

## MINUTES

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

March 19, 2009  
4:30 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Jane Waite, Vice Chair; Paul Bessemer, Michael Carrigan, Arbrella Luvert, Carl Hermanns, Melly Holloway, Sarah Lauer, Guadalupe Quinn, Bruce Stiller, members; Carmen Urbina, Linda Smart, 4J staff.

**ABSENT:** Jeralynn Beghetto, Yvonne Curtis, Lelia Feres-Johnson, Jim Garcia, Alicia Hays, Tom Henry, Charles Martinez, Kay Mechas, Lauri Moss, Jerry Rosiek, Larry Soberman, Twila Souers, Surendra Subramani, Larry Sullivan, Maria Thomas, Peter Tromba, Linda Vargas.

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Ms. Waite convened the meeting. Those present introduced themselves. Several multicultural representatives from local schools were present and introduced themselves.

### **II. Public Comment**

River Road/ El Camino Elementary School teacher shared that staff had been looking forward to having a cultural diversity (CALC) photo exhibition at their school, and had been all set up for it. At the last minute they were told it was not possible to have the exhibition presented there now, and the process had been put on hold. She expressed deep concern that the students would not have the benefit of seeing the exhibition.

Ms. Urbina said that policy and curriculum issues were being looked at currently, that a training was being developed for March 31, that a conversation with parents was being planned at Meadowlark, and that the exhibit was scheduled to go back up in mid-May. Ms. Waite added that all of the concerns were being heard and considered by the district, and it was unfortunate that appropriate communication had not occurred in regards to River Road.

### **III. Equity Report Comments**

Ms. Waite remarked that this year's Equity Report to the board had been different than other years. A smaller, less lengthy report was given the board at a work session this time, she said, followed by questions and discussion, and she felt the process was very fruitful. She asked if there were any questions or concerns about the report and the process.

Ms. Luvert responded that she had attended the work session and that she felt the report should be given in a more public setting. She believed that what was going on with the achievement gap needed extra attention, and that more Equity members should have been in attendance at the follow-up board session.

Ms. Waite commented that she hoped for work sessions with different district department heads, and

that more of the Equity members would attend these sessions in order to be effective. She said the board was appropriately concerned about issues raised in the Equity Report, especially about how to preserve equity principles during a time of dwindling resources. As staff cuts were being made, she noted, Human Resources was looking at how to preserve necessary skill sets, such as cultural competency and others, among the staff.

Mr. Hermanns commented that he liked the format of the Equity Report, and that he felt the district was moving forward by creating a structural framework and intent to support important equity issues, despite the current budget crisis.

#### **IV. EEA Presentation**

Paul Duchin, co-president of the Eugene Education Association (EEA), explained that he and Merri Steele, the other co-president, had received diversity training by the National Education Association (NEA) and had subsequently been honored with the 2006 Rosina J. Willits Memorial Award for local work in creating a Human and Civil Rights cadre to train staff in local schools. He presented a video produced by the NEA regarding diversity in the local community.

Mr. Duchin described the program called Education for All as a diversity training with follow-up care strategies to address the achievement gap. Ms. Steele added that there were two cadres made up of teachers—the diversity cadre, whose members were trained in the Education for All cadre, and the CARE cadre, whose members were trained to work on the achievement gap. Linda Smart was involved with both cadres, Mr. Duchin noted, and he thanked her for her work.

Mr. Duchin said that all the teachers doing this work volunteered their time as there was no funding from the school district other than for release time for some of the teachers to attend the trainings. Other funding was through grants for the work of Mr. Duchin and Ms. Steele. A list of elementary and middle schools where trainings had already happened was shown, and Ms. Steele said it was more difficult to find ways to address the high school staff because of their large numbers. A training had been done for a portion of South Eugene High School and also a training for those teachers who chose to attend from any of the four high schools.

Mr. Duchin described how teachers from North Eugene High School had made a commitment to each other that they would never walk by a situation in the school where disrespect was being expressed without addressing the situation.

Ms. Steele added that they had received a grant from the NEA to present five seminars (three of Education for All and two of Cares Training), for which the University of Oregon provided credit at a reduced fee.

Mr. Duchin said they had also done two trainings with the Springfield School District, which resulted in that district forming their own diversity cadre. He and Ms. Steele had also been privileged to do a diversity training with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

The first module, Mr. Duchin explained, was about Understanding Diversity, where one very powerful and arousing exercise showed how varieties of groups experienced a sense of belonging and also of separation. The second module, Ms. Steele continued, was about Cultural Identity and core values. and how easy it was for individuals to “file” students in certain categories, through both true and false information. These two modules took from 3-3.5 hours to complete, and were done in one day, Mr. Duchin said.

The third module was called Reacting to Differences, beginning with an insiders/ outsiders activity

where participants identified times when they felt an insider or outsider. And the fourth module, Ms. Steele shared, was about Valuing Diversity and Reflection, dealing with how change could happen and reflection on what one was already doing.

Mr. Duchin noted that teachers wanted to bring something back to their classrooms, and that there was concern by all that there be commitments following the trainings to changing policies and procedures to move the diversity values forward in the schools. Superintendent Russell had attended an initial training, and was committed to the training process, he said.

Mr. Duchin and Ms. Steele had been trained through another NEA grant in the CARE strategies (Culture, Abilities, Resilience and Effort), which were designed to provide teachers with useful activities regarding cultural diversity. Following this training, the two leaders created five seminars: two on understanding diversity issues and three on CARE strategies.

Ms. Steele remarked that the CARE strategies were very flexible and contained an enormous number of ideas and activities in a notebook to use with students, colleagues and study groups. As well, there was background research to be studied by the teachers and additional activities that could be found online. One example of activities was about culture, a poem titled, "I Am From." This activity was powerful, she said, in bringing forth a lot of information about a person in a short time frame.

Ms. Waite asked how this activity was handled in the classroom, noting that recently in the district a student was disciplined for not wanting to share their "I Am From" poem in the classroom. Mr. Duchin responded that they counseled teachers to not put pressure on students to share what they had written, and that it was important to handle these situations very sensitively. Ms. Smart remarked that she gave her students three options: the student could share their own poem, another student could share the poem for them, or the student could decide to not share it at all.

Responding to a question about the length of training, Mr. Duchin said each of the two training segments was four full days long, plus there were summer refresher courses. More grant funds were needed in order to offer more trainings.

Another activity example was Multiple Intelligences, which helped teachers identify different types of intelligence to uncover unrecognized abilities in students, and which led to learning new strategies to reach more students. Resilience, or lack of it, Mr. Duchin remarked, often determined the level of success students attained. Students came from so many different backgrounds. For most in our culture, a homeless person living in a car would be considered poor, while in another culture owning a car was only for wealthy people. Six hundred students in the district had been identified as homeless and receiving services, Ms. Steele shared.

The CARE materials were all downloadable from the NEA website, Ms. Steele continued, though one would need a lot of paper to print it all.

Mr. Hermanns thanked Mr. Duchin and Ms. Steele for their commitment to this work, and noted that the district needed to continue to work to pull different aspects of this multicultural work together.

Ms. Holloway commented that with the huge amount of work that had already been done, she would like the training to be scheduled for all schools, as part of the commitment to close the achievement gaps. She would want to be able to evaluate the equity in her classroom. She also encouraged the monitoring of long-term outcomes from such a program, in terms of such things as hiring practices and how safe students and teachers felt. This would include documentation of the path and ways to get there.

Ms. Steele responded that a decision had been made that the training would be optional rather than

required, because of the importance of buy-in from those doing the training.

Ms. Luvert remarked that the workforce in the district was 90% white. She had been in the district 32 years, and she wanted to know if the union blocked the issue of diversity. Mr. Duchin responded that the union did not block diversity hiring. He said there was not a big pool of diverse teachers from which to choose, and that Human Resources had in the past not been very effective in hiring teachers of multicultural backgrounds.

Ms. Luvert also brought up the idea of prospective teachers being evaluated for their cultural competence. Mr. Duchin felt there would be no problem in asking that applicants be evaluated in this way.

In response to a concern by Ms. Holloway about what might be waived regarding diversity hiring, Mr. Hermanns suggested making an appointment with Celia Feres-Johnson, Director of Human Resources (HR), to talk about this issue. He added that major changes in HR were in the works because of the strong leadership by the new Director this year.

## **V. District Changes and Updates**

Mr. Hermanns gave an update regarding district budget changes that were announced the week before, due to the \$16 million deficit. The district took a three-phased approach, he said, with the first phase being a two-thirds reduction of the deficit through reserves and central office and department cuts and reorganizations. The final one-third must come from classroom expenditures, he said, and would be reached by increasing the ratio of students to staff by 1 student. For example, if in the past the ratio was 23:1, the ratio would increase to 24 or 25:1. The intention, he said, was to optimize what was available to help all students while ensuring there was no back-sliding on helping the students who needed extra attention.

For the Central Office reorganization, Mr. Hermanns noted, since Tom Henry was retiring, there was a determination to eliminate Mr. Hermanns' position as Chief Operating Officer and move Mr. Hermanns into Mr. Henry's position in the Instruction Department. With Ms. Luvert retiring, Ms. Urbina would help take on the equity portion of Mr. Luvert's position, he continued. He commented that a lot of work was being done to pull resources together to move the multicultural programs forward, including intervention for those students in need.

Mr. Stiller said that for both academic and behavioral intervention there would be tiered intervention models, including systematic screening, progress monitor data and then intervention levels built to match the needs. To bring this approach throughout the whole district would take a major effort, and could not be implemented with all models in all schools next year, he said. He was fearful that budget cuts would have a substantial negative impact on the ability to do systematic supplemental interventions.

Ms. Urbina reported that Wallace Grant had sponsored a training for forty-eight administrators called CFEE- which was a 4-day intensive training and conversation about race. To move the conversation forward within the district Wallace regional meetings for K-12 were happening, she added. A Churchill regional meeting planned for March 30 would bring a team of facilitators for a conversation about relationships in the region and the children in the achievement gap. A first step for relationship would be for adults to commit to spending time with students from the achievement gap on a one-to-one basis throughout the rest of the school year.

Another piece of the program, she added, was called CFEE-FELLOWS where each month the trainees continued their training with 2-hour sessions.

Ms. Waite remarked that people tended to question why administrators were being trained rather than teachers who worked directly with the students. She argued that it was necessary to have receptive and understanding leadership to support the work of the staff, and that huge shifts were being seen as a result of administrative training.

Mr. Urbina added that another important outcome of the training was common language around such things as race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, and stereotypes. She said that the needs of 30% of the students were not being met, most of whom were students of color or biracial.

Ms. Smart remarked that she was very happy to hear about work around relationships with kids, because when those bonds were created, everything could move forward.

## **VI. Update:**

- **GLBTQ Sub-Committee**

Ms. Urbina said it was exciting to have this subcommittee meeting. The next meeting would be the following Monday, she said. A main topic would be Meadowlark, she shared. One of the main things they were doing was developing guidelines for elementary schools, she said, and that the display could be used effectively at that level.

An action plan was being developed that the GLBTQ sub-committee would have input towards, she continued, along with representatives from BRO, PFLAGG, CALC and other groups. There would be staff training and development, and also a parent meeting with an open forum to discuss the process. It was important, she insisted, to find tools for administrators and teachers to support these issues.

Mr. Hermanns noted that it was very important to learn how to deal effectively with issues around race and gender identity. He said that there was a great lack of understanding of how to handle these challenges and keep all the children well and safe.

- **Student Survey**

Mr. Stiller explained that he did not believe that office discipline referrals were the best way to deal with harassment in the schools. He had been advocating for some time that student surveys be used to gather information, and he and Ms. Urbina had developed a draft of a survey from old surveys that had been administered in conjunction with bully prevention type programs. Copies of the drafted survey were passed out to committee members. Meetings had been happening with middle school principals, who had been supportive of the survey idea. The survey was wanted to be a one-page document, and would take some instructional time to administer in the middle and high schools.

Mr. Stiller remarked that feedback was welcome in developing the survey, and that it would pass through principal and assistant principal groups in the schools as well as the Equity Committee. Another issue was when and how to administer the survey. If Survey Monkey was used, there was an issue about computer access for the students. If it was administered manually, then there would be an immense scoring task. The survey would be analyzed by class level and by ethnicity groups. He recommended that labels be chosen that were the most culturally acceptable.

Ms. Luvert suggested having common language definitions read and explained before the surveys were filled out by students so that there would be common understanding about meanings.

Ms. Waite recommended that the surveys be looked over outside the meeting time and that comments be sent by email to Mr. Stiller or Ms. Urbina.

- **ODE Race and Ethnicity Guidelines**

Ms. Waite explained that some changes had been made in the way that ODE collected information about race and ethnicity, causing the State of Oregon to make some changes as well for compliance. A district meeting earlier today with Springfield, Bethel, 4J, Lane ESD, and a representative from ODE elucidated ways that the district would be impacted by these changes. ODE had pointed out that next year it would be optional for districts to make the change, but the following year it would not be optional, she said. Springfield and Eugene schools were not planning to move forward with changes the coming year, she said, though Bethel would.

Community concerns were that racial category descriptions were questionable, Ms. Waite noted, including an observer identification component. She encouraged all Equity Committee members to read the document thoroughly and give feedback in order to mobilize pressure for change at the federal level that would in turn bring change to the state level. Ms. Urbina remarked that Latinos would not identify well with the current descriptions and would tend to leave the boxes blank, and, therefore, they would feel that they did not exist.

Another problem would be for multiracial students, since there could be only one race chosen.

Ms. Waite announced that the next meeting was scheduled for April 28, and that the June meeting would be on a Thursday, June 18, rather than the regular Tuesday meeting time.

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

*(Recorded by Judy Burton)*