

MINUTES

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

February 24, 2009
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Jane Waite, Vice Chair; Arbrella Luvert, Guadalupe Quinn, Bruce Stiller, Sarah Lauer, Carl Hermanns, Michael Carrigan, Tom Henry, Jim Garcia, Maria Thomas, Melly Holloway, Larry Soberman, Alicia Hays, members; Carmen Urbina, Linda Vargas, Jeralynn Beghetto, Lelia Feres-Johnson, Lauri Moss, Larry Sullivan, Kay Mechas, Yvonne Curtis, Linda Smart, 4J staff.

ABSENT: Twila Souers, Surendra Subramani, Charles Martinez, Peter Tromba, Jerry Rosiek.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter convened the meeting. He noted that Mr. Subramani, Mr. Tromba, Ms. Souers, and Mr. Rosiek would not be present. Those present introduced themselves.

II. Public Comment

There were no members of the public who wished to speak at this time.

III. Equity Report Discussion

Ms. Waite said several people had met in order to articulate the questions raised at the previous meeting. These were provided to the group in a handout entitled ***Equity Committee – Questions re: Equity Data Report***. She related that they had asked Mr. Henry to bring people who could provide answers to the next meeting and he had done so.

Mr. Peter remarked that given the enormity and complexity of the questions that it would not be the group's expectation that Mr. Henry and 4J staff would arrive prepared to answer all of them.

Mr. Henry felt that all of the questions were important. He suggested going through them and if there were questions that would require a greater amount of detail staff would provide a high level response and then they should hold a work session to elaborate upon them.

Mr. Peter suggested that the committee reorient the agenda in order to address items **V.** and **VI.** first. The committee was amenable to doing so.

V. Diversity and Equity Plan

Ms. Luvert stated that the plan was in development based upon the equity change. She related that the process had begun two years earlier with focus groups and they had arrived at four goals: recruitment and retention, training, data, and looking at behaviors through achievement data. She said they had discovered it was more than just a diversity goal, it pointed to a need to systemically

change the district. She stated that she and John Lenssen had gathered up data on what was happening in the schools and then they had gone out to look for models. She had found the Montgomery Plan and she liked it quite a lot. She said it incorporated the strategic plan direction, learning pathways, and pathways for teachers. She passed out copies of the plan for people to peruse.

VI. Update:

- **GLBTQ Subcommittee**

Ms. Urbina reported that the subcommittee included representatives from CALC, BRO and PFLAG. She related that the subcommittee had met several times and was looking at conducting a survey, with the help of University of Oregon students, oriented to the Gay Student Alliances (GSAs) and school administrations around perceptions. She said one thing they had heard from the community was that the schools might feel they were being supportive of the GSAs but the GSAs did not feel supported. She noted that Seattle public schools had a GLBTQ advisory committee that had advised the superintendent and school board since 1995. She said originally the subcommittee had been formed for the specific goal to formulate the survey and execute it but they now felt that they should become a permanent subcommittee to the Equity Committee.

Mr. Peter ascertained that there was general support from the committee to do this.

Ms. Urbina stated that all of the high schools and Monroe Middle School had GSAs.

Ms. Thomas wondered if there should be a separate subcommittee for everyone, such as a subcommittee to address issues related to being a Latino student. Mr. Peter responded that he was not aware that there had been a recommendation to look at other groups. He said the GLBTQ subcommittee had been formed because the Equity Committee did not feel it could adequately understand and develop recommendations on this issue because of the complexity of it. He underscored that he would not stand in the way of forming other subcommittees if there was a strong sentiment to do so.

III. Equity Report Discussion -- continued

Mr. Henry asked Ms. Beghetto to speak to the question in regarding cultural competency.

Ms. Beghetto related that the Human Resources Department (HR) had polled different stakeholders regarding what they wanted to see from HR and how the services it provided could be improved. She recalled that they had come before the Equity Committee to show the HR work plan the previous spring. She stated that evaluations had been on the top of everyone's list and they intended to address them. She said the evaluation system currently included a component for administrators.

Regarding question 2 (a), Ms. Beghetto stated that the district had developed a method for differentiating staffing that would reward those schools that were implementing competency practices, but it had not been put into place for the present year. She felt they were on track in that area.

Ms. Holloway asked if there was a timeline for it. Ms. Beghetto replied that it was not on the HR work plan as much as it was on the work plan for the Superintendent's staff.

In response to a question from Ms. Luvert, Ms. Beghetto affirmed that improving the administrative process was included as part of the work plan.

Ms. Feres-Johnson stated that 2(b) addressed specific questions around seniority and the requirements for specific skill sets. She said if the district required a position to have bilingual and bicultural skills, an employee with more seniority could not bump another employee in that position unless they had those skills.

In response to a question from Ms. Waite, Ms. Beghetto stated that article 12.1 in the contract outlined the process. She said it was not only seniority by license; if there were two people with equal seniority they could use criteria such as special qualifications, relevant experience outside the district, district program requirements, affirmative action, and increased levels of training. She added that the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) also provided that they could look at competence, merit, and skills when considering seniority.

Mr. Peter asked if there was a way that the district decided competence and merit. Ms. Beghetto replied that the district was site specific; it depended on the program.

In response to a follow-up question from Mr. Peter, Ms. Beghetto clarified that the building principal had input into merit and competence, but those decisions were made by a Validity Committee that was comprised of HR personnel, instruction personnel, and principals.

Mr. Henry asked Ms. Feres-Johnson to discuss the exit surveys. Ms. Feres-Johnson explained that staff was in the process of developing a system for 09/10 to conduct two exit survey processes, one in the middle of the school year to collect data from all employees regarding job satisfaction and one-on-one interviews with all employees who left the district.

Ms. Thomas asked how exactly they planned to conduct the exit interview. Ms. Feres-Johnson replied that it was not possible to require an exit interview, but they could encourage them. She said they were making the time to have an open dialogue.

Ms. Thomas asked how they planned to address information that merited action. Ms. Feres-Johnson responded that they would take the information they would receive and balance it against other sources of information. She said they planned to analyze the information for trends and to identify the root cause of any issues. She stated that they would then develop focus groups to assist in addressing those issues.

In response to a question from Ms. Quinn, Mr. Henry said there had not previously been a systemic plan for exit interviews.

Ms. Waite asked if it would be possible to offer anonymous exit surveys. Ms. Feres-Johnson replied that they planned to give people the choice. Her experience had been that most employees were not concerned with remaining anonymous and wanted to provide information.

Ms. Thomas expressed concern that people leaving the district might not want to be absolutely honest because of the worry that they might not get a good job reference as a result. Ms. Feres-Johnson assured her that the plan would not be connected with providing references.

Mr. Henry said question 3 stood out because it was a catchall question. He interpreted it as asking what exactly the district was doing to address the achievement gap and how was it measuring its efforts. He had invited several members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), which was a function of the Superintendent's office. He explained that the ILT was created by Superintendent George Russell to provide guidance, at a high level, for instructional decisions, goal setting, and building the framework to support goals. He said the school district had been an activity-based district up until the present year. He noted that this was not uncommon as most districts set goals and then developed activities around them. He related that the School Board had, through a series of

meetings and a lengthy retreat, decided the district should be more outcome-based in its focus. He stated that the board goals, superintendent goals, and the ILT goals outlined targets that were set with specificity and determined outcomes. He said the Superintendent, the Board, and the ILT believed it would help the district by having clearer targets and by bringing more accountability to the system. He underscored his feeling that accountability was something that needed to be addressed more directly in the district, at all levels including at the school level. He thought this would help to articulate why gains took place. He said whenever they would initiate a new program, they would establish baseline data for it and then evaluate its effectiveness.

Mr. Henry pointed to a handout entitled ***Eugene School District 4J Big Picture Strategies to Improve Achievement 2007/09***. He explained that the school district tended to develop goals and strategies in two-year cycles. He noted that the handout had been an attempt to synopsise the 40-page Eugene School District Continuous Improvement Plan for 07-09. He reviewed the strategies. He said the first item, an effort to align curriculum to the standards, sought to increase achievement. He stated that the district had done this with language arts. He related that they had laid out the standards and prioritized them, but due to budget constraints they would not be able to adopt the new mathematics standards at present.

Ms. Waite asked if staff was articulating the goals to the administration of each building. Mr. Henry responded that the district was involving teams of teachers as well as administrative staff. Ms. Curtis added that in the language arts process they had gone to district leadership first to ensure they were all talking about the same things when speaking about best practices. She said they had worked with the principal groups around what best practices were, sharing research and discussing strategies. She related that the principals had been a part of the professional development of teachers. She said now that the instructional intervention progress monitoring model was being implemented they had done two levels of professional development, one for the administrators and teacher teams and one embedded model with three staff development specialists at the elementary level and some Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff at the middle school level. She explained that the latter consisted of some teachers who could go to classrooms and model it, team teach, and participate in planning. She stressed that it was new but they were getting traction and it was making sense. She said they were repeating the process with mathematics instruction, even though they did not have the resources. She stated that the district had already contracted with a professional development group, which was believed to be the best for developing the administrators. She related that they had set aside five days for the training. She underscored that the principals understood they were expected to lead the change.

Mr. Henry noted that this bumped up against the “sacred cow” of site-based decision-making. He said this was a movement toward making an accountable systemic effort in the school district.

Ms. Luvert asked that they consider the issue of tracking and the issue of the focus on elementary education versus middle and high school structures. Mr. Henry responded that they would get to it in the discussion.

Mr. Sobert related that third graders moving from Howard Elementary to Twin Oaks Elementary School had been on the same exact page of the reading material.

Mr. Henry stated that using data to monitor student progress, to inform instructional decisions, and to design interventions was based on the belief that if they were really going to make progress with students, all students’ progress should be monitored. He said they wanted to be able to determine if something was not working so that it could be changed. They wanted to be able to go to a school and ask a principal who the students were that were in “the gap” and have the principal be able to answer the question and say how the students were doing and what kinds of resources staff was using to make that progress. He said they would be able to discuss how interventions were working.

He pointed out that this was a significant shift because previously they tended to rely on universal strategies. He felt the district had done a good job of providing training but they had not drilled it down to the level of determining what the training was doing for specific students. He averred that this approach spoke to the “accountability piece.” He noted that meetings were taking place all through the school years at middle and high schools.

Mr. Stiller noted that half of the elementary schools were “title schools.”

Mr. Carrigan noted that his daughter was benefiting from specialized instruction in the Family School.

Ms. Thomas asked if the data collection was specific to academic data or did it include attendance and truancy. Ms. Mechas replied that at the middle school level they were looking at the total child, including attendance data. Mr. Stiller added that typically either academic or behavioral data triggered a closer look at a child.

Mr. Henry indicated that he welcomed questions regarding the strategies.

Ms. Moses discussed the alternative school programs, per question 4. She explained that there were three alternative high schools and the district contracted with approximately 15 private programs, programs that had sprung up in response to need. She had determined that the district needed to study what was happening in its alternative education programs one year earlier and the study had just been completed. She related that they had made recommendations for significant changes.

Ms. Moses reported that they had done site visits to each of the alternative schools and they had brought in a consultant who had served as the director for the alternative programs in Portland. She noted that Brad New, the administrator of high school services, had done the study. She said staff intended to conduct a financial analysis of the financial impacts. She related that they learned that the alternative program was a “pretty loosely connected system” and the students referred to alternative education had a low completion rate. She said some received diplomas and some received Graduation Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs) but most received neither. She averred that the rigor in the programs was low. She added that they also had issues with special education students. She related that suggestions included doing some reorganization and changes in management to attempt to tie the programs together. She said the district wanted to develop a cap for some of the placements in private programs, noting that the district had been sending students out to the programs without really watching what happened afterwards very well. She explained that students were placed based on fit; if a student wanted to be there was the criterion.

Ms. Moses stated that they were looking at developing an early college program and the district was closely linked with Lane Community College (LCC). She said they were exploring some online learning opportunities. She related that the school system included night school and summer school but it was not as robust as it could be. She said they were looking into further development of the student retention team, staff who worked at the schools who paid closer attention to students that were shared in the system.

Mr. Hermanns averred that the study they had done was comprehensive and the recommendations that they were making would bring about significant changes and benefit to the alternative education students. He said they needed to make sure that alternative education was tightly aligned with special education, mental health services, etc.

In response to a question from Ms. Lauer, Ms. Moses said the district had 383 students in alternative education.

Mr. Peter asked what the ethnic breakout of the students in alternative education was. Ms. Moses

replied that in the schools at large 5 percent of the population was Native American and for alternative schools that number was 11 percent; African American students made up 3 percent of school populations and 4 percent of alternative education populations; Latino students made up 7 percent of school populations and 10 percent of alternative education populations.

Mr. Henry indicated that he agreed with the statement made in 7, that efforts to create substantial data reports be fully supported at all levels of the district.

Mr. Henry indicated that staff would have to research the data requested in questions 6 and 8, having to do with equity data and cohort data in the former and data on the curriculum paths of students by race in the latter. He said they would get the data and provide it to the committee.

Ms. Curtis observed that conducting data by district was one thing, but given that the population was low, data from specific schools could get so small that individual students could potentially be identified.

Ms. Mehas explained, in response to question 9, that the district had developed a spread sheet on every student that had not met or only barely met the standards when tested at the middle school level. She said they tried to work with individual students and the Student Achievement Coordinators (SACs) worked closely with the principal and the grade level teams. She stated that school administration often brought in Mr. Stiller and her to help the SACs. She said they were not certain which classes were making the difference so in the present year staff was tracking the individual classes and interventions to see which really were the most effective. She underscored that they were really looking at the individual child. She had observed classrooms. She felt there was an enthusiasm in teaching staff and a knowledge of their students. She believed they were seeing improvement. She noted that they were using outside resources.

Mr. Peter observed that middle school was a “precipice” that students fell off of. Ms. Mehas responded that she anticipated that the data would indicate this. She said this was a large part of the conversation she had with middle school principals. She had told them that if they looked they would see students’ performance was declining while in their schools.

Ms. Luvert commented that she appreciated the direction they were going in. She said there was also the issue of grades: a student with Fs could go through middle school and on to high school. She suggested that they should look at capturing those students before they were promoted. Ms. Mechas agreed that this was a concern. She felt that middle school needed to be more meaningful. She noted that when she was a middle school principal she had heard students declare that Fs did not matter until they went to high school.

Mr. Henry called it all a great strategy. He said now it needed to filter down, though this was the direction the district was headed.

Ms. Mehas related that the Coaching for Educational Equity training that had been held for administrators had resulted in groups meeting monthly. She said all of the teachers in the Churchill region would be participating in the process on March 30.

Mr. Henry noted that question 10 was about training for administrators.

Ms. Curtis thought that they had spoken to that with the language arts and mathematics efforts. She said they were being very purposeful around the training in cultural competency and equity, specifically around issues of race as well as content-based practices.

Mr. Henry observed that question 11 asked if the district would consider less site-based decision

making. He said they were still feeling a lot of pressure for a certain amount of site-based decision-making. He felt that the district needed to find a better balance between site-based decision-making and systemic decision-making. He thought the district should quit doing “drive by training,” in other words a one day training with no follow-up.

Ms. Curtis said as they developed their models where people were using data all of the time and they understood how to use the data, knew what the measures meant, and how to administer and interpret the assessments, staff was being asked for some of the same things consistently. She predicted that the more they did this, the more it would go to all of the levels, and the more improvement they would see.

Ms. Waite felt that sites sometimes could not identify what they needed.

Ms. Holloway remarked that when one was dealing with situations that teachers had no choice in, such as class size, the district needed to make sure that this was part of the professional development and that, in this example, staff would be provided best practices for large groups.

Mr. Henry asked Mr. Stiller to respond to question 12, regarding where anti-bullying programs were located.

Mr. Stiller reported that participation in positive behavior support (PBS) was voluntary in 4J schools. He said all but two and a half elementary schools, seven out of eight middle schools, and two out of four high schools were participating. He explained that the half school was in the Harris/Eastside Elementary School. He said he provided consultation and support to all schools, but he spent more time in schools that were involved in the PBS program. He related that most of the elementary schools were implementing a specific anti-bullying program, but high schools were typically implementing things such as peer mediation. He stated that one issue in the anti-bullying programs was that there was very little data in the field to support the efficacy. He said the data showed that programs increased students' knowledge of bullying, but not whether it worked to reduce the behavior. This was because it had not been researched. He related that a graduate student based his doctoral dissertation on programs in three of the elementary schools and had determined there were significant results in those schools. He said they were discovering some implementation issues but he felt they had “pretty good buy-in” from most of the schools. They were continuing to implement the program along with other behavior support efforts for kids who had severe ongoing patterns of bullying.

Mr. Stiller related that they had implemented bully prevention and PBS in two middle schools in the present year. He said it was more difficult than it was in elementary school. He explained that one of the critical variables was getting student buy-in.

Mr. Peter asked Mr. Stiller to discuss anti-racism best practices in relation to PBS. Mr. Stiller stated that all of the PBS schools taught respect as a fundamental concept and all of them acknowledged respectful student behavior at a high rate. He said harassment, discrimination, and racism were taught as “non-examples of respect.” In terms of formal strategies to promote respect for diversity, he said there was a lot of variability between what schools were doing.

Mr. Henry stated that most of the rest of the questions dealt with ELL and special education. He predicted they would take more time to answer. He related that Mr. Sullivan had requested a work session with the Equity Committee about special education when he had shown him the questions.

The committee was amenable to holding a work session. Ms. Urbina said she would meet with Mr. Sullivan about it.

Mr. Peter asked Mr. Sullivan if he wished to comment. Mr. Sullivan responded that he was glad the questions were being asked. He agreed that the over-identification and over-representation of race in special education was an issue. He related that the question was being asked constantly of special education. He said they had their system performance review program and indicator 9 and 10 had to do with the disproportionality. He stated that they had an office of civil right settlement which required having procedures in place to ensure they did not over-identify or misidentify. He affirmed however, in response to question 15, that he believed they had over-identified. He stated that they were looking at gaps. He also felt more students from the general population had been identified as special education than should have been. He averred that there were many things they should do to ensure the right students were identified and served and to also ensure there were ways they could be “exited” and served in general education with success.

Mr. Sullivan said in terms of SPED, ELL, and ELPA one of the things they were doing with non-discriminatory assessment were culturally and linguistically diverse comprehensive evaluation process. He noted that they had just vetted this procedure with the office of civil rights. He wanted to ensure that they could effectively distinguish between barriers to learning that were linguistic or cultural and not disability-related. He said the district had funded, in part, a culturally and linguistically diverse team.

Mr. Peter expressed his appreciation for the members who had participated in the CFEE training and for their hard work and dedication for the committee.

IV. Development of Key Recommendations to the Board of Directors

Mr. Peter said the single message that was most important was the committee’s hope that the Board would apply the “equity lens” to the budget decisions they had to make. He hoped the Board would be able to hold harmless the students who were struggling. He stressed that it was in everyone’s best interest to lift those students up. He also felt they should comment on the LGBTQ related concerns.

Mr. Henry felt it was a critical time to ask questions about how the district could continue to support programs and not just the students and schools with the highest needs. He said in the face of the \$23 million shortfall things like the sheltered English training and the summer bridge program came into question.

Ms. Holloway asked what kind of programs were involved in recruiting student teachers with culturally different backgrounds. She thought it would be good to nurture more teachers and staff.

Ms. Waite observed that the district had a lot of newer hires that were more diverse and culturally competent and wondered how they could retain them.

Ms. Luvert said the reality was that the old perception that the last hire was the first fire was no longer applicable. She stated that the principals needed to understand the parameters; the district needed to retain its staff of color.

Mr. Garcia pointed out that a person who had lived in different cultures had a skill and skills should be considered if positions would be cut. He felt that diversity was a capacity-building opportunity.

Mr. Peter expressed interest in the work of the Validity Committee. Ms. Feres-Johnson indicated that she could provide information on it.

Ms. Thomas understood that the district would have to work with the unions. She asked if there was

any kind of study on needs assessments regarding what decisions there were to be made about what positions needed to be retained. She said they should see if there were certain positions that needed to be in the district to serve certain groups and to serve the public better. Ms. Feres-Johnson assured her that they were trying to work within strict parameters. She explained that seniority was governed by contractual agreements and Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS). She underscored that seniority was not used to eliminate teachers and educators of color; the system was designed to retain the best quality employees.

Mr. Henry stressed that the contracts were achieved through mutual agreement. Mr. Peter added that the union had worked hard on the issues.

Mr. Soberman pointed out that there would be a number of retiring teachers in the coming year. He thought there might be some shuffling of people.

Ms. Luvert wanted the message delivered to the Board to underscore that they needed to look at how they could get a workforce that was 90 percent Caucasian to be culturally competent within a year.

The meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

(Recorded by Ruth Atcherson)