

MINUTES

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

November 25, 2008
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair, Jane Waite, Vice Chair; Paul Bessemer, Dan Davis, Carl Hermanns, Sarah Lauer, Arbrella Luvert, Charles Martinez, Alan Merrill, Laurie Moses, Brad New, Guadalupe Quinn, Jerry Rosiek, George Russell, Linda Smart, Larry Soberman, Twila Souers, Bruce Stiller, Surendra Subramani, Maria Thomas, Carmen Urbina, members; Malvina Holloway, guest.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Marshall Peter convened the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

II. Public Comment

There were no comments.

III. Update – TRIPOD Project

Laurie Moses introduced the fall report of the TRIPOD project by explaining it was a national consortium of schools and districts with a shared interest in raising achievement for all students while narrowing gaps among students from different racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds. This goal could be accomplished through strengthening classroom content or what is taught, pedagogy or the art of teaching and relationships between students and teachers. The project was started in 2001 by Dr. Ronald Ferguson of Harvard University from his work with Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) school districts.

She explained that certain learning conditions needed to be present in the classroom: 1) instruction and support making success seem possible, lessons being interesting and enjoyable, 4) teachers providing both support and press, and 5) peers being supportive. When students were engaged, she continued, they felt trusting and safe, behaved cooperatively, aimed to learn as much as they could, worked diligently, and achieved satisfaction and a sense of efficacy based on effort and progress. The methodology of the project used student and teacher surveys to collect data and analyze school climate and student engagement and then to prioritize interventions and actions aimed at raising achievement and narrowing gaps.

Ms. Moses commented that District 4J began participating in MSAN in 2004-05 and that in spring 2007 students completed the first survey. The following school year Tripod Project data teams were established, and a second survey was completed in the spring of 2008. In the current school year, she said, activities and changes were being implemented based on data from the surveys. She remarked that the Tripod Project provided opportunities to receive important feedback from students and to analyze the feedback so that changes could be implemented.

Ms. Moses reported that topics covered on the surveys included issues related to students'

engagement in the classroom, such as the level of enjoyment and the degree to which they hold back in engagement. As well, student perception of the classroom environment was surveyed in terms of what they said about teachers' demands, how much the teachers encouraged them, and their peer dynamics.

She said that from the survey this last year of about 4000 students in District 4J, it was learned that students rated classroom experience in 4J schools higher than the national average in all categories except for the area of diligence. They reported a positive culture for learning in classrooms in terms of peer support, low level of teasing between students and low levels of distraction in the classroom. For the issue of trust, students reported high ratings for teacher and peer support and encouragement.

In the area of diligence, Ms. Moses said there were four engagement targets focused in this area: 1) students pushed themselves to understand their class work, 2) they sought help and asked questions, 3) they were comfortable seeking help, and 4) they did not hold back from participation. Some areas needing attention, she noted, were teachers communicating their commitment to students to help them understand, teachers being successful at eliciting best quality work, teachers pressing for hard work, teachers aiming to have students think critically, teachers understanding the significance of believing that all students have the ability to learn.

Ms. Moses reported that fall activities had included taking questions and the data to 9th grade advisors, leadership classes and MSAN classes, exploring ways to increase student engagement through teaching and learning groups, where small groups of teachers gathered on a regular basis for professional development. As well, exploration was being done for increasing out of school support for students, and expanding cultural competence training for staff.

For other work in the district which was closely aligned with the Tripod project, she noted that all high schools had been working with a framework called Rigor and Relevance in the Classroom and that also there had been involvement with the Harvard Executive Leadership Group, focusing on classroom environment. She stressed the importance of continuing to work on helping teachers to believe that all students could learn.

Responding to a question by Ms. Waite regarding what an action step would be for helping teachers in this way, Ms. Moses said it meant continuing to focus on what was preventing teachers in engaging more fundamentally in this belief. Professional development in diversity and cultural awareness was one method.

Bruce Stiller asked if sequential data over a period of years was planned to be studied, and if the Tripod system would compare ongoing data. Ms. Moses responded that there was currently a shortage of data at the high school level, and that she very much wanted to continue collecting data. She added that more varied reports were possible to request, though they were costly.

Charles Martinez remarked that, having personally spent a lot of time doing quantitative research around student voices, he had a lot of concerns about how the data collected was being used and about inferences being drawn from a methodological standpoint. He also recognized the importance for the district to utilize the students' voices, though he felt it was necessary to be cautious about drawing conclusions. He noted that the national comparison was not based on representative sampling, so that district percentages were being compared to a sample rather than a national representation.

Another concern he expressed was the term "predictive," suggesting causality where it might be not actually true. He also mentioned that Johnny Lake had been working on a project related particularly to the success of African American students, and that it was hoped that some of the Tripod data could

be used to find some of the research questions that were important to the 4J district. He was hopeful that the Tripod project staff would be open to collaborating on such a program.

Jerry Rosiek expressed concern about how the Tripod data were collected and correlated. He wondered how much money was spent on the Tripod project, noting he had understood it to be in the six-figure range. Ms. Moses said the survey itself cost something under \$20,000 for each of the two years. Mr. Peter added that when staff time, training time, analysis time, and 4,000 student hours were factored in, the costs would be well into six figures.

Mr. Rosiek remarked that the focuses of the Tripod Project were compelling, the need for focus on instructional core that included content, pedagogy and relationships, especially since relationships were often left out of such data. His question was how Tripod led from the survey to any sort of knowledge and insight into changing relationships in the schools. The answer he understood was that data was given to the school staff who could discuss what they heard and perhaps learn some things from it. He was concerned about the analysis showing correlations from which to make inferences about investing money in the area of diligence. He did not believe, from what was presented, that the research bore out this inference, or that the survey instrument actually had validity at the level of the construct. For instance, what was the diligence being measured when a child was asked if he/ she was pushing him/ herself very hard? He said there had been much research to show that people had different strategies for protecting themselves against negative experiences, such as some tending to maximize their claims of success while others tending to minimize their successes. He saw no reason to believe this study was providing a valid inference.

On a more global level, Mr. Rosiek commented on a question in the survey about "My teacher makes me feel like he/ she cares about me." Again, he said, there was some feature of the students' attitudes or feelings being identified or relationship to school given as a cause of success or failure. One would need to know some history about the students' prior expectations about the classroom setting. For some students, he said, a very small act by the teacher, such as saying hello in the hallway, could be perceived as caring, while for others it would take a much bigger act to bring the same result. A different kind of question, he offered, might consider how much the teacher knew about the student or specific communities. He did not see a value in using the data presented by this project as an indicator for directing the staff of the district to attempt to raise the diligence score because he did not see the instrument of the survey being sufficiently refined to provide valid results.

Twila Souers expressed a concern about any research project as to whether it contained cultural references or biases. Because of cultural differences, Hispanic or Native American students might perceive concepts differently than white students.

Mr. Peter appreciated the points made and efforts of the Tripod Project. He said he believed students were a very important resource of information, though he expressed disappointment about the idea that teachers should be protected from this data. He felt that teachers should receive all feedback from students unless they somehow indicate they're too sensitive to receive it. Looking at the data, he thought it would be helpful to see it presented as a year-to-year comparison for 4J rather than a national comparison.

Responding to a question from Mr. Peter wondering if there was much variance between high schools, e.g., if students perceived there was more help after school at one school, Ms. Moses said that very similar trends were found in all the schools. She responded about the teachers receiving feedback, that approximately 50 teachers had asked to view the feedback about their classroom, while this past year approximately 200 teachers wanted to receive the feedback.

Ms. Waite mentioned that she had been doing staff development work in the south region of the district and had heard negative reactions from teachers about the Tripod Project. She said teachers

felt there was no validity to the data, which was surprising to her. She shared Ms. Souers's concern about cultural bias. She asked how Ms. Moses felt the project was working, if she felt she was receiving the staff engagement that was hoped for, and if she saw resistance from the staff.

Ms. Moses responded that staff engagement varied, and that her perception was that with the smaller schools in the north region helped the conversations move forward there, while the larger schools seemed more difficult. In answer to a question from Ms. Waite about the effectiveness of buy-in by staff concerning decisions based on the surveys, Ms. Moses said the amount of resistance varied from school to school. She said some staff felt the conversations coming out of the surveys were welcomed and others did not see the need for it. Ms. Waite clarified that she meant staff felt the survey tool was not valid, not that they did not want to talk about the issues.

Dr. Martinez said there would always be resistance, no matter how valid the tools were. He felt the most useful way data such as these could be helpful was when they launched direct connections between students and teachers, causing a focus on critical questions despite problems with the data themselves. He stressed that direct conversations with the students were very important. He said that a Latino Youth Survey had been conducted which was developed by district students. That survey, he said, reflected the voices of the students, and though imperfect, analyses and data derived from it were very indigenous. Its success, he felt, came from the power of hearing the students' voices in such a direct way. He felt the validity of the Tripod Project was more in initiating positive conversations rather than determining pathways to be taken.

Malvina Holloway, teacher from Madison Middle School, noted that one could find feedback about what students say about teachers on the internet. She hoped there would continue to be research done about instructional core and hearing the student voices, and that there could be some relevance to understanding what strategies helped with diligence and what the students perceived they were receiving.

IV. Update – Human Resources

Brad New remarked that he worked in High School Services where he coordinated counseling guidance services for K-12 students. His subject for this meeting was the Student Success Framework, noting that one of the responsibilities of the district was to have comprehensive plans in each school for encouraging student success. He said there was a lot of dialogue about academic rigor these days, and that the Student Success Framework was about all the other things that contributed to the success of students—academically, socially, personally—all the things that tend to come and go depending on who was in charge, what programs were currently funded, or what support and services was emphasizing at the moment.

Mr. New explained that a grant from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) supported this work, and that this year was the design phase of the project, with the challenge being to figure out the direction the district wanted to take. He noted that no matter how wonderful the instructional strategies were, if a student came into the classroom unprepared to learn, there would be no success. He said the program was about creating a holistic system of services for students within the community of administrators, counselors, teachers, and others. The guidance curriculum, he shared, consists of activities presented through classroom lessons, group activities, school presentations, community events and parent workshops, and was developed around four developmental domains: academic, career, personal-social and community involvement. He pointed out that skills and strategies were presented to help students gain confidence and resilience, such as listening skills in elementary classes, student-led conferences in middle school and test-taking skills for high school students. He described his job as building a structure in the district where each school had a plan with strategies for supporting students.

Mr. New presented data from a program in Missouri in schools with substantial minority student enrollment. He showed how in schools with more comprehensive school guidance programs had better academic, career, and social/emotional outcomes, such as fewer discipline problems, higher attendance rates, greater likelihood to graduate from high school and to attend four-year colleges.

He clarified that the Student Success Framework was to be a four-year project. He said the design portion this year would include how to interest schools in understanding the project. There were two demonstration schools, he said, where methods would be developed on how to help school staff and administrators learn the strategies of the project.

Ms. Waite asked what strategies there might be for reaching all students, because she understood that most programs did not reach all students. Mr. New responded that it was through working with individuals to build understanding of the goals and purposes. He noted that this year he had been doing professional development with counselors, which had not existed in the past. He felt it would take some time to bring a central focus to the network of counselors who had all come from different backgrounds and trainings. One strategy called Motivational Interviewing was about how to put a student in charge of fulfilling their goals, to help them investigate and discover their purpose. An emphasis would be placed on developing an esprit de corps with counselors about their own purpose and providing unified trainings.

Ms. Waite noted that the Educational Trust had resources that might be helpful.

Responding to a question by Carmen Urbina about how many counselors came from the University of Oregon, Mr. New thought it was quite small.

Bruce Stiller said he was in his 22nd year working for the district, and during that time counselors in elementary schools and most middle schools disappeared during times of budget cuts. Now they were coming back, he noted, with most elementary schools having a half-time or full-time counselor and better representation in the middle schools. He said the counselors who had been hired more recently were better trained than earlier counselors, and he felt very positive about the work of the Student Success Framework. He noted that skillful, trained counselors were needed in all schools, and especially to support students who were struggling. He wondered how it could be made easier for all schools to have counselors.

Mr. New agreed that a first priority was to have counselors in every school, and to have a positive student-to-counselor ratio.

V. Gang Related Information Update

Chief Security Advisor to 4J, Dan Davis, commented that in the 1980's there was significant gang-related activity in the Portland area, which gave reason for concern to the Eugene community. At that time community groups, school districts, police, juvenile justice and others came together to gather information about gangs, bringing knowledgeable people from Portland and Seattle to share information from the bigger cities. As a result of these meetings, gang activities in the Eugene area had pretty much dissipated, with success continuing for a number of years. As other priorities emerged within the community, gang activity lost focus until the present time where there was now again some gang activity, especially in the Springfield area.

Mr. Davis noted that things had changed with gangs since the 1980's when gang members tended to wear blue or red clothing to identify themselves. Now, he said, special colored clothes were not worn nor was there as much organized drug activity. Current gang activity was in a very loose format, he remarked. He felt that as the community organized again to deal with gang activity, it would be possible to manage the activity by getting in touch with it ahead of time.

Mr. Davis said he had attended a conference on gang-related issues in Medford where information was shared about a program in Houston, Texas where a large gang problem existed. He noted that Eugene did not need such a comprehensive program, though some good strategies were learned. He said that John Arens?? of Juvenile Justice was coordinating a group, including schools and businesses, to meet and bring organizations together to deal with gang problems. Rather than certain areas being guarded by distinct gangs, he said that gang activity was happening in various unrelated areas.

Mr. Peter remarked that he had been involved in a Gang Action Task Force in the 1980's and remembered that there were gangs migrating north from the Los Angeles area. His understanding was that gangs these days tended to be more racist or "skinhead" and wondered if that was consistent with Mr. Davis's impression.

Mr. Davis commented that skinheads were always around and appeared in cycles. They were more aggressive in their beliefs and activities and tended to make many mistakes and were dangerous. He said that other gangs were more in and out in terms of creating problems, and that now they were less organized than in the 1980's.

Paul Bessemer asked what the main point of the current gangs was, if they were not territorially defined and not necessarily into drug use. He wondered if the nature of gangs was different now nationwide. Mr. Davis responded that if the problems were not addressed now, over time gang activities would become more organized and become a problem. He hoped that the new group would become a conduit for gathering information from different directions and be able to implement a program to address the problem.

Jane Waite remarked that from attending meetings and conferences with local enforcement she had learned that the largest criminal element was 18 - 24-year-old white supremacists. From the 4J school district perspective, her concern was district level protocol that could be easily and clearly transmitted to administrators, and whether there would be two separate protocols needed for the different kinds of gangs. Mr. Davis said no, that both types of gangs should be dealt with together. He felt the school districts had good policies now, with appropriate consequences for behavior around gang membership.

Responding to a question by Ms. Waite concerning clarity in protocol for white supremacist gang activity, Mr. Davis said it was difficult to answer because each school was different. His perception was that the policy should be all-encompassing. He was not sure if that was the case.

Guadalupe Quinn wondered what the description of a gang was if it did not include neo-Nazis, white supremacists, racists, and skinheads, if they were seen differently. She also wondered how diverse the task force was, and if it included parents and youth. She had been involved in such a task force in the past, which was mostly composed of white people and institutions with little involvement from the larger community.

Mr. Davis apologized for any miscommunication about the different types of gangs being separated, saying they should all be grouped under the same umbrella. About the make-up of the new group, he said it did include a cross-section of the community as well as Maria Thomas from the Department of Youth Services. The group had not yet had its first meeting, so he was not sure about the membership of the committee. Its purpose was to gather and assess information and make recommendations, rather than to take action.

Ms. Quinn expressed her hope that the group would be educated in the history and behavior of neo-Nazis, racists, skinheads and hate groups in the community. Mr. Davis agreed this would be

important, stressing that in the 1980's the groups consisted mainly of African Americans and Hispanics, and that over a period of time, many white youth became involved as well.

Maria Thomas said her concern was to make sure there would be funding for programs to deal with youth who might be identified within the schools. She stated that white youth were never identified the same as minority youth were. She felt some reluctance to be a part of the task force if there was no funding to deal with the youth once they were identified, because they could become targeted and profiled when perhaps they were just hanging out with friends.

Mr. Peter asked for an update from the Hate Graffiti Task Force. Ms. Quinn reported that they had met about four times and had moved from talking about the history of the problem and current protocols to how to come up with policies that would differentiate between hate graffiti and other graffiti. Mr. Peter noted that his intention was to create a connection between the two groups.

Ms. Quinn stated her main concern to be that clear policies and protocols would be communicated effectively to the right people, affecting issues such as how students were identified and how they were treated afterwards.

Mr. Peter thanked Mr. Davis for his update and offered support from the Equity Committee for this work.

Mr. Davis reiterated that he felt the main issues were communication and knowledge, and when programs were ready to be implemented, the intention was to help to change behavior and not to be merely punitive.

Ms. Souers noted that resources for youth were sadly lacking in the area, and she hoped this group would provide some sorely needed collaborative planning for youth.

VI. Update

Hate Graffiti Task Force

Bruce Stiller noted that the task force had met three times, with another meeting coming up soon. He said they had identified a pretty clear protocol for administrators and custodians in case they spotted graffiti in facilities. They also had developed a basic outline for making sure people knew what to do, what steps to take around graffiti and how to get the information into manuals. He felt they were close to having a proposal ready for taking care of the physical mess and still needed to deal with how to care for emotional problems around graffiti. Ms. Quinn added that the protocol was being set up with different strategies for different kinds of graffiti, and that getting the word out to the community was an important part of their work.

Ms. Urbina clarified that recommendations would come in the form of 1) changes in language of policies that would define hate graffiti, 2) protocols and procedures for principals, police, administrators, custodians, facilities staff, and risk management, and 3) recommendations for the district regarding investment and prevention and support systems.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer (LGBTQ) Equity Sub-Committee

Ms. Urbina remarked that Josué Peña-Juárez had been interviewing people at the Gay Straight Alliances (GSA's) in the schools, and that at the same time Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) had been meeting with George Russell and the Eugene Education Association (EEA) about training. She said that the two efforts had joined together, they had met once very

productively, and were also joined by Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), a couple of students, and a young woman who had been working with the GSA's for the past two years. She noted there was a sub-committee now working on the questions they would be asking GSA's as well as school principals. They hoped to meet again within the next two weeks.

Ms. Waite asked Sarah Lauer of PFLAG if she felt support was now coming from the district, remarking that things that had happened the year before and brought to this committee's attention were very powerful. She stressed that the student population involved were some of the most vulnerable students.

Ms. Lauer responded that the idea coming out of the meeting with Mr. Russell was that the district would attempt to form a cadre from each high school to support the GSA's, that they would receive a special training, and that GSA representatives would be replaced when they could no longer participate. She felt positive about this plan.

In response to a question by Mr. Rosiek about the numbers of teachers needed for the training, Ms. Lauer said it was usually one or two advisors from each club. Mr. Rosiek remarked that what the College of Education liked to do was to have summer institutes that provided some form of certification. He said that, because summer courses needed to be self-sustaining, he was not sure what the numbers of teachers would need to be, but he could imagine a three course sequence in support of LGBTQ students—queer theory and curriculum and all the cutting edge work happening in that area around how to create a queer-positive atmosphere—for professional development credit. He thought it could be a goal of the Equity Committee to work towards this goal for maybe two or three years out. He commented that more ELL endorsements were needed.

High School Requirement Sub-Committee

Ms. Waite noted that the sub-committee had met, with no further comment.

VII. Other Business

Presentation of Equity Data to the School Board

Mr. Peter raised an issue regarding a need for another sub-committee to look at the equity data. He understood there was interest at the school board level of having more discussion.

Dr. Martinez responded that at a recent board meeting, possibly the one where MSAN students presented, he had raised an issue the Equity Committee report saying that the way this had been done did not lend itself to engagement in the issues so that the board did not benefit effectively from the wisdom of the Equity Committee. Typically, he noted, an important, valuable, thorough and honest review of the equity data in the district was presented to the board and then a formalized set of comments was delivered by Mr. Peter, the board would respond with what would be done to fix the problem and then it all happened again the following year. Dr. Martinez said he had reported to the board that the expertise in the Equity Committee should be utilized differently, perhaps framing the report time for engaging core issues from the Equity Committee's work. He suggested that the report could be disseminated in advance and a brief report presented, followed by whatever engagement the Equity Committee was currently focused on.

Mr. Peter remarked he thought the report card was an important snapshot of improvement or non-improvement within the district, so he wanted to make sure that Dr. Martinez meant to say the report would still be delivered, but possibly in a different way. Dr. Martinez clarified his thought that there would be a full written report, with highlights, but that the meeting space would include more than just the data. His experience as a board member was that the data would be discussed and some focus

on what should be done, and then no follow-up.

Arbriella Luvert responded that comments to the board had really evolved since the students had so much to share. She felt that the equity data still needed presenting over the air, but that there could be a second step to the reporting, perhaps a work session describing more details about the work being done. She felt that there was still a lack of connection in the community about the board's having changed its goals.

Dr. Martinez clarified that he was speaking for himself and not the whole board, and that he had experienced the discussion about what was being done by the board as not very useful, partly because the same patterns and trends in the data remained the same. He agreed that accountability needed more light, though he saw this as the only thing that was happening, and that more could be done.

Ms. Urbina noted that the meeting with the board was scheduled for February 4, 2009.

Mr. Stiller echoed Dr. Martinez's comments, that too much time was spent dissecting the data and not enough time on action plans. He felt a formal action plan was needed to address equity issues, saying that the Equity Committee could help by identifying issues to be included in the action plan likely to impact the data.

Mr. Peter agreed with Ms. Luvert, that the committee had worked hard to develop the report card and its being a process of negotiation. He hoped that all the board would receive the report and that it would be in a form that could be easily shared with schools. He reiterated that if the issues could be discussed and an action plan developed, together it would work well.

Dr. Martinez noted he was hearing the need for more reflection on this process. He suggested that if there was desire for the board to think differently in terms of 4J policy, then he felt the committee's presentation needed to be adjusted. If the goal was to shine a spotlight, put it on the radio, create a report that reached the schools and drove their activity, then perhaps no change was needed. He continued that if the desire was to create a larger impact on the board as policy makers, it might be useful to think about refinements to how it was being done.

Ms. Waite felt it was obvious that both needed to be done. The report was valuable to the public and individual schools, and it was clear from Alicia Hays's prior comments that the board wanted more guidance from the Equity Committee. She proposed that other communication structures be explored for presentation to the board.

Mr. Stiller mentioned hearing teens in different schools talking about school board goals around these ideas, so that the report was having good impact. Now, he felt, it was important to identify what more could be done.

Mr. Rosiek noted a difference between the group's consulting about issues with Superintendent Russell and people working with him, where issues were talked about from different angles, and meeting with a body that had decision-making power to implement the ideas. He stressed that there was real power in working as an advisory group with the board, leaving the decision-making to the board. He felt there could be something lost by taking the committee out of its consulting role, remarking that if an action plan were needed, there would have to be consensus about the plan.

Mr. Peter felt it was still important to meet with Tom Henry to look at the data, and wondered if Dr. Martinez had interest in this. Dr. Martinez responded that he would be happy to be there, though he appreciated the unfettered view of people who would view the data differently than he would. Mr. Peter identified a group, including Ms. Urbina, Mr. Hermanns, Ms. Luvert and Ms. Waite, who would

meet with him before the February 4, 2009 meeting with the board.

Dr. Martinez summarized that perhaps this issue could be brought to the next meeting with the board. He hoped the value of the report card had not been felt to be minimized.

Carl Hermanns, Assistant Superintendent, expressed the main concern of the board being that a lot of data was presented and action changed little. He added that a significant investment was being made shortly in the CP?? training, where 45 administrators would be attending. A main concern, he noted, was what happened after this training because so often presentations were made and then no action followed. Because of little time left tonight, he said, he would bring to the next meeting more information about plans for instituting action to occur following CP?? so that actual change would be noticed by students in the schools.

He mentioned having met with Mr. Lauer, and also meeting with MSAN students at North Eugene High School who had done a wonderful project about looking at things that supported or impeded their learning. He reported that linking of data between MSAN and Tripod data had identified certain themes around school climate and types of student engagement in the classrooms. What was being planned, through a think tank conversation, were ways to impact issues of harassment and issues regarding school climate. There was a focus on identifying three or four issues where change could be implemented by the spring of 2009. He said he would bring more information at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

(Recorded by Judy Burton)