addressing the situation constructively.

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

*(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)*