

## MINUTES

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

May 26, 2009  
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Paul Bessemer, Michael Carrigan, Alicia Hays, Sarah Lauer, Arbrella Luvert, Sarah Ross, Guadalupe Quinn, Larry Soberman, Twila Souers, Bruce Stiller, Maria Thomas, Akasha Vitelli, Jane Waite, members; Carmen Urbina, Carl Hermanns, Linda Smart, 4J staff; Rebecca Flynn, Julie Tessey, Susan Kwashma, Christine Tofte, Hank Schramm, Don Harkins, Christina Parker, Heidi \_\_\_\_\_, Matt Kennett, Laura Brown, Anthony Tessey, Susan Dwoskin, Rosemary Gray, guests.

### Welcome and Introductions

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

### Public Comment

Mr. Peter limited public comments to two minutes per person because of time constraints. Ms. Hays clarified that it was the committee's intent to hear the comments, but not to engage with the public in conversation during the meeting.

Rebecca Flynn of Safe Schools for All Students Coalition reminded the committee that she had spoken at the last meeting about an anti-bullying bill going through the state legislature that would toughen the current law. She had asked committee members to look at the bill, which had passed the House, and passed out of the Senate Education Committee unanimously, was now waiting for a Senate vote and the Governor's signature. She brought a copy of the two-page bill, as amended by the House of Representatives, and she passed around a copy of the current 4J policy that her coalition would like to use as a model for the rest of the state. She had marked in red changes that needed to be made to match the new law. She stressed that better than punishing bullies was preventing bullying in the first place, so that up-front training with the diversity plan and including issues about lesbian and gay students and their parents would be warranted.

Chris Tofte commented on the proposed cultural diversity plan, as a mother of three children, two of mixed race and one Anglo gay son. She said she was both dismayed and impressed with the plan because it systematically put into place things to protect her mixed race children, but ignored the gay child. Since GLBTQ students were known to be at risk both socially and emotionally, she felt they needed to be included in the diversity plan.

Don Harkins, parent of two children who attended Buena Vista Meadowlark School, expressed his opposition to the photo array that had gone up at the school. He felt the array introduced a controversial issue to students at an inappropriate age. Children aged 5-12, he said, needed to learn from their parents and church leaders about such issues, and he felt an inappropriate message was being conveyed. He commented that the 4J Department of Education's guidelines had been ignored on this subject, which stated that gender orientation was not to be discussed until grade 9. There were also questions of first amendment right violations, he said, which said that non-religion would not be given

preference over religion. Also there was no opt-out clause, which he felt would satisfy many parents. He was also concerned that parents were not consulted before the array was put up. He was glad that the array had come down and wanted it to remain down.

Christina Parker commented about the mature content displayed in one of the photos of the array. She welcomed the diversity and cultural background wholeheartedly. She had a 7-year-old in school with whom she was not comfortable bringing up issues of sexuality at his young age. She felt it was a subject that should be brought up at home at a later age.

Matt Kennett stated he had a daughter at Meadowlark, and was concerned about the age-appropriateness of the photo array. All preferences were okay with him, though he found the material inappropriate for the ages of students present at the school. He felt the earliest appropriate age would be grades 8 or 9.

[REDACTED] remarked that she was happy for her child to attend Buena Vista because she valued diversity, but she felt the material presented in the photo array was not appropriate for elementary students. The main concern for her, she said, was gender issues and she especially disliked the word “queer.” Without that particular photo, she was happy about the rest of the display.

Laura Brown shared the concerns that had been stated by the other parents, though she was also upset that parents had not been considered or heard in the matter. She said that parents were told that one side wanted it up and that was all that mattered, not what the parents thought about it. Her daughter would have had to miss the last two weeks of school in order to miss seeing the photo array. Ms. Brown felt that everyone needed to work together to decide which values and issues were presented to the children. She wanted her children to value people and not the activities that the people were engaged in. She felt that the word “queer” would be used in wrong ways on the playground, and then children would be in trouble.

Julie Ann Tessey, mother of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader at Meadowlark, said she felt it inappropriate to introduce such issues at an age of innocence. She disagreed with the captions that were placed under the photos, and the introduction of the concept of “queer” into the language of a young child. She said that her gay friends would be appalled at the use of that word. She felt that all people had differences and needed to be acknowledged and respected. She wanted the objectionable captions removed from under the photos.

Susan Dwoskin said she had asked for the CALC exhibit to come to River Road after spring break, and was told it would not happen because of the issues at Meadowlark, but that she would hear again about when it would be brought to River Road. She had been teaching for over a decade in the school, she said, and she knew there were kids in the school with issues about who they were in terms of gender issues that they were not allowed to bring up anywhere, and that they were frightened children. Having an exhibit at the school, she felt, would represent a right of these children to feel they were not a separate or denigrated part of the community. She wondered if the exhibit would be coming to River Road.

Rosemary Gray addressed the issue of bullying and how words could be hurtful to students. As a supervisor of student teachers and educator for over forty years, she had been in elementary, middle and high school and also college classes, and in all levels she had heard words used that denigrated and disenfranchised students in different ways. Bullying was always hurtful, she said. Forty years ago, she said, she heard two little girls be called fairies, which they could not understand, and four years ago in a grade 2 classroom she heard a student be called a fag. The words had changed, but the hurt remained the same, she said. The most hurtful language in verbal harassment today, she commented, had to do with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and students of

special needs. The words “queer,” “fag,” “dyke,” or “retard,” were hurtful and all students needed to be safe and receive equitable education, she said.

### **Review Diversity and Equity Recommendations**

Mr. Peter clarified that the district had been going through a process of mapping investments and commitments made to issues of equity. Based on that work, he said, Ms. Luvert had put together a strategic plan which would be gone through systematically today, giving feedback on items and suggesting other items to be included.

Ms. Luvert commented that she was open to all input and that she hoped the process would help the district’s programs to become more inclusive and equitable for all. She passed around a copy of a PowerPoint report of Tripod data from the four Eugene high schools. Data showing academic achievement by race was presented, and she noted that with new requirements at the University of Oregon for a 3.2 GPA for admission, many minority students would not be able to meet those requirements under current circumstances. She noted that in general racial minority students, except for Asians, showed lower learning advantage in their home environments, with Black, Hispanic and Arabic students showing the lowest levels of advantage and generally lower GPAs than for white students. In addition, she said, students of all racial groups other than whites agreed that more discussion about race and ethnicity at school would improve their situations.

Ms. Luvert reviewed a list of goals, including #1 revising language to update policies, #2 increasing access and educational opportunities by eliminating systemic barriers for minority groups who were under-enrolled in rigorous coursework, such as algebra, TAG, honors and AP classes.

Mr. Peter clarified that the report said there were persistent gaps between the academic performance of African American, Latino, and Native American students when compared to their white and Asian peers. As well, he said, those students were more likely to be suspended, and more likely to be identified for Special Education, and less likely to be identified for talented and gifted programs. These patterns had been persistent, he said, with very little improvement over time.

Ms. Luvert continued with recommendation #3 considering academic stress for racial group equity, with equity meaning all students having equal opportunity to achieve at high levels, which might require an unequal distribution of resources and services to address the diversity of student needs. Goal #4 regarded training, she said, to assure the integration of multicultural and English language learner components to district level training. Goal #5 regarded parent involvement, goal #6 was about hiring, recruitment and retention, and #7 regarding the complaint process, how to resolve issues and concerns.

Responding to a question from Maria Thomas, Mr. Hermanns explained that the district was facing serious budget cuts, but that foundations had been set that should allow moving forward with the equity goals. Instruction was being reorganized, he said, with two specific overlays – 1) access to general education and 2) equity. He did not believe that budget cuts would impact the carrying out of these priorities.

Next the committee considered the many recommendations for each of the goals, with the following comments.

For Goal 1 about updating policy language, Ms. Waite commented on recommendation #1, that she would like to see policy updated just to reflect the highest possible level of equity, a broader base than was being recommended.

Ms. Luvert responded to a question from Ms. Lauer about #7, “All types of harassment should be

included – put this on the level of ‘weapons’ – that where there were signs at schools explaining that weapons were not allowed, that it should also be posted that verbal harassment would not be tolerated either. About #3, she clarified that at all levels of administration, staff should be evaluated for cultural competency, so that they were prepared to deal with diversity issues.

Responding to a question from Ms. Tofte, Ms. Luvert said that “cultural diversity” meant all forms of diversity, including the GLBTQ community. Ms. Tofte suggested that in #11 be added that GLBTQ issues would be integrated into the curriculum as well.

Ms. Waite offered for #2 that training should be ongoing or at least sequential as one offering was never enough. For #3 she suggested looking at the Institute for Educational Leadership, a document called “Cultural Competency for Educational Leadership,” which she would send to Ms. Luvert. For #4 and #5 she wondered about the term “cultural responsiveness” which she felt would put onus on the students, and she would prefer a term like “cultural fluency or proficiency” rather than “responsiveness.”

Ms. Tofte noted that at her school, River Road Elementary, their training had separated diversity training from GLBTQ issues. She wanted to be assured that GLBTQ issues would be included in district trainings.

Ms. Thomas asked about #3 and 4 what the outcome would be for non-performance.

Ms. Waite commented on #6, about contract language that reflects common support of increasing diversity and cultural competency, that it be seen as not only support in the contract, but also a kind of prerequisite to the supplemental questions. She was not sure if this was possible. For #7 she asked that LGBTQ issues be included, noting that sexual harassment was different from gender identity or orientation. For #9 Ms. Waite asked that the content of the recommendation be more specific. For #10 she wondered if the district could use supplemental questions to make it a very strongly required skill set for staff.

Ms. Parker asked about #11, how this would be introduced and implemented. Ms. Luvert responded that the actual recommendation had an area of responsibility in front of it, and that it would be the job of the directors who established the curriculum or instructional adoption to address these issues. Ms. Waite reminded the committee that she developed an equity rubric for evaluating curriculum along with a language arts adoption, and since then it had been created as a more standard curriculum rubric and she would be happy to share it. Ms. Tofte requested that GLBTQ curriculum also be offered in the multi-cultural education norm.

Mr. Peter commented on #12, that there was a perception that current contracting was creating an absence of opportunities for some businesses. Ms. Luvert replied that for any money coming in or going out of the district, an analysis needed to be done on who was or was not benefiting. Mr. Peter remarked that this was a very complex undertaking with all of the various district contracts, so he wondered if a subcommittee could look at this, though he guessed that with the many contracts with hundreds of businesses it would need to be explored whether that data was currently summarized or what the load would be. Ms. Luvert suggested that it be added as a data point for Equity review.

Mr. Peter questioned about #13 that as part of the recording it would be good if the data was disaggregated at the building level so it could be presented both as aggregated and disaggregated. Ms. Waite wondered if this would be the place for leadership around regular meetings concerning what was being done for failing students. She had had some discussion about creation of a form for all teachers to track what was being done for students who were falling behind.

Ms. Quinn expressed her concern that when the word “staff” was used that it be known which staff

were included. She noted that classified staff were often not included in a lot of data, even those who worked directly with kids. Ms. Luvert noted that the last sentence in recommendation #13 addressed classified staff. Mr. Stiller said he did lots of trainings with staff, and that were financial obstacles for classified staff to be available on staff development days because they had to be paid extra to participate. Ms. Quinn said that for equity purposes, it was important to consider how to be inclusive of classified staff, especially those working with kids. Ms. Waite noted that all staff had been included in the two Eugene schools where she had been doing all-staff training. She saw it as a building level commitment to require participation by classified staff.

Ms. Souers felt it was important for key individuals, such as school secretarial staff, who were primary contacts with families, to have cultural training. Ms. Tofte suggested that community resources also include resources for GLBTQ students. She had been told that it was currently up to principals to decide if those resources would be available in their schools.

Moving into Goal #2, item #15, Mr. Stiller suggested adding the word “measurable.” Ms. Waite suggested that this recommendation be done at the classroom level, even the subject level, again tracking what was done for each student where there were problems. Ms. Vitelli hoped that, in setting goals for helping underperforming students, there would be some checks and balances for attendance and safety, noting that attendance was an important requirement for increased performance.

For #16, Mr. Bessemer requested inclusion of parents of LGBTQ students and possibly parents of students of color as well. Ms. Thomas suggested using “representation” from the different aspects of the community rather than just parents. Ms. Waite wondered why the Equity Teams were separate from Site Council. Ms. Luvert responded that there were already equity teams, and that this question would require a larger conversation.

For #17, Mr. Bessemer asked if math classes were currently officially being tracked and other classes not. Ms. Hermanns responded that there was no official tracking in the old sense of the word. He said that currently there was an algebra project being discussed for the middle and high schools that would increase the opportunities for all children. Mr. Peter noted that the main point addressed in this recommendation was that students of color may not be receiving the same access to AP and IB level classes, with a concern that academic rigor be available for all students. Mr. Bessemer said this idea was not clear from the way the recommendation was written. Ms. Waite remarked that the new state standards for math were making this recommendation critical.

For #18, Ms. Waite asked if this was a requirement. Ms. Aubrella responded that these were all recommendations which would go back to the directors. Mr. Stiller asked if #18 meant that each counselor would develop an action plan. Ms. Luvert responded that the vision was for each building to have an action plan, especially those with counselors. Mr. Still suggested then that this one be moved up to #16 with the Equity Teams developing the action plans.

For #19 Ms. Lauer suggested adding “retention” to signify students of color being retained, especially at the elementary level. Mr. Peter explained that the data reviewed as part of the equity report card was Special Education identification disaggregated by ethnicity. Within that, he said, there was disproportion within different specific categories. Mr. Soberman felt the tone could be amended by saying something like, “reviewing our referral process to be culturally sensitive for all.” Mr. Peter clarified that this suggestion meant to eliminate the phrase, “SPED to eliminate behaviors.” Mr. Stiller suggested using language around maximizing access for Special Ed students to General Ed classes, since that was what was wanted.

Mr. Peter noted that the law required that students have maximum access to the general curriculum. His concern was an increased probability that kids of color would be identified as eligible for Special Ed and that they were more likely to be identified in certain categories. Mr. Stiller responded that

then it was important to carefully review their referrals and evaluation process. Ms. Vitelli wanted to make sure to include requirements that all the schools had the tools, staff and resources for meeting the needs of all the students.

Ms. Waite suggested again the importance of tracking intervention, so that results of previous strategies could be assessed, and of making sure there were resources available for multiple levels of intervention, before referral to Special Ed, particularly at the secondary level. It was noted that there were currently tiered intervention models in academics and behavior, but they were only available in pockets and in certain subject matter and not in all levels, and that it was important to have a clear goal for intervention models to be available systemically.

For #20 Mr. Peter said he was not convinced that TRIPOD continued to be a good investment, and wanted careful evaluation of that to be made. Mr. Stiller suggested not specifying TRIPOD, but rather expressing a concept of using survey data to accomplish the goal, making it more general. He commented that it was being considered to alter the way TRIPOD was used to minimize the expense. Mr. Peter agreed with this idea. Ms. Waite suggested saying that sufficient evaluation tools/ data tools were needed that could be tracked over time.

For #22, Mr. Peter expressed strong support for this idea. Ms. Waite commented that at the high school level intervention needed a lot of support.

For Goal #3, recommendation #23, Mr. Peter asked what “audit of transcripts” meant. He guessed the idea was to carefully track students who were at risk with readiness to intervene. Ms. Luvert clarified that the earlier the need for intervention was identified and provided, the better the process worked, but how could kids who were not identified be tracked and supported. Mr. Peter expressed concern that, given small numbers in some schools, if reports were provided at 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grades and on a school basis, it might be possible to identify those who needed intervention. He noted that with very small numbers of students of color, there was a confidentiality issue. He said that every parent should have access to data on their child and data should be disaggregated on a school basis, with sensitivity for confidentiality. Ms. Waite iterated her idea about a standard form being developed for tracking intervention and failing students, with consistent expectations and accountability.

For #25 Mr. Bessemer wondered why a performance goal of 95% was used rather than 100%. Ms. Luvert agreed that the goal should be raised to 100%.

For #27 Mr. Soberman said he would be more interested in the outcomes of their learning rather than grade point averages, which he felt were somewhat arbitrary. Mr. Peter wondered what was meant by “encouraging through MSAN data.” Ms. Luvert responded that she had not found acceptable the idea of grade point averages being predictable based on race, and that there should be a goal of eliminating this situation. Mr. Stiller remarked that because GPA was used for college entrance, it probably made sense to include them along with benchmarks. Ms. Waite noted that the University of Oregon had raised its minimum GPA requirement to 3.0 and that automatic admission had risen from to 3.4, which was a significant shift.

For #28 Ms. Thomas asked if this was a policy, to which Ms. Luvert responded that it was being recommended to take a look at the situation, using all intervention tools, etc. Ms. Waite said that now there was the Big Bridge program, but she wondered how that could continue to be supported. Mr. Peter suggested that the language be fine tuned for more clarity on this recommendation. Ms. Waite added that a “D” grade was not considered a passing grade in any university.

For Goal 4, recommendation #29, Mr. Schramm suggested adding sexual orientation. Ms. Souers felt that a lot of this section was repetitive from the policies section.

For #31, 34, 35, 36 and 38, Ms. Tofte asked that sexual orientation and gender identity be included. Ms. Ross asked if class status was included anywhere, noting that kids suffered from generational poverty. Ms. Luvert said that there was often an assumption that equity only involved race. Ms. Tofte said her administrator had stated that diversity training would include only race issues. Mr. Peter clarified that ongoing problems regarding academic achievement, discipline, and Special Education identification had been taken from data that was disaggregated by ethnicity. He acknowledged that there were other issues that needed addressing, since harassment and discrimination data were also pointing out that schools were not always friendly environments for students.

For #33 Ms. Waite was concerned about the phrase, “especially regions with the largest diverse demographics,” feeling that it was important for everyone and not just the more diverse areas.

For Goal 5, Parent Involvement, Mr. Peter suggested that thought be given to providing information to parents to help them understand what consenting to evaluation of their child would mean.

For #39, Ms. Tofte requested that LGBTQ be added.

Responding to a question by Ms. Thomas about whether there was something included about parent evaluation of the school and staff, Mr. Peter said it was an issue that had been raised, and that there were currently no plans to allow parents to evaluate staff. He felt it was a hot issue that would evolve over the next year or two, and that it was a bargaining issue. Ms. Urbina commented that Title I offered an evaluation for parents, but it was only for Title I schools, which were elementary schools only. She said this was the goal of having a district-wide parent involvement policy.

Mr. Peter remarked that parents who were well educated, and who had time to be involved in the schools were likely to know who the best teachers were, where those parents who worked might not have the same knowledge. He knew that there was a website for South Eugene High School where parents could do some evaluation, but no current routine mechanism for either students or parents to evaluate teachers. Mr. Stiller felt it was a topic too big for tonight’s discussion.

For #41, Ms. Ross wondered what was meant by a multiracial parent committee, whether it was the multiracial community or a committee of parents of different races. Ms. Luvert responded that not only were multi-racial people needed, but people of multiple perspectives. Ms. Ross noted that the multiracial community would like to know how to help their kids be successful, and that the current data did not show how well the kids were doing. Even though information was collected, she said, there was no analysis done. Ms. Waite said that much work was being done to maintain the integrity of a multiracial, self-identified category at the state and national levels. Right now, she said, the category of multiracial was not a choice.

Ms. Tofte suggested for #41 that different terminology be used and perhaps say, “a parent advisory committee representing multiple perspectives” or something more all-inclusive. She also suggested for #43 that more inclusive language be used.

Responding to Ms. Waite’s question regarding what #45 meant, Ms. Luvert said that when the survey on tutoring was done, it was discovered that parents were not aware of support available in the building. The suggestion was, she continued, to target the supports within each building to people who needed it. For example, if African American students were not coming for tutoring, perhaps their parents did not know that tutoring support was available, so that some targeted mailings would be appropriate. Ms. Waite felt this was more an academic support item than intervention.

For the goal of Hiring, Recruitment, Retention, a math error was noted in #48 where  $64 + 26 = 90$  and not 100.

Regarding #50, Mr. Peter felt that some of the language could be strengthened, and it was confusing to him. Ms. Luvert clarified that some of these recommendations came from outside consultants in 2002-3. She agreed for #50 that rewriting could help clarify that when people of color were hired, they should not be expected to take on all diversity issues in the building without additional compensation. Ms. Urbina added that this was a key factor for retention of professional staff of color in the district.

For #55, Ms. Waite suggested adding tribal colleges.

For Goal #7 – Complaint Process Review, recommendation #60, Ms. Luvert clarified that it was about creating guidelines for the district's responding to and following up on harassment complaints that came to the board. Mr. Stiller suggested expanding this recommendation to include any kind of harassment, not just racial harassment, and he would delete the reference to Special Ed students. Ms. Luvert said that sometimes Special Ed students said inappropriate things that needed different responses than issues with other students. She agreed to rewrite this recommendation.

For #61, Mr. Stiller remarked that there was not an action identified.

For #64, Ms. Tofte suggested adding "or any derogatory language," to make the recommendation more inclusive.

For #66, Ms. Tofte suggested that teachers be trained on the complaint policy so that they would know what was expected of them when complaints arose. Mr. Stiller added that this training could happen during the teachers' in-service week before school began.

Ms. Luvert asked that people email her with any further suggestions. Gratitude was expressed to her for her good work.

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

Mr. Hermanns commented that there had been a parent meeting the last Thursday, and another meeting this morning to find a balance that respected all the divergent views expressed by parents and fell within the interests and mission of the district, to make sure that all children were safe and treated as part of the school community. A letter had gone out to all parents, explaining that a way was being sought to move forward constructively on this issue. The letter was read aloud. In the next few days, he said, more meetings would be held with other community groups.

#### **Update – Student Survey**

Mr. Stiller reported that version 7 of the survey had been completed and some good advice had been received. The proposal included a piloted survey this spring, using staff feedback to develop a further version that would be administered system-wide next year. Churchill High School and Kelly wanted to do the survey, he said, and he was recruiting other volunteers.

#### **Federal Race/Ethnicity Changes**

Ms. Waite reported that a letter had been drafted in support of some basic changes that had been outlined earlier. The letter was sent to all stakeholders that could be thought of in the United States. All sixteen superintendents were attempting to organize to retain the ability to keep a multiracial category for folks who self-identified as multiracial and those who were multiracial but perhaps identified as another ethnicity. As well, the requirements would be dropped for the two-part question on the Latino issue. No responses had been received as yet, she said, that she would be meeting

with the superintendent tomorrow to find out what next steps would be, and she would bring that information back to the committee. She added that quality trainings were being planned in case these changes did move forward. Ms. Urbina asked Ms. Waite to forward the drafted letter to her.

### **Special Education – Brief Update**

Ms. Urbina reported that Larry Sullivan would come to the June meeting and spend time updating this issue. The conversation was begun at the last meeting, and he had to leave early tonight, so it was agreed that he would report at the June meeting.

The next meeting was scheduled for June 18. Mr. Peter said he would be out of town then, and that Ms. Waite would chair the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

*(Recorded by Judy Burton)*