

## MINUTES

School District 4J Equity Committee  
Education Center Parr Room  
200 N. Monroe Street —Eugene, Oregon

October 24, 2006  
4:30 pm

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Andy Gottesman, Vice Chair; Gifford Tallmadge, Mike Galick, Sarah Lauer, Linda Liu, Charles Martinez, Belinda McLain, Surendra Subramani, Maria Thomas, Alexandra Montes, Victor Palma, Amy Harley, Jane Waite, Shabazz Muhamad, Guadalupe Quinn, Michael Carrigan, Maj Rafferty, Caleb Pruzinski, Joe Brainard, Lloyd Rodriguez, Carmen Urbina, Bruce Stiller, Dennis Urso, Arbrela Luvert, Cydney Vandercar

Mr. Peter convened the meeting.

### I. Welcome and Introduction

Mr. Peter welcomed those present, particularly students who had joined the committee. Those present introduced themselves and briefly commented on why they were members of the committee.

### II. Public Comment

There was no one wishing to speak.

### III. Review Group Agreements

Ms. Urbina reviewed the contents of binders and background materials provided to committee members and asked that everyone review the accuracy of their contact information on the committee roster.

Mr. Peter reviewed the document entitled *Organization and Group Agreement of the Eugene School District 4J Equity Committee*. He said the committee's broad assignment was to advise the school district on issues related to inclusiveness, justice and equity. He said there were significant problems and needs in those areas, particularly related to students from different ethnic backgrounds. He said that data collection and disaggregation, plus impetus from the Equity Committee, had contributed to the district's interest in carefully examining its performance with respect to a number of issues:

- the achievement gap between students of color and white students
- the disproportionate likelihood that students of color would be suspended, expelled, placed in special education and not placed in talented and gifted programs
- lack of representativeness on the teaching staff compared to the community, and
- the likelihood that students from a variety of backgrounds would be harassed, bullied or treated poorly in school.

Mr. Peter said the committee was charged with planning activities that dealt with nondiscrimination and equity in district educational programs, reporting on community issues as they related to equity, monitoring the district's nondiscrimination and harassment policies and promoting mutual understanding, inclusiveness, justice and equity. He said the presence of the superintendent and 4J School Board representatives on the committee facilitated feedback to the district and evidenced the district's strong concern related to these issues. An annual report on progress or lack thereof was also issued by the committee in cooperation with district staff.

Mr. Martinez emphasized the importance of the committee's voice and role in furthering the work of addressing the achievement gap. He said he reported to be board on the committee's activities at each board meeting but suggested the committee might wish to consider other ways to provide regular feedback to the board to more fully integrate that information.

Mr. Peter observed that the committee had conducted meetings somewhat informally in the past, but would use motions and votes to take formal action on items of business. He asked members to use discretion when using the Equity Committee list serve to distribute information and be certain that it was relevant to the committee's work. He also cautioned committee members to be clear when they were speaking on an issue about whether they were speaking as an individual community member or as a member of the Equity Committee. Members should speak for the committee only when designated to do so.

Ms. Urbina thanked youth members for honoring the committee with their presence and commitment. She stressed that they were full members of the committee with an equal voice and equal vote and should feel free to express their thoughts and opinions.

#### **IV. Retreat Planning Time**

Mr. Peter polled the group about availability for a four-hour planning retreat during the week or on a weekend. He determined that those present agreed to a retreat on Tuesday, November 28, 2006, from 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

#### **V. Diversity Plan Update**

Ms. Luvert distributed a draft document entitled *Eugene 4J School District: Diversity Priorities*, which was the result on a brainstorming session with teachers, administrators and community members at the end of the last school year to discuss what the district needed to do with respect to diversity planning. She said the goal was to work with the Equity Committee to develop a strong diversity plan for the district. She said the district was in the process of conducting a needs analysis and she particularly wanted to hear from students. She reviewed the following diversity priorities and possible strategies and invited questions and comments from the committee:

- Recruitment and Retention
- Family Involvement
- Training
- Data Collection and Evaluation
- Student Achievement
- Student Behavior

Mr. Stiller asked what the district was currently doing to achieve staffing diversity. Ms. Luvert said that the needs assessment would provide better data. She estimated that the 60 new teachers in the district did not meet the diversity goal of 20 percent. She said that the percentage was closer to five percent for teaching staff.

Mr. Martinez said the state average for diversity in the K through 12 system was about five percent and those figures had not changed appreciably for the past two decades despite the increase in the student of color population; the percentage was higher for administrative staff.

Mr. Stiller asked if a wider geographic recruitment of teachers would improve the statistics. Mr. Martinez said that recruitment and hiring processes were different for administrators and teachers and the lack of diversity among teachers was a persistent problem in the district and across the state.

Mr. Tallmadge was not certain that a broader geographic recruitment was the answer. He pointed out that students of color were graduating from the University of Oregon but not getting hired for district teaching positions.

Ms. Rafferty asked how the district defined diversity and established goals. Ms. Luvert replied that some goals had been established previously by the district. She said she would take the committee's questions and report back on them and suggested that Human Resource (HR) could also make a presentation on the hiring policies and procedures, impediments to diversity and ways the Equity Committee could assist the district to reach its goals.

Ms. Waite commented that there was nothing on the list of strategies regarding retention. She said that Terry Bryant had conducted a study based on exit interviews about how a hostile environment contributed to lack of retention. She said that training for administrators and faculty should be an active part of the effort to create a more holistic environment for staff as well as for students.

Mr. Pruzinski asked that the chair develop a speakers' queue so that everyone had an opportunity to talk, particularly the student members of the committee.

Mr. Martinez suggested adding a strategy to recruitment and retention related to how the district coordinated with the Interagency Diversity and Equity Coalition (IDEC), the City and other groups to provide a more supportive environment in the community and the workplace for underrepresented groups.

Mr. Brainard hoped to see changes in HR that would improve the district employment opportunities for Native American graduates from the University. He said that Native American applicants were not selected for interviews and Native American teachers in the district had gone from 11 to 5 currently. He had been unable to obtain any information about why Native American teachers had left the district. Frustration about this led to him leaving the Equity Committee during his previous term. He was willing to participate again if change could be brought about.

Ms. Quinn expressed the hope that the Equity Committee would have an opportunity to speak directly with HR representatives as it was important for the committee to share its concerns and hear from HR directly on those issues.

Ms. Waite said the committee should go beyond discussions with HR and develop specific recommendations for implementation.

Mr. Peter noted that an updated equity report card would be available at the December meeting and perhaps the committee could establish a subcommittee to develop recommendations related to recruitment and retention.

Ms. Luvert and Mr. Martinez described the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN), which was an organization involving districts from across the country that brought students together to discuss their experiences and educate others about those experiences. District staff participated in a research component that reviewed data related to the achievement gap with a strong focus on African-American and Latino disparities in achievement.

Ms. Luvert distributed a schedule of cultural competency training opportunities.

Mr. Peter remarked that the challenge for the committee would be to develop smaller groups around specific work tasks.

Ms. Thomas felt that HR should participate in the planning retreat if the committee would be making recommendations about recruitment and retention.

Mr. Martinez thought it might be more productive for the committee to review available data and formulate recommendations before scheduling a discussion with HR.

In response to a question from Ms. Lauer, Ms. Luvert described the equity and diversity training offerings currently available from the district. Ms. Urbina added that there was little institutional memory of what had happened previously in buildings and she was meeting with teams from each building to try to identify what had occurred, what was successful and what was needed in terms of training. She said the goal was to develop a menu of training tailored to the needs of a building.

Mr. Pruzinski asked if information was available about the extent of training current staff and faculty had received. Ms. Luvert said the needs assessment was still underway. She noted that South Eugene High School requested training for the student body.

Mr. Pruzinski commented that he felt more training was needed for teachers and administrators.

Ms. Rafferty emphasized the importance of including student input in the needs assessment, particularly input from students of color.

Ms. Luvert asked committee members to email her with any other comments or suggestions regarding diversity priorities and strategies.

Ms. Urbina said that a glossary of terms and acronyms would be provided to committee members.

## **VI. Potential Subcommittees**

Mr. Peter reviewed a statistical presentation made to the 4J School Board and Equity Committee in January 2006. The presentation included statewide and district assessment data for math and reading skills at the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades and by ethnicity as well as data related to expulsions, dropout rates, participation in special education and talented and gifted programs and reports of harassment, discrimination, intimidation and bullying. He said that each component of the report card could suggest possible subcommittees. He said the report card arose from discussions between the Equity Committee and district about how to meaningfully evaluate and annually report easily compared data on the district's performance. He said the challenge was to obtain data on which an evaluation could be made with a high degree of confidence.

Referring to the differences in performance between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, Mr. Martinez pointed out that the data was not based on the same groups of students being tracked over time and while the gaps in achievement should not be discounted it did make interpreting the data much more complicated as it was not longitudinal data.

Mr. Pruzinski asked if the data on dropouts was expressed in actual numbers or as a percentage of each group. Mr. Martinez said the figures were actual numbers but data should be plotted against representation in the district to illustrate where there was disproportionality. He said there was massive disparity, especially for African-American, Latino and Native American students.

Mr. Tallmadge asked for the equity reports for prior years. Ms. Urbina said that the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Office of Civil Rights websites had extensive assessment data available to the public. Mr. Martinez volunteered to help committee members delve into the data.

Mr. Stiller pointed out the disparity between percentages of white and Hispanic students failing to achieve the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading benchmark. He noted that research indicated odds were extremely high that students failing the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade benchmark would fail subsequent benchmarks in higher grades as those benchmarks became progressively more difficult. He stressed the importance of students meeting benchmarks at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level because it established a pattern for achievement during the rest of their school careers.

The committee reviewed expulsion and suspension data. Committee members asked that the data be shown both as actual numbers and percentage of the student population.

Mr. Martinez remarked that when numbers were quite small the data was unstable. He suggested that it would be more useful to monitor disciplinary referrals as they would provide an early intervention point.

Mr. Brainard agreed that monitoring disciplinary referrals was more useful as it provided an opportunity for intervention before expulsion or suspension.

Ms. Luvert agreed that disciplinary referrals could be examined but the committee could also consider best practices around suspension and expulsion as that was not the only disciplinary approach. She felt it was a civil rights issue and urged the committee to look at alternatives.

In response to questions from the committee, Mr. Urso said the dropout report was for seniors and there were approximately 1,200 seniors in the district. He said that students who left the district but continued educational activities in a high school completion program were not counted as a dropout if their continuing education was confirmed.

Mr. Peter reviewed harassment and bullying statistics and said it was a challenge to obtain reliable data reports from buildings. He was not certain whether the rising numbers were because of better reporting or an actual increase in incidents.

Mr. Stiller said that the anti-bullying programs promoted by the district actively encouraged students to report incidents that would have previously been covert, which could explain the increased reports.

Mr. Pruzinski remarked that he felt 90 percent of harassment and bullying was not reported.

Mr. Urso commented that many parents did not believe in positive behavior support and wanted those students to be suspended or expelled. He said that voice was not represented on the committee.

Concluding his statistical review, Mr. Peter said the district's goal was for teacher and building administration ethnicity to mirror the student population.

At Ms. Luvert's request, Mr. Urso shared a comment from a new teacher who thought the data from the equity report card was from somewhere else and did not connect it to Eugene's public schools.

Ms. Luvert added that many parents had even less understanding of the situation and educating the community was essential.

## **VII. Next Steps**

The next meeting was scheduled for November 28, 2006, from 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)