

MINUTES

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

June 18, 2009
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Carl Hermanns, acting Chair; Guadalupe Quinn, Bruce Stiller, Sarah Lauer, Twila Souers, Surendra Subramani, Maria Thomas, Alicia Hays, Jerry Rosiek, Sarah Ross, members; Carmen Urbina, 4J staff.

ABSENT: Marshall Peter, Jane Waite, Arbrella Luvert, Michael Carrigan, Tom Henry, Larry Soberman, Charles Martinez, Peter Tromba, members.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Hermanns convened the meeting.

II. Public Comment

Don Harkin recalled his testimony at the previous meeting regarding the photo array that was to be put up at Buena Vista/Meadowlark Elementary Schools. He opined that there had only been several pictures and captions that had been controversial to some parents. He had been saddened that the other photos could not have been displayed without the photos in question. He also had been saddened at the amount of energy it had taken to address the display. He suggested that a policy be set to specifically request that “awareness material” with regard Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer (GLBTQ) would not be presented to children in grades K through five. He thought that after that point they could present such materials and allow parents to opt their children out should they be so inclined.

Clark Barry echoed Mr. Harkin’s sentiments. He averred that there was a school community that was identified by the parents and students in the school. He felt the letter that had been sent after the fact had been adversarial.

III. Update:

- **Meadowlark/Buena Vista Update**
- **Student Survey**

Mr. Hermanns reported that the decision had been made to forego putting up the photo display at Meadowlark/Buena Vista schools. He said the schools would be reviewing this issue with their own equity committee. He underscored that the district’s concern was to ensure that all of its families and children felt welcome and accepted in the schools and that the schools served the full diversity of the city and its school communities. He stressed that children should not be invisible if they were part of the school population.

Ms. Lauer announced that Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) was planning a healing and bridge building celebration for the GLBTQ community after the controversy. She extended an invitation to the Equity Committee to join the celebration, which is planned to be held at

the First Christian Church at 6 p.m. on June 29. She noted that the speakers included Mayor Kitty Piercy, School Superintendent George Russell, Jane Waite, and Guadalupe Quinn. She said the celebration would also include a performance by Soromundi and would feature all three of the Community Alliance of Lane County (CALC) photo displays.

Mr. Stiller reported that the School Climate Survey had been administered in four secondary schools – three middle schools and one high school. He noted that two schools had the technology to utilize Survey Monkey and so he had those results and had compiled graphs. He said the surveys had provided “a ton” of data and he had produced a total of 19 graphs per school. The two schools that did not have the technology had done the surveys by hand and Ms. Urbina had recruited some students to review them and score them. He remarked that this would be a large undertaking. He stated that when he returned to work he would compile spreadsheets and graphs for those results.

Mr. Stiller stated that some things extrapolated from the survey were consistent with what staff would expect and some were encouraging. He noted, regarding the latter, that the number of students who felt supported and listened to by adult staff was high. He said students indicated that of the potential actions they might take to counter bullying talking to a staff member would be the most helpful, though the overriding message from students was that they did not feel even that would be very helpful. He had observed in the bullying and harassment data that the numbers were lower than in other surveys from other districts and national data.

Mr. Stiller described the survey. He explained that there were five questions pertaining to the basis data. He reported that harassment regarding sexual orientation represented 70 percent of such actions in 1 middle school and 66 percent in the other. He planned to continue to work with the University of Oregon to refine the survey. He noted that some questions duplicated the resulting data. Overall, he felt the survey had gone well.

In response to a question from Ms. Lauer, Mr. Stiller explained that rather than put all of the schools through the survey in its first iteration, staff had decided to run it through a few to begin with and then refine the survey. He said the version they utilized would not be appropriate for elementary school students because some of the language was a little graphic.

Ms. Urbina thanked Mr. Stiller for his work. She ascertained from Mr. Stiller that he had revised the survey seven times in order to be responsive to feedback from school principals and staff. She said that bullying and harassment was an issue in the community and the district had to do something about it. She noted that they were also moving forward in tandem with House Bill 2599, which addressed harassment and bullying.

The committee gave Mr. Stiller a round of applause for his hard work.

In response to a question, Ms. Urbina stated that based on the reports they saw, elementary school children were more likely to report incidents of bullying than students in middle and high schools.

Mr. Stiller related that in the Bully Prevention programs, they taught and encouraged ways of dealing with bullying. He said they asked questions in the survey that sought to determine which actions the students felt were helpful.

Ms. Urbina said Mr. Stiller had brought together middle school students in focus groups to provide feedback on the survey as well.

Mr. Stiller had heard that the Churchill High School students were anxious to find out the results of their survey.

Ms. Quinn averred that high school students wanted to have a good school and did not think it was okay to treat people badly.

Mr. Stiller concurred. He said middle and elementary school students tended to conclude that the reason to be safe, responsible, and respectable was because the adults instructed them to instead of adopting the behaviors so that they could show up to school every day expecting to be treated in those ways. He thought this merited addressing.

Ms. Thomas asked if there were ways to identify whom the harassment was coming from and whether some students were hearing things from staff. Mr. Stiller responded that questions 3 and 4 delineated treatment by staff and treatment by students. He said there were no direct questions regarding whether students had heard staff members use offensive language.

Ms. Thomas thought it would be helpful to include that. Ms. Quinn concurred. She averred that Latino students heard offensive things from staff.

Mr. Rosiek remarked that close scrutiny revealed that often the target of bullying was counseled on how to change their behavior to avoid becoming a target. He said essentially a student learned to reform their identity so that it would not elicit a response.

Ms. Hayes recounted an incident in which a cafeteria worker had instructed her son not to talk about his family at Buena Vista Elementary School. She added that she had gone to the principal and the incident was addressed.

Ms. Thomas felt that this pointed to the importance of recognizing how the adults were behaving in school. She wanted to make sure that the surveys looked for insight into how the adults were treating the students in schools.

Ms. Quinn thought that what felt most important was that they were working toward establishing the schools as a safe place where all young people felt safe, heard and respected.

Mr. Stiller agreed that they were “not there yet 100 percent.” He said the survey could include questions about adult behavior and asked for suggestions on how the questions could be worded.

Ms. Ross expressed some concern about asking students to circle choices for ethnicity and gender. She thought there could be broader choices to make.

Ms. Lauer thought it all came back to a need for all-inclusive training for staff.

Mr. Harkin expressed concern as a member of the public that the survey did not address more general types of bullying such as calling someone a “nerd.” Mr. Stiller assured him that the definition at the top of the survey and the subsequent question 2 did address this. He pointed out that harassment based on physical appearance was called out by question 11.

Mr. Rosiek commented that when they conducted this type of analysis, he wondered if the analysis would be “left at the point of intervention,” which was the level of how students interacted with students. He asked if they should recognize and take responsibility for the root of the students’ behavior, which was far more distributed and embedded in the practices of adult community members. He thought it would be a start to ask students what they thought about the adults, but he was not certain that the students would readily recognize the behaviors in adults or whether the adults could even see it. He felt that even he sometimes fell into cultural assumptions regarding gender and was surprised by his own assumptions.

Ms. Hayes commented that it was challenging to explain some insults to the students and why they should not be used without having the young people shut down and stop listening.

Ms. Thomas supported using the survey on an annual basis in order to look at the school culture and how it changed from year to year.

Mr. Stiller indicated that it was his intent to conduct the survey on an annual basis. Ms. Urbina added that the principals supported doing so.

Ms. Quinn considered the survey to be a process that “goes on forever.” She said that while she would like to fix the whole world, they would do what they could do to make the community a better place. She felt the survey was part of this effort.

Ms. Souers said she would share the survey with the Human Rights Commission of Eugene and explain the effort behind it and how it would be used.

Mr. Rosiek asked how, when returning to the Churchill student community, the survey would be used to further the discussion with students. He had met some students in the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) program who were equipped to challenge the institution around them and teachers. He said this had become the premise for creating student discussion groups in order to sensitize students to the implicit racist, sexist, oppressive, homophobic excesses in everyone’s talk and to teach them how to say it out loud to people who might resist at first. He added that the district should never rely on students to transform schools, but students could play an important role in influencing school culture.

Mr. Stiller agreed with Mr. Rosiek. He related that by fourth grade a very high percentage of bullying and harassment behaviors were covert. He stated that student buy-in to intervention efforts was critical. He said when staff had tried to extend the elementary bully prevention and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) programs up to middle school he had not been certain how well it would work but it had been clear they would have to do more processing with the students and grant students more control over it. He explained that the key variables addressed by bully prevention and PBS were very similar to “Use Another Word”, which was student-driven. He said the middle school program, “Expect Respect” that had been worked on at Spencer Butte Middle School was a hybrid of the two. He observed that nothing would change if there were no buy-in to the concept that the students did not want those types of behaviors at their school.

Mr. Rosiek understood that PBS focused on coaching students to use certain behaviors to disrupt social situations. He said things became different when students went on to middle or high school, because teaching a student to interrupt covert homophobic harassment could make that student subject to such harassment.

Mr. Stiller stressed that this was why they needed to gain collective buy-in from the students.

Ms. Thomas asked if they were looking at what went on between adults in regards to discrimination. She thought that was part of the overall climate of a school building. Mr. Stiller responded that they did not look at it with this particular survey. Ms. Urbina added that this would fall under the purview of the Human Resources Department. She thought a recommendation to survey employees would be good to pass along to the department.

Mr. Subramani asked when the final report would be complete. Mr. Stiller replied that he would present it later in the fall.

Ms. Quinn ascertained from Mr. Stiller that they would have a chance to review the survey and

provide feedback for the next year. Mr. Stiller added that he intended to work with the University of Oregon in order to get some technical assistance from survey experts. He said the plan would be to administer the survey annually in the spring, during a time in which it would not conflict with other activities.

IV. Next Year Visioning

Mr. Hermanns explained that Mr. Peter and Ms. Urbina had asked him to briefly talk with the committee about what members envisioned the committee undertaking and how they felt the committee should proceed.

Mr. Hermanns highlighted the activities of the committee's work over the past year, which had been launched by an effort done by Arbrella Luvert and John Vincent. Ms. Luvert and Mr. Vincent had conducted an inventory of each of the district's schools of what was going on in the schools around what the schools perceived to be equity. He reported that it had become clear to staff that there was a lot of activity in all of the schools, all of it well-meaning but none of it really connected to another program. This had spurred an effort that had culminated in Mr. Stiller's survey effort.

Mr. Hermanns related a meeting he had with an MSAN class at North Eugene High School. He said the students had talked about the social dynamics and had discussed racial harassment that occurred at the school. He had been disheartened by how matter of fact the students had been about it. He had asked the students if they reported it and students indicated they did but did not perceive that any results came of it. He said when reporting this back to the administrators and teachers, they indicated that the students sometimes did not see how situations were handled but they assured him that they really did make an effort to respond. His response to this had been to ask whether the culture had changed and the answer was no.

Continuing, Mr. Hermanns said a common theme he had heard from the students about their classroom experience was that the teachers did not really know them and did not ask them about themselves. He related the experience of one girl of Latino heritage who had been encouraged by one guidance counselor to go to the University of Oregon, but a new counselor had told her that she should look at going to Lane Community College (LCC). He said the student had a grade point average of 3.6 and had been looking forward to going to the University. What had been meaningful to him had been that her posture had been that she would not listen to this person anymore, but later she indicated that his suggestion had caused her to question whether the counselor knew something she did not. He observed that young people in that situation were fragile about such things.

Mr. Hermanns said the district had decided that, on an academic level, they would focus on three main things, the first of which was individual progress monitoring. He stated that the district had made great strides in this direction already and was utilizing the Individual Progress Model (IPM) and tiered interventions. He noted that the latter ensured that a student would not be placed into Special Education based solely on a reading problem. He said they had worked with the University of Oregon to get a test called ECC-BM, which allowed the students to be benchmarked. He said they were also tying actual finances and resources to focused outcomes. He explained that if the students then progressed, the effectiveness of the intervention could be measured, and if they did not, they would be able to identify what did not work. He stated that there was a cultural/linguistic component that was systematically being added to the benchmarking.

Mr. Hermanns explained that the second area of focus was algebra and they were looking at proficiency-based assessments. He said a student in middle school could get high school credit for algebra if they met a certain level of assessment. He noted that there were many summer bridge programs for algebra.

Mr. Hermanns stated that the third area of focus was instructional technology and how the staff worked with it. He said overlying all of it was equity and what was referred to as Access to General Education (ATGE), related to Special Education. He underscored that the schools needed to be not only safe and free from harassment, but they also needed to be places that reflected back an expectation of and a belief in the ability of each of the students to achieve at high levels. He commented that in going into the classroom, one heard people talking a lot about the instructional core, i.e. the relationship between the student and the teacher and the curriculum. He said, from an equity standpoint, they were focusing on the relationship between the students and their teachers. He noted that Ms. Urbina would be taking on the equity work.

Mr. Hermanns shared that in an effort to increase access to the Pre-SAT tests, he planned to collaborate with the University of Oregon so that instead of going to a gym in a high school on a Saturday morning, students would be able to bus over to the campus to take the test. He said college student monitors would work with the young people and, in addition to administering the test, would meet with them and provide a tour of the campus. He related that they were encouraging the MSAN students to start having an understanding of pedagogy. He said there were opportunities to show how students could shape their experience. He did not foresee that the financial constraints the district was facing would impede the work.

Ms. Lauer asked what would happen to a student who met the benchmarks at the elementary level and then started to fall behind in middle school. Mr. Hermanns responded that this was a big issue and did happen in the schools. He assured her that this was a specific area of focus.

Ms. Urbina said the individual progress monitoring looked to multiple sources for data on each student, from state test scores to specific work done by the teacher and principal. She stated that the director and the principal looked at every single file and looked at all of the testing and the assets of the student. She related an example of a disparity around equity that had been uncovered through the data in that a student who was Caucasian was promoted to a higher level of math though s/he only met two of three criteria for the promotion but students of color were not promoted with only two criteria met.

Mr. Hermanns concurred. He said if a kid was not learning, one should not automatically think what is wrong with that kid; one should ask what the conditions of learning were that were supporting that kid.

Mr. Stiller considered this a cultural shift in the workforce that was happening slowly. He noted that he had worked for the district for 23 years as a school psychologist and a behavior support coordinator. He recalled that 20 years earlier blaming the child was extremely common, as well as blaming the parent. He said the cultural shift they had been working on through PBS was about environmental redesign and not about blaming the children or their families. He felt they were making progress, though there was still a way to go. He stated that some buildings were further along than others.

Mr. Rosiek observed that as this progress was happening, the language of intervention was still individually posed. He expressed concern about collecting all of the equity interventions and trying to manage them under one "sort of accountability rubric." He did not trust any institution to have the outcomes that could manage the equity intervention. He felt it would be easy to "choke off" innovation inside of that sphere. He understood that there were two different parts, that one part was to get into the minds of the adults and begin to change them, but the language and what it meant and how it was tied to the "pervasive national discourse" about outcomes was another. He averred that what was sacrificed in pursuit of the evidence-based outcomes was the more diffuse critical and cultural lenses that could not be driven by this.

Mr. Hermanns did not perceive a dichotomy in the way the district was approaching it.

Mr. Rosiek asked who would conduct the evaluation and who would the evaluation be presented to in order to justify the funds. He said there were different ways to measure outcomes and he was worried about narrow definitions of outcomes. He felt those narrow definitions could “choke off” the wisdom that was in the community about doing other things.

Mr. Hermanns looked forward to furthering these types of discussions in the Equity Committee. He appreciated people asking “the hard questions.” He averred that when he talked about outcomes he was not looking at taking a student’s grade point and tying it to what a student was doing in MSAN and evaluating the effort being made there. He was talking about all of the efforts like the MSAN effort and the efforts being put into place with student leadership. He was looking at all of those things as supporting what would hopefully be good teaching and learning. He was interested in the outcomes that measured whether a student was doing better or worse in math, as an example, and if he saw evidence that the student was doing worse he would want to look at what interventions the student was receiving. He underscored that these type of efforts needed to go on because they knew this from the evidence drawn from looking at a classroom and what the kids reported to them. He added that if one went into a classroom and observed the students, one would know within five minutes whether students were engaged or not.

Mr. Rosiek asked what the relationships were between the outcomes of a math test and the equity efforts like MSAN or PBS. He noted that there had been some claims made that reducing the level of bullying in a school improved test scores.

Mr. Stiller had not seen this research and commented that he would be skeptical of this claim.

Mr. Hermanns remarked that he would surmise that a child would do better if he or she did not feel intimidated, bored, disengaged, and afraid. He said how to assess the outcome on an ECC BM method test, which looked specifically at skills, would point to the skill of the teaching.

Ms. Ross commented, regarding responses that students did not feel their teachers really knew them, that the ratio of students to teachers had increased greatly. She observed that it was difficult to track large numbers of people. She said there was only so much a person could do to establish relationships in a large group. She related that her own son had encountered difficulty in school, but because of relationships he had established with certain teachers he had been able to turn around and now was a college graduate. She thought the intervention could almost be that they needed a better student/teacher ratio. She felt that it should be at least considered as one of the deficiencies of the school system.

Ms. Hayes concurred. She said, as a school board member, it was something the board had tried to do when more money had come in the previous year. She shared that it had been a very hard decision to make cuts but when most of the spending goes to staff when cuts were made, staff levels were affected. She underscored that a goal of closing the achievement gap was at odds with staff reductions. She observed that the union supported layoffs according to super seniority, but it was a known fact that students did better when they saw themselves reflected in their teachers. She appreciated that the School District 4J was at least willing to have a conversation around retaining teachers who provided more diversity to the learning environment. She said she would like to see how the committee could support the Human Resources Department in doing this work.

Ms. Lauer asked what happened with the District Division Plan. Mr. Hermanns responded that Ms. Luvert was making the final edits to it and adding all of the input she had received. He related that it was a lengthy document containing about 60 items in it, some of them that could be implemented

immediately and some that would be affected by the collective bargaining process. He related that they planned to take the document and prioritize it in order to establish what the highest priority items were that could be initiated in the present.

Ms. Urbina read some quotes from MSAN students who had spoken about their experiences to an in-service for 350 teachers:

- “It’s hard for students to just approach teachers.”
- “A lot of teachers act like they’re listening but they’re really not.”
- “He dropped out because he was really shy and it was hard for him to communicate with teachers.”
- “I’ve been kicked out of places based on how I look. I’ve been stereotyped that I’m in a gang.”
- “Culture and race isn’t something to be tolerated; it’s to be appreciated.”
- “Treat us based on who we are, not as a percentage point.”
- “Talk to your students, see what they’re interested in, and find a way to tie it in.”
- “Put us in groups with people we don’t usually talk to. We need to know everyone’s culture so we can work together.”
- “Why is it so hard for white teachers to talk about race and culture in school? What assumptions do you make about students of color and white students in my classroom?”

Ms. Thomas thought this harkened back to her suggestion to conduct a climate survey with staff.

Ms. Urbina assured her that every single department was looking at the work they were doing through the equity lens. She said she and Jason Mak, in the Human Resources Department, felt they knew the right people to bring in that could provide the insight. She averred that the community was gifted with people who had tremendous expertise around equity and diversity. She agreed that this was an idea to bring to Mr. Mak to discuss and possibly implement.

Mr. Hermanns recalled that he had promised the MSAN class, which he had visited in November, 2008, that he would check in at the end of the year to see what if any progress had been made. He related that the kids had said the general overall school culture and some of the “harassment stuff” had not changed a lot, but they were hanging around with many different kids now. He had been heartened to hear that some of their teachers had started to change. He said the students had characterized it as the teachers were “really starting to get on us now” and they liked that. One student had complimented the principal to him, calling her “great.” He felt that just good teaching and teachers showing that they cared and expected students to do good work made a difference.

Ms. Ross agreed. She observed that one good teacher could actually keep a kid in school.

Ms. Quinn remarked that everyone could remember one good teacher in their schooling experience that really made a difference for them. She said one piece of the educational system was to prepare them to live in the world they were growing up in.

Ms. Hayes appreciated hearing about the MSAN. She expressed concern that the MSAN was inconsistent from school to school. She wanted to ensure that they did not narrow themselves in terms of the creativity that happened. Mr. Hermanns responded that this issue was on the “radar screen.”

Ms. Urbina assured Ms. Hayes that she was working toward that end. She had scheduled meetings with all of the high schools because the MSAN class was offered in all of them. She said the feeling the students had ranged from considering it a badge of honor to a feeling that it was a class they had to take because they were a problem somehow. She related that they wanted to go into middle schools and mentor the students at that age and they intended to create a plan with outcomes. She

said one thing that had been discussed at Churchill High School was that it should be mandatory that at least two MSAN students should serve on the site council. She noted that they were bringing in students of color and International High School leadership students to work on the Churchill surveys. The kids had never interacted before.

Ms. Hayes related that she had attended a national conference on domestic violence and child maltreatment in Wyoming. She reported that there was an overrepresentation of children of color in the foster care system nationally and even more so in the State of Oregon. She said study after study indicated that there was no more child maltreatment in one family than the next, regardless of culture, but for some reason children of color were removed from their families at a higher percentage rate. She related that they were working on a tool box for judges with a check list, with Multnomah County tapped to serve as one of the model courts in which to implement them. She thought it was intriguing to consider how she would use that check list or how teachers, principals, and others could use it. She explained that a model court served as a training for courts.

Ms. Urbina said she was teaching a class for parents of African-American children at present. She related that the 25 parents attending the class were mostly parents of biracial children or white parents of African-American children. She said what had come up for this group was the need for the knowledge base to understand how it was to walk as a person of color in the context of Eugene, Oregon. She stated that the graduation would be held on June 22 and invited the committee members to come. She added that the bigger question was how to have the conversation with the whole community.

Ms. Hayes said the School Board would be appointing a new member or two to the Equity Committee.

Ms. Urbina suggested that the committee go around the table and offer final thoughts for the year. She thanked the committee members for their work and their compassion for the community and for the schools.

Mr. Hermanns echoed that. He felt that the Equity Committee was a gift to the school district.

Ms. Ross observed that the committee used to have student members. Ms. Urbina explained that the committee had student members at the beginning of the year and then they were not able to continue. She said this was still their hope, noting that they had provided transportation to the students to make it an easier commitment to make.

Mr. Rosiek said he had appreciated the frank conversations they were able to have in the Equity Committee. He related that it had been a "glorious" year where equity was concerned in the education department. He stated that they had new programs and the demography of the students in the Masters and PhD programs was "stunning." He felt the committee supported his work at the University.

Ms. Thomas liked coming to the committee. She related that she was able to see the aftereffects of the schools not working with the kids in a positive manner. She understood that they were moving forward and the committee helped School District 4J implement changes. She knew there was a lot more work to do and she looked forward to the future. She added that, historically, at the end of the school year there was a "bunch of stuff" going on with kids and she saw them in the juvenile department and this year was no exception. She wanted to implement changes that had "some teeth" and accountability. She averred that they lose too many kids, but they also had saved a lot.

Mr. Subramani shared that he had served on the committee now for six years. He had seen a slow transition. He wanted to give tremendous credit to Ms. Urbina for the work she had done and

continued to do.

The committee gave Ms. Urbina a round of applause.

Ms. Lauer said she was honored to serve on the committee. She especially appreciated the support the GLBTQ community had received from the committee both in the Buena Vista/Meadowlark photo display issue and with the subcommittee.

Mr. Stiller related that he had seen a commitment and sincerity from the district leadership that he had been very proud of. He said it was definitely different from ten years earlier. He had witnessed a willingness on the part of the district to take some risks and commended School Superintendent George Russell, Mr. Hermanns, and the School District 4J School Board.

Ms. Hayes called the committee a great group. She said she recently attended a conference and shared a quote from it: "don't let the fear of losing the job keep you from doing the job."

Ms. Souers said when she had returned to the committee the issues had been consistent with the issues she had seen 30 years earlier, but this year had been an "incredibly exciting" year. She acknowledged the hard work of Mr. Hermanns, Ms. Urbina, and Mr. Russell. She especially appreciated Mr. Stiller's work and that the School Board members were involved in the committee. She shared that she was grateful to be a part of it.

Ms. Quinn echoed the sentiments of the committee. She believed that the people came to the committee because they cared about the community's kids. She said this made the work possible and left them with great hope. She believed that it did really matter that they came together and talked about what was working and what was not working. She underscored the need to keep their "eyes on the prize," which was the kids in the community who would eventually run the community and the country in the future. She underscored the importance of taking care of them now.

The meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

(Recorded by Ruth Atcherson)