

MINUTES

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

November 24, 2009
4 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Carl Hermanns, Co-chair; Sara Cramer, Jennifer Geller, Alicia Hayes, Misa Joo, Sarah Lauer, Joe Lavin, Guadalupe Quinn, Linda Smart, Twila Souers, Bruce Stiller, Maria Thomas, Peter Tromba, Belinda McClain, members; Carmen Urbina, Superintendent George Russell, Charles Martinez, 4J staff.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m.

II. Public Comment

Mr. Peter stated that no community members were present to provide comments but noted that anyone who arrived later in the meeting would be given the opportunity to speak.

III. Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Mr. Lavin noted corrections to the minutes.

Mr. Peter, noting no objections from the Committee, deemed the minutes of the District 4J Equity Committee for October 27, 2009 approved as submitted.

Mr. Peter reviewed the meeting agenda for the benefit of the Committee members.

Mr. Peter noted that he and Ms. Geller would speak regarding ballot measures 66 and 67 later on in the meeting.

Ms. Geller passed out a fact sheet from Stand for Children that provided information regarding Measures 66 and 67 and briefly described how those tax measures would preserve essential revenue for School District 4J. She encouraged the committee members to rally community support for the passage of the two ballot measures.

Mr. Peter understood that the failure of Measures 66 and 67 would represent a reduction of approximately \$8.5 million to the District and also, would most likely, result in the closing of one of the District's high schools. Mr. Peter countered the prevailing conception that passage of the measures would eliminate jobs across the State.

Ms. Smart understood that the failure of Measures 66 and 67 would eliminate approximately 125 District 4J jobs.

Mr. Peter agreed that the failure of Measures 66 and 67 would represent a "crippling blow" to the District 4J budget.

IV. De-Brief on Equity Report Presentation to the Board & on Joint Meeting of the Equity Committee and the Board on January 23, 2010

Mr. Peter circulated his draft remarks regarding the Joint Eugene School Board/Equity Committee Meeting of November 4, 2009. He noted that while many elements of the meeting had been discouraging it had actually been a relatively productive meeting.

Mr. Hermanns asked Ms. Souers and Ms. Quinn how they felt about the conversations from the November 4 meeting. Ms. Souers believed that the Equity Committee's comments had been taken very seriously by those present at the meeting.

Ms. Quinn agreed with Ms. Souers' comments and felt that it was unfortunate that the discussions raised at the November 4 meeting did not happen more often and that significant action pieces from those discussions were rarely raised.

Ms. Hays suggested that half of the District 4J Board's winter retreat be dedicated to discussions of Equity Committee items. She further suggested that the findings of those discussions might be taken before the 4J Budget Committee.

Ms. Quinn noted that it sometimes seemed overwhelming to squeeze the Equity Committee's discussion findings into the limited amount of time the 4J Board had to discuss such matters. She suggested that such conversations might be streamlined in order to improve the process. Ms. Hays agreed that Ms. Quinn's suggestion might warrant further consideration.

Mr. Peter maintained that reducing the number of items covered during Board discussions did not seem to him to be the best way to come up with a cohesive plan for addressing various areas of concern.

Mr. Hermanns briefly discussed the conceptual processes employed in Board discussions and believed that they were indeed attempting to focus on a more limited number of action areas. He hoped that the process would result in a viable action plan for the District and that it would involve a manageable framework capable of addressing a variety of issues.

Ms. Urbina elaborated upon her perceptions of the Board processes, that she had arrived at, during her first year as the District 4J Equity Coordinator and Parent Involvement/Community Coordinator. She briefly commented on how the report of John Lenness had **informed various District initiatives** and also how different District framework discussions had been incorporated into the District's various human resource processes.

Ms. Urbina briefly described how an equity plan might be developed by the Equity Committee and District staff in order to develop the District's overall capacity for understanding and addressing various equity, diversity and cultural competency matters.

Mr. Tromba and Ms. Cramer arrived to the meeting at 4:55 p.m.

Mr. Peter believed that various elements of the District were chaotic and unproductive and believed that more specific goals were needed in order to meet the District's objectives. He believed many of the District's practices in recent years had failed to deliver results.

Ms. Souers indicated she was less focused on establishing an equity plan than she was on developing an effective assessment process for identifying problems and possible solutions within the District.

Mr. Stiller noted his experience in developing various behavior plans and action plans and believed that such plans often failed due to a lack of fidelity in their implementation. He believed that the District's concerns needed to be looked on as community problems rather than just school problems.

Ms. Joo briefly described her perceptions regarding the District and noted she was heartened by the progress she had seen regarding action plans. She agreed that establishing "buy-in" on action plans across the District was essential **for those plans' District-wide success.**

Mr. Tromba noted recent discussions he had with District Superintendent George Russell regarding closing the achievement gap and asked what models were available for the kinds of action plans the Committee seemed to be discussing. He noted that his biology background **had informed his beliefs** that systemic change was necessary for the continued health and prosperity of the District.

Ms. Thomas agreed with Mr. Peter's previous comments and noted that, while she had recognized changes in the District, she had not seen constant accountability for the District. She cited the current lack of African-American and Latino student union groups at Churchill High School as an example. She expressed that measurable accountability was necessary to help sustain change within District schools.

Ms. Hays noted that the Board would continue its discussions in January. Ms. Hays commented on various studies which indicated that consistency was essential in effectively implementing educational strategies and that adequate time was needed to determine if certain strategies were indeed working as designed.

Ms. Hays suggested that the Equity Committee was well-positioned to discuss whether site-based or District-wide strategies were most appropriate for determining effective policies. She further recognized the importance in definitively determining whether large and expensive strategies such as the DARE program were actually working.

Ms. Hays hoped that the Equity Members would be able to attend the Board's retreat on January 23, 2010.

Mr. Peter responded to Mr. Tromba's comments and expressed that the absence of available models for effective strategies should not preclude the development of action plans for the District. He believes that the absence of action plans represented an abrogation of the District's primary responsibilities.

Ms. Smart noted she had attended a recent meeting with Churchill High School students and noted that she had recently been hearing many of the same concerns and dialogues that had been raised when her children had attended Churchill. She was saddened to think that such little progress had been made in many areas of the District. She agreed that systemic change needed to be made.

Ms. Urbina briefly described her perceptions regarding the development of an equity plan and asked for patience in order that a sustainable and effective plan for the District might be created and implemented.

Mr. Lavin noted recent discussions by the South Area Leadership Team about how they might develop meaningful connections with students. He believed that the most meaningful area of impact in any action plan would address teacher-student relationships and staff-student relationships in a manner that would help break down many established beliefs regarding such relationships.

Superintendent George Russell arrived to the meeting at 5:15 p.m.

Mr. Tromba briefly commented on various steps that could be taken in order move the District forward to a sustainable action plan. He noted that the relationships, which Mr. Lavin had referred to, usually took a long time to change and positively affect. He worried about any action plan for the District which purported to be “the end all and be all” with respect to educational strategies.

Ms. Hays referenced previous comments that had been made and noted that it was important to use both the Committee and the Board's time effectively with respect to policy and strategy discussions.

Ms. Thompson suggested that the Committee review the structure of the District in order to identify areas that might be improved and successful programs that might be implemented.

Ms. Cramer agreed that there were procedural areas of the District that could be improved in a cost-effective manner. She hoped that some sort of strategy for accurately documenting strategies used action plans for the District could be used.

Ms. Quinn believed it was necessary for the Equity Committee to have an honest conversation with the Board in order to align the equity goals of the Committee and the Board with those of the community at large.

Ms. Hays, responding to a question from Mr. Peter, confirmed that the Board meeting was scheduled for 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 23, 2010.

Ms. Urbina hoped that the context for the Board's January 23 meeting would be made clear to the Equity Committee so that everyone involved could engage in a meaningful conversation about District matters. Superintendent Russell responded that District staff would be available at the meeting to answer question and further hoped that the dialogue that had begun at the November 4 joint meeting could be continued.

Mr. Peter noted that several Committee members had planned to attend the January 23 Board meeting.

Mr. Stiller commented that the student's suggestions, from the meeting he had referenced earlier to, were eminently practical and that they should be taken seriously.

The Committee members briefly discussed their intentions and hopes for the January 23 Board meeting.

Ms. Geller noted that the Equity Committee had posed six critical questions to the Board the last time they had attended a board meeting and asked if it would be necessary for the Board to revisit those questions for the benefit of the Equity Committee.

Ms. Joo briefly commented on how District site councils had often interacted with student populations at different schools in the community. She noted that she did not know of any African-American or Latino student union that had not focused on civic duty as one of their strongest guiding principles.

Mr. Tromba noted that some strategies were already so well-aligned with the Board's goals that they might not even require any formal Board action in order to be implemented.

Mr. Tromba hoped that discussions of the delineations between District-wide and site-based strategies would be included at the January 23 meeting. He believed that non-Board goals were often pushed into site-based strategies where the benefits from those strategies were not readily apparent.

Ms. Lauer expressed that site-based organization was highly important in order for principals and school staff to effectively communicate their educational strategies to other areas of the 4J School District.

Mr. Peter noted the next Equity Committee meeting was scheduled for December 17, 2009.

Charles Martinez arrived to the meeting at 5:39 pm.

Mr. Peter suggested that the six critical questions that the Equity Committee had previously asked the Board could be used to develop a survey instrument that could feed discussions on the current state of the District. Mr. Martinez agreed that the Equity Committee's questions might be used in such a manner.

Mr. Martinez informed the Committee that the Board planned to have a conversation about site-based decision making processes and the Board's interactions with the Equity Committee before its January 23 meeting. He hoped that such conversations would enable the Board to have a much more productive meeting on January 23.

Mr. Peter suggested that the District staff might generate for the Equity Committee members a portfolio of one-page statements that briefly detailed the particulars of each District program.

Mr. Martinez briefly described how the Board considered and discussed District programs. He hoped that the programs might be viewed objectively in order to more accurately gauge their direct benefit to District students. Ms. Geller agreed with Mr. Martinez's comments.

Mr. Peter asked Mr. Martinez if he would attend the next Equity Committee meeting on December 17.

Superintendent Russell noted the short time between the Equity Committee's meeting on December 17 and the Board's meeting on January 23 and hoped that the Equity Committee would carefully consider how they planned to address their areas of concern.

Mr. Martinez suggested that a portfolio of District programs similar to what Mr. Peter had described could be generated by staff in order to highlight key areas of the District. Mr. Peter stated that such a portfolio really only needed to include a brief description of each program and each programs' goals and costs.

Ms. Souers agreed a portfolio describing the particulars of each District program would be very helpful to the work of the Equity Committee.

Mr. Lavin briefly commented on how survey instruments such as Mr. Peter had suggested might be used in District 4J schools.

The Committee members briefly discussed how surveys were administered within the District and the types of survey areas that might be covered in such processes.

Mr. Martinez confirmed he would coordinate with Mr. Peter and Ms. Urbina regarding discussion items for the December 17 and January 23 meetings.

V. Student Leadership Capacity Building

Mr. Hermanns updated the Committee on recent student leadership capacity building efforts and noted that the current strategies in that regard were being evaluated in a context that would answer the question, "Is it mutually aligned and how does it change what happens in the everyday lives of our kids in school?" He noted that the overall culture of each 4J school and the classroom relationships between students and teachers were being used as the primary criteria by which the leadership capacity building efforts were evaluated.

Mr. Hermanns expressed from his recent observations at Churchill High School and other schools that students were very interested in having input on the nature and development of their educational experience. Mr. Hermanns believed that the District did not have mechanisms that consistently and systematically supported students in this regard.

Mr. Hermanns stated that Superintendent Russell had suggested the creation of student advisory committees within the district whereby students and the four high school principals would meet with Superintendent Russell on a quarterly basis to discuss various matters of concern.

Ms. Thomas asked if the members of student advisory committees would be chosen by the high school principals. Ms. Urbina answered that the student members of such committees would not be chosen by principals but would rather submit an application and essay that would be reviewed by a small District committee who would select and appoint student members to the committee.

Ms. Urbina, responding to a question from Ms. Thomas, noted that the District had not yet formally been notified of Superintendent Russell's suggestion to create student advisory committees.

Superintendent Russell, responding to a question from Ms. Smart, noted that the District might eventually expand the student advisory committee process to include middle schools as well as high schools. He added that the District intended to expand the student conference for 2010 to include middle schools.

Mr. Hermanns noted that he and District staff had been in contact with Johnny Lake about working with students in a leadership capacity and also about using that training in order to create a nucleus of approximately twelve students from each high school who could then pass along their leadership skills to even more students.

Mr. Hermanns briefly described how he envisioned the student leadership training sessions with Mr. Lake would be conducted.

Mr. Hermanns, responding to a question from Ms. Lauer, noted it had not yet been determined who the four student advisory committee members would ultimately report to.

Superintendent Russell noted that while various aspects of the student advisory council process had yet to be worked out, it was anticipated to operate in a manner similar to Susan Castillo's student superintendent/student advisory council process.

Mr. Hermanns believed that the ongoing and self-sustaining nature of the student leadership training sessions would be of great benefit to the District.

The Equity Committee members briefly discussed the merits of the student advisory committee process.

Mr. Hermanns, responding to a question from Ms. Thomas, stated that the selection criteria for the student advisory committee members had not yet been determined.

Ms. Thomson believed that, without the support of the various student unions to disseminate the leadership training principles in each school, the student advisory committee process would demand a great deal of resources with very little measurable benefit.

Ms. Hays commented that, in her efforts to better understand the principles of positive youth development and engagement, she had struggled to incorporate various diversity and equity principles as part of her overall learning process. She hoped that Mr. Hermanns and anyone else involved in the student leadership curriculum process would surmount similar challenges as they progressed in their work.

Mr. Hermanns noted that Mr. Lake had developed a student leadership curriculum at North Eugene High School that he planned to take to students in the other 4J high schools.

Ms. Urbina noted that Mr. Lake had worked to create a space for student voices to be heard throughout the District. Ms. Hays hoped that Mr. Lake and others involved in the student leadership training process would work to first determine how and if students wanted to have such a space provided for them.

The Equity Committee members continued their discussion of the merits of the student advisory committee process.

VI. Instructional Focus

Mr. Hermanns passed out a discussion sheet entitled "Board Retreat Presentation: Foundational and Future Thinking" and shared his thoughts on how the elements listed therein might be tied in to the various equity concerns of the Committee and the District itself.

Ms. Hays excused herself from the meeting at 6:12 p.m.

Mr. Hermanns briefly described the process by which the discussion sheet had been drafted. He noted that the ongoing District budget crisis and various issues related to educational efficacy had provided the basis for many of the items listed in the discussion sheet. Mr. Hermanns briefly elaborated upon each of the three key instructional strategies listed in the discussion sheet.

Ms. Cramer excused herself from the meeting at 6:16 p.m.

Mr. Hermanns noted that the progress monitoring instructional strategy listed on the discussion sheet would encourage open and shared practices by allowing successful teachers to share their methods with other teachers in the District.

Mr. Hermanns, responding to a question from Ms. Thomas, noted that it was uncertain how certain protective factors would be utilized in order to help educators identify the best ways in which to deal with problem students. Mr. Stiller added that the District had developed a behavioral model similar to IPPS which was a tiered intervention model designed to assist certain students. Mr. Stiller added that the behavioral model had only been implemented at nine 4J schools so far and that there were several ways in which the model might be expanded to help even more students.

The Committee members briefly discussed a variety of factors that had affected the implementation of the behavioral model described by Mr. Stiller.

Mr. Stiller hoped that schools using the IPPS behavioral model would not rely on teacher referrals as the primary source for screening students who needed greater assistance. He hoped that multiple sources would be used and that the behavioral model would build a system that supported good behavior throughout the District staff.

Mr. Lavin commented that Brad New and Tia Dube' had worked on a suicide prevention task force and suggested that their work in that regard represented another way in which District staff could efficiently manage its resources.

Ms. McClain asked how the behavioral model might be used at the various school levels in order to generate consensus among District staff as to which students needed greater behavioral assistance and at what levels such assistance was needed. Mr. Tromba answered that such consensus was typically achieved through the use of team meetings with teachers and staff.

Mr. Hermanns proceeded to briefly elaborate upon the algebra concept assessments and instructional technology strategies listed in the discussion sheet.

Mr. Peter encouraged the Committee members and their associates to strongly support the passage of Ballot Measures 66 and 67. He added that he needed one more volunteer to assist in the December 1 call bank used to support the two ballot measures.

Ms. Urbina distributed two handouts regarding the upcoming equity seminars, "Beyond Conflict to Consensus Institute: The Basic Process" and "Taking It Up: Building our Will, Skill and Knowledge to Interrupt Racial Inequities in Oregon's Schools," and encouraged the Equity Committee members to participate in those events.

Mr. Hermanns adjourned the meeting at 6:32 p.m.

(Recorded by Wade Hicks)