

## MINUTES

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

April 1, 2010  
4:30 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Marshall Peter, Chair; Carl Hermanns, Co-chair; Michael Carrigan, Sascha Cosio, Jennifer Geller, Sarah Lauer, Joel Lavin, Linda Smart, Bruce Stiller, Surendra Subramani, Lorraine Wilson, Melly Holloway, Racquel Wells, Andy Gottesman, members; Carmen Urbina, 4J staff; Heather Norland, University of Oregon, guest.

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Mr. Peter convened the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

### **Committee and Public Comment**

Mr. Carrigan raised concerns about a 4J equity policy that all middle and high school students had to take a mainstream math class, even if the class was not helpful. He said this was a problem for many students and asked if the Equity Committee might need to have some involvement in the issue.

Mr. Peter said his understanding was that the law affecting students with disabilities and their individualized education programs (IEP) assumed those students would be educated with peers who did not have disabilities, but that assumption did not supersede students' being able to derive educational benefits from instruction. He did not believe the district would be able to have a policy mandating that students with IEPs were only educated in mainstream math classes.

Mr. Lavin stated he was not aware of such a district policy. He explained how students were assessed and interventions developed for students who needed assistance.

Mr. Peter asked Ms. Urbina to raise the question with Larry Sullivan and report back to the committee.

In response to a question from Mr. Subramani, Ms. Urbina said in the past the Equity Report was issued in March and presented to the board in April, primarily because special education (SPED) data was not available until January or February. This year general instruction data was presented as soon as it was available and the SPED data would be presented in a second report when it was available. She said there would be a SPED data presentation in May. She asked for volunteers to work with district staff to develop the report format. Ms. Cosio, Ms. Smart and Mr. Peter volunteered to work on the report.

Mr. Subramani asked to have the report presented to the advisory board of the University Of Oregon College Of Education.

Ms. Wells announced that a Human Rights Summit would be held on April 10 at Lane Community College and an Anti-hate Activity Public Forum would be held April 21. She distributed informational flyers on both events.

Mr. Carrigan distributed information on a Cesar Chavez event at Agnes Gordon Middle School.

Ms. Holloway reported on her participation in a Courageous Conversations event and said it would be useful to compile the information that was shared at those types of events.

Ms. Urbina said recently 800 4J staff participated in Courageous Conversations activities and other had participated last year. She said evaluations by those in attendance were being compiled and she would share that information with the committee when it was available.

Ms. Wells encouraged the committee to reach out to parents and families and make them aware of the equity work that was being done in the district. Ms. Urbina said that she would raise the issue with principals about how to communicate that information to parents.

Mr. Lavin said one of the most accessible methods of communicating with parents was the parent newsletters schools sent home. Ms. Urbina agreed and suggested establishing an “equity corner” in each issue.

Ms. Wilson asked if parents could be included in activities like Courageous Conversations. Ms. Urbina said those events were professional development activities for district staff and board members, but she would develop a list of parent activities that were being offered by schools throughout the district.

Mr. Stiller agreed that the school was the best point of communication with parents.

### **Review and Approval of Agenda**

There were no changes to the agenda.

### **Review Presentation to the Board – Equity Committee Recommendations**

Ms. Wells described her presentation of Equity Committee recommendations to the 4J Board. She said the board was provided with a full list of items discussed during its joint retreat with the committee and a list of priorities the committee was recommending for use of equity resources. Those documents were also distributed to the committee. She was somewhat surprised that there was not a discussion of the recommendations.

Ms. Geller commented that the Equity Committee’s presentation was useful and informative and was not regarded by the board as controversial or unreasonable. She said the board’s somewhat subdued response could have been a result of its focus on volatile community issues that were also on the agenda at that meeting.

Mr. Hermanns added that many of the committee’s highest priorities were already embedded in the superintendent’s budget recommendations and the presentation confirmed the importance of some of the budget decisions that had been put forth and of which the board was already aware.

Mr. Peter stressed that the district’s budget process would be challenging and encouraged committee members to attend Budget Committee and board meetings to listen to discussions and offer comments.

Mr. Hermanns agreed that the budget process would be difficult. He said the budget proposal

included “essential minimums,” including those reflected of the committee’s recommendations. He said the strategy was to embed those essential minimums in the system and budget so they were not always vulnerable during the budget process. He said if it appeared those essential elements were in jeopardy, then the committee could engage in strategies to reinforce to the board and Budget Committee the community’s priorities regarding equity.

Mr. Peter praised the productive relationship between the board and Equity Committee, he expressed his appreciation for the superintendent’s budget recommendations in support of equity.

Ms. Geller said the next Budget Committee was scheduled for May 20 and invited committee members to attend. She said their presence and advocacy was helpful.

Ms. Urbina said it had been difficult to fill the student slots on the Equity Committee and the superintendent had created a Superintendent’s Student Advisory Committee with representatives from each of the high schools. She said discussions at the meetings were very interesting and she would share with the committee the priorities students had identified during a budgeting process exercise.

### **Harassment and Bully Survey – Update**

Mr. Stiller said the survey instrument and supporting documents were being finalized and the survey would be administered to middle and high school students in the spring. He stressed that taking the survey was optional and either the student or parent could opt out. Additions to the survey included questions related to harassment based on religion, bystander behavior and how harassment was reported. He said on the high school version there was an optional section for students who identified as gay, lesbian, transgender or bi-sexual; that was omitted from the middle school version. He said the section was optional because some students might not feel safe responding and that it also applied to any question on the survey. He said the section was not in the middle school survey because many students would be uncertain as to how to answer. There was concern about community backlash if it was included at the middle school level, based on feedback from principals.

Ms. Lauer felt that many middle school students would be able to identify and if they were not sure about the meaning of terms used on the survey, those could be clarified. Mr. Stiller replied that even with prompts on the proctoring instructions, most staff would not be able to skillfully respond to students’ questions without additional training and that the context of administering a survey was not the best time to provide that training.

Ms. Lauer asked to have the issue revisited before the survey was administered next year.

In response to a question from Mr. Peter, Mr. Stiller said that University of Oregon graduate students had researched other survey instruments to identify one that had psychometrics to support it, because the 4J survey did not. After reviewing other instruments, the students had indicated a preference for the 4J survey and data from each year’s survey would be compared to determine the effectiveness of interventions. He hoped the Oregon Social Living Center would assist in developing psychometrics for the 4J survey.

Mr. Stiller echoed Ms. Lauer’s request to revisit the issue of a gay, lesbian, transgender and bi-sexual section in the middle school survey and the need to look at education as a way to mitigate community backlash.

Mr. Peter expressed an interest in seeing a report with disaggregated data on reasons for student discipline to assist the committee’s examination of disproportionate discipline issues.

Ms. Urbina distributed an article entitled "*The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*"

Mr. Hermanns indicated that the district's new data reporting system had enhanced capabilities for disaggregating data. Mr. Stiller and Ms. Urbina would work with district staff to determine what data reports could be generated.

Mr. Hermanns asked for feedback from the committee on a pilot project related to text bullying that had been proposed by a community member. He said that texting had become a vehicle for targeting and harassing students. The project would establish a way for students to forward to a staff member, such as a counselor, any messages that were threatening or harassing.

The committee discussed the problem of threatening and harassing text messages and "sexting" and the challenges the district faced in trying to address those behaviors.

### **Update Race and Ethnicity Guidelines**

Ms. Urbina explained the new federal guidelines that required all students and district staff to be re-identified with respect to race and ethnicity. She reviewed the data collection form and pointed out that when someone answered yes to the first question regarding whether they were Hispanic or Latino, they were reported as Latino regardless of which race category they also selected. She said in the event that someone did not self-identify, federal guidelines required observer identification. She said 4J School District had provided leadership in opposing the new requirements, particularly observer identification, and stressing the impact on various populations of the first question related to Hispanic and Latino ethnicity. Consequently, other districts in the area had refused to conduct observer identification.

Ms. Urbina said the district's concerns had also been conveyed to members of Oregon congressional delegation. In response to questions about federal funds, she said the district's refusal to conduct observer identification would not result in funds being withheld. She shared a response from the State of California to the new requirements that characterized racial identification by observation as offensive and inaccurate and how the state proposed to implement third-party identification. She said that 4J would pursue the same strategy of reporting someone as Two or More Races when ethnicity and race data was missing. She said parents were being sent materials explaining the situation and the approach the district had adopted. She asked committee members to assist with education and outreach efforts to families.

### **Budget Update**

Mr. Hermanns stated that last year the district cut \$21 million from its budget and was faced with the need to cut another \$6 million this year, with potentially \$11 million in additional cuts next year. He said from the equity perspective, there was a commitment to an additional FTE, plus a line item to support equity activities in budgets for the current and coming year. He said the FTE would provide a staff person to work with Ms. Urbina to assist with equity and diversity efforts in schools. Specific skill requirements and job duties would be established based on what was needed to change school climates, particularly at the high school level.

Mr. Hermanns described the transparent process used to discuss the allocation of resources and differentiated staffing strategies with school principals. He said the district could not cut its way out of its funding dilemma; continuing to trim costs throughout the system only degraded the ability to

serve. He would be asking principals to take a new look at their schools and come up with innovative ways to adjust the current structure to meet students' needs.

Ms. Wells remarked that similar conversations about developing sustainable budgets in the face of dwindling resources were occurring in public agencies throughout the region.

Mr. Peter hoped that the district could explore way to develop additional resources in the community to support the education system.

Mr. Peter announced that the next meeting was on April 28 and adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

*(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)*