

MINUTES

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

January 22, 2008
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Andy Gottesman, Vice Chair; Jeralynn Beghetto, Michael Carrigan, Jim Garcia, Alicia Hays, Arbrella Luvert, Charles Martinez, Alan Merrill, Guadalupe Quinn, Jerry Rosiek, Larry Soberman, Bruce Stiller, Surendra Subramani, Maria Thomas, Helen Towle, Jane Waite, members; Carmen Urbina, committee staff; Superintendent George Russell; John Lenssen, consultant, Christina Greening, Terrence Greening, guests.

Welcome and Introductions

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

Public Comment

Christina Greening stated she was a member of the Eugene Human Rights Commission. She introduced her son Terrence, who was a student at South Eugene High School. She told the committee that an incident involving her son had caused her concern about the role of police in the schools. She asked why police were allowed to talk to minors in schools without first notifying parents or having parents present. She said that a young person would feel obligated to talk to a police officer. She was also concerned that schools freely shared student information with police officers. She said she and her son were both frightened and she had withdrawn him from school. She had come to the Equity Committee because both the police and school had been unresponsive to her questions and concerns.

Following a discussion among committee members, Mr. Peter said the incident to which Ms. Greening referred would need to be adjudicated by the district; however, the committee was interested in the concerns she had raised and would research the matter further. Committee members requested the information on the following:

- The district's policies related to police interaction with students
- Guidelines or criteria schools must follow regarding contacting parents
- Police department policies regarding interrogation of minors at schools
- State policies related to the above

Ms. Towle said she would research existing policies and report back to the committee.

Updates:

TRIPOD

Ms. Waite reported that a subcommittee had met and discussed concerns regarding how data would be used and how it would affect instruction.

Mr. Stiller said the next step was to schedule a meeting with Laurie Moses to address specific questions.

Human Resources

Ms. Towle distributed a form for collecting demographic information from current and new district employees. She reviewed the form and noted the section that allowed employees to identify two ethnicity categories and select the one that was reported to the State, which only allowed one to be reported for each person. She asked for feedback from the committee.

Ms. Towle explained that the questions related to proficiency in another language were intended to identify people who had language skills that the district could call upon for translation or interpretation. She said the question regarding disability allowed an employee to self-identify and would be used to establish a baseline against which the district could measure progress.

In response to a question from Ms. Waite, Ms. Towle replied that the question did not distinguish between cognitive and physical disabilities because the district was interested in any disability and she did not want to require employees to specify the nature of disabilities.

Ms. Hays pointed out who was self-reporting and what was considered a disability affect the statistics. Ms. Towle agreed, but she was not certain what would be a better approach than self-identification. She did not want the district to be involved in judging whether someone had a disability.

Mr. Rosiek agreed with Ms. Hays' concerns. He was not certain how useful the disability data would be, other than as a public relations tool, without a finer gradation of disability categories.

Ms. Towle said she had received feedback from similar groups both in support of and opposed to using disability categories for reporting. She said the intent of collecting the data was accountability, not public relations.

Ms. Waite said the ESD (educations service district) was interested in representation of disability diversity among students and she would send information to Ms. Towle.

Mr. Rosiek pointed out that there could be reporting options that allowed people to identify as disabled but opt out of reporting specific disability information and that could be useful to the district.

Ms. Towle said she would work with interested committee members to edit the form and consider revisions to the section related to disability reporting.

Mapping Diversity Efforts—District and Building

Mr. Peter said the Equity Committee had recommended last year that the district conduct a process to map the investments the district was making with respect to equity to bring greater

clarify to the efforts at the district and building levels to inform development of a strategic plan. He invited John Lenssen, the consultant conducting the assessment, to report on his progress.

Mr. Lenssen said the project had become a much larger task than originally envisioned and he would present a preliminary summary of the picture that was emerging as data was collected at district and building levels. He said the report would identify strategies and connect them to allocated resources. He said one of the valuable byproducts of the collection process was the dialogue that occurred at each building and the potential for follow-up conversations when the report was completed.

Mr. Lenssen said leadership for equity and diversity at the district level had many components and support for diversity strategies and programs had been internalized and taken on throughout the district organization. He said there was also a focus on leadership development and listed a number of efforts at the district level. He said there were multiple, significant diversity and equity initiatives at the district, including the parent/family outreach program and a project to redesign the process of assessing students who required special education and intervention and connecting that to the ELL assessment process. He said the district's focus on school improvement and closing the achievement gap had resulted in many schools incorporating significant diversity efforts in their school improvement initiatives. He reviewed other district efforts that were providing leadership.

Continuing, Mr. Lenssen stated that building level efforts were diverse and mixed. He said some schools had multiple plans and strategies in place and in some cases those were linked; at other school there were plans and strategies, but they were not necessarily linked. He said in some schools there might be one or two strategies in place. He reviewed various strategies and programs and how schools employed them.

Mr. Lenssen concluded by stating that mapping diversity and equity efforts would allow the district to move to the next level of accountability. He noted that many of the programs and strategies were not measurable and where measurement was possible it was not occurring. He cautioned that it take a significant commitment from the district to support and guide evaluation of programs at the building level. He said the mapping process had gathered a tremendous amount of information.

Mr. Peter asked if the report would be available for presentation to the School Board at its March 5 meeting. Mr. Lenssen said he expected to provide Superintendent Russell with a formal draft within three weeks. He said the report would be reviewed for accuracy and a final version issued about two weeks later.

Ms. Thomas asked if the report would identify activities by building. Mr. Lenssen said there would be a brief summary for each school.

Mr. Rosiek asked if the report would distinguish between curricular and pedagogical innovations and provide the information that would prevent a move to accountability to drastically narrow the concept of diversity. Mr. Lenssen said it was a challenging expectation to address that in the report with a degree of depth and complexity, but the report would make some of those distinctions.

Ms. Thomas asked if parents and students were being asked for feedback. Mr. Lenssen replied that the mapping process would not solicit that type of evaluation feedback.

Mr. Garcia commented that while there were many efforts under way, he was not certain there was a common understanding of the meaning of the terms "diversity" and "equity." He hoped the report would identify systems in the infrastructure that supported teachers and specify how various strategies and program were funded. He was interested in structural change. Mr. Lenssen said that would be part of the expanded focus on resources for programs and their sustainability. He agreed that buildings seemed to have different definitions of diversity and equity and approaches to incorporating those concepts.

Ms. Waite stated that she hoped the mapping report would not supersede the equity report and present an unrealistic picture of the diversity and equity in the district.

Ms. Quinn agreed with Mr. Garcia about the need for systemic change. She did not want diversity and equity to be dependent on the efforts of specific teachers in different buildings. She said the report could identify the efforts that were occurring while pointing out the need for a clear vision of diversity and a system approach to sustain those efforts.

Mr. Merrill agreed that diversity should not depend on the efforts of one teacher or administrator or community member and needed to be sustained by systemic support.

Ms. Thomas asked if the report would include statistics on graduation rates for youth of color. Mr. Lenssen agreed that was important information for the district and the Equity Committee, but it was not a part of the mapping report. Mr. Peter noted the equity report would include that information and data would be available for review at the committee's next meeting.

Mr. Stiller said data showed the district was making slow progress but had not yet reached its target. He said it was a daunting problem that would be difficult to solve.

Mr. Merrill hoped the report would identify the length of time a program had been implemented in a particular school.

Mr. Rosiek observed that the discussed seemed to indicate the committee's role with respect to the mapping report would be to compare programs to graduation rates for students of color or target populations. He cautioned against making that type of causal inference and said there were other ways to use the data. He said the report might help focus energies on particular efforts but should not attempt to make direct links between programs and outcomes.

Ms. Waite agreed with Mr. Rosiek's comments. She saw the mapping report reflecting attitude and site consciousness and culture. She said trying to track graduation rates was a difficult approach to evaluating programs.

Mr. Martinez favored thinking about outcomes in a more complex way and was concerned about an approach in which outcomes did not matter. He said that sometimes activities were designed for the appearance, developed in response to an incident and continued by tradition rather than efficacy. He said that measuring efficacy was a critical matter that required more in depth discussion.

Mr. Rosiek agreed it was important to examine programs in the context in which they arose and if a program claimed to achieve a specific outcome, such as graduation rates, that should be reported; however, it would be inappropriate to attempt to measure, for example, an African-American studies program on graduation rates. He was suspicious of any managerial group such as the Equity Committee undertaking an assessment of programs based on a narrow range

of outcomes instead of using information to promote and enhance efforts that benefited students but did not result in a measurable outcome.

Mr. Martinez suggested one approach could be to ask in the analysis about the purpose of programs and intended outcomes. He said if that question was not asked then the danger was that everything counted the same and that was not his perception of what was occurring in the district.

Mr. Peter commented that the conversation had set the stage for a discussion of the district and committee's roles in establishing a baseline expectation for school and improving efforts without stifling innovative programs.

Mr. Lenssen stated that his report would be presented to the superintendent, who would then decide how it would be disseminated. He thanked the committee for its discussion and reiterated that the report would not be drawing conclusions about causality and linking of programs and strategies to graduation rates. He said there could be measurability attached to many of the programs and strategies.

Ms. Luvert emphasized that the mapping process had been useful in stimulating discussions and consideration of diversity and equity at the building level.

Equity Committee Overview

Mr. Martinez stressed the importance of the Equity Committee's work to the School Board and said it had changed the district's culture in some significant ways. He said changes had brought more honesty to the discussion of equity challenges and transparency to the reporting and evaluation of data. He said the Board paid close attention to the committee and its work was reflected in the Board and superintendent's goals. As an example, he pointed out that the committee's work and expertise had helped focused district efforts on diversity in hiring

Shaping 4J's Future

Superintendent Russell said the report presented to the Board last week was continuing to evolve. He said the framework was based on the district's core values of excellence, equity and choice. He said the challenge was to assure that equity and choice together contributed to excellence and that was amplified by the district's declining student base and consequent reduction in resources. He said the declining enrollments also resulted in significantly changing demographics. He said there were likely more school buildings than needed, students were not evenly distributed through the district and the choice system exacerbated imbalances in student populations at schools.

Superintendent Russell said the Board would begin to consider how to address those challenges and provide direction to him in developing recommendations. He reviewed the goals and principles in the report. He indicated he favored neighborhood schools as a way to strengthen neighborhoods and parents also supported having a strong school in their neighborhoods. He said that sustainability was also identified as an important factor that the school should incorporate into its plans and programs.

Mr. Peter asked how the Equity Committee could help support or promote his efforts. Superin-

tendent Russell suggested the committee wait until final recommendations were made to the Board.

Mr. Rosiek said the language used to discuss the report was important and talking points would be developed and could be shared with the committee.

Ms. Hays asked for feedback on whether the student population of alternative schools should reflect the diversity of students in the *high school region* or the *district*.

Superintendent Russell remarked that the question was why an alternative school should not reflect the diversity of the district as opposed to the region if it was really a district-wide magnet school. He said region was originally identified because of the possibility of providing transportation for alternative schools and the cost of trying to do that on a district-wide basis versus a regional basis. He said another issue was giving priority to those in the region for those schools.

The committee discussed the significant difference between the distribution of free and reduced lunch students at the elementary and middle school levels compared to high school, which indicated that those exercising choice tended to be white and more affluent.

Ms. Waite remarked that the diversity of a school should reflect the area from which it drew its students.

Ms. Beghetto asked if there had been consideration of revising the lottery system. Superintendent Russell replied there had been changes to the lottery system, although there had not been a significant impact. He attributed that in part to the lack of transportation attached to choice.

Updates (continued)

South Eugene—Judy Sheppard Presentation

Ms. Urbina reported that South Eugene High School students had taken the committee's recommendations to heart and \$5,000 had already been raised to support the Judy Sheppard presentations on February 13. She said the evening presentation would be open to the public. She distributed a letter from students requesting sponsorships for the event.

Ms. Urbina announced that the Freedom Fund dinner was scheduled for March 8 and she would be asking members to join the district at that event.

Ms. Waite said the ESD was interested in filming Judy Sheppard's talk and sharing that with other schools in Lane County. Ms. Urbina said she would research whether that could be done.

Work Plan Update

This item was postponed due to lack of time.

Items for Next Meeting on February 26

- Equity PowerPoint presentation
- Report on policies related to police interaction with students at schools
- Continuing update on *Shaping 4J's Future*
- Completion of Equity Committee overview

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)