

MINUTES

Equity Committee Meeting
Eugene Public Schools District 4J
200 North Monroe
Parr Room

March 29, 2011
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Andy Gottesman, Carl Hermanns, Guadalupe Quinn, Linda Smart, Maria Thomas, Jane Waite, Brie Stiller, Tibor Bessko, Michael Carrigan, Jett Johnson, Jennifer Geller, Sascha Cosio, Misa Joo, Linda Hamilton, Joel Lavin, Melly Halloway, Sarah Cramer, members; Carmen Urbina, Brad New, staff.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter called the meeting to order at 4:38 p.m. and asked those present to introduce themselves.

The Equity Committee members held a discussion regarding their respective spring break activities.

II. Public Comment

No members of the public were present to provide comments or offer testimony.

III. Alternative School Presentation.

Secondary Education Administrator, Brad New, noted his work over the past four years with the Eugene Education Options (EEO) and provided a detailed description of how those options represented a comprehensive system to address the needs of secondary education students, teachers and staff.

Mr. New stated that the EEO represented a new identity and code for the 4J School District's efforts surrounding secondary education. He noted that the EEO was a consolidation of many initiatives that were already familiar to many of the Equity Committee members.

Mr. New distributed an information packet regarding the EEO initiative and provided a detailed overview of the initiative's various program elements.

Mr. New commented that the EEO program elements had been personalized in a manner that would lead to college career and character for 4J students.

Mr. New described how the Options High Schools area of the EEO was essentially a consolidation of the District's previous alternative high school systems. He noted that all of the students involved in the west and east campus Options High Schools had been referred to the program by their respective 4J high school although Mr. New further specified that the EEO initiative had not been intended to reduce 4J high school enrollment.

Ms. Joo arrived to the meeting at 4:44 p.m.

Mr. New described in detail the Early College High School area of the EEO program and described how it had been intended to blend educational aspects of the K-12 environment with the opportunities available at local community colleges. He noted that approximately 100 students were currently involved in that area of the EEO program.

Mr. New described the Community-Based Options of the EEO program and commented that the retention levels for students in that area of the program had shown significant recent improvement.

Mr. New described the Promoting Personalized Learning area of the EEO and how he had personally been involved in that area which was designed to create highly personalized learning environments for each student.

Mr. New described the Teen Parent Program area of the EEO initiative and reported that approximately 35 teen parents across the District had been involved in the program over the past year. Mr. New further described how EEO program staff had worked to increase the level of outreach for students who might benefit from the Teen Parent Program. He also noted that the District received certain levels of State funding to support that area of the EEO initiative.

Mr. New reported that the 4J Street Academy program area of the EEO initiative was maintained solely by David Sheehan and was designed to serve as a network for young adults in the downtown area of Eugene to seek out additional educational opportunities.

Mr. New presented information regarding the projected 2010-2012 enrollment levels for various areas of the EEO program.

Mr. New stated that a 4J Online Academy was being developed as part of the EEO as a means to encourage students who had left the 4J systems for alternative educational charter structures to return to the District.

Mr. New described how LCC's RTEC center was a new facility that had been designed to provide a space for high-school level students to more effectively transition into community college areas. He noted that the facility was scheduled to be completed in early fall of 2011 and would serve as a resource for the Early College High School area of the EEO initiative.

Mr. New, responding to a comment from Mr. Peter, noted that as part of his duties as Secondary Education Administrator he had worked closely with 4J staff such as Ms. Urbina to coordinate the implementation of the EEO at North Eugene High School.

Mr. Peter appreciated the EEO program's notion of intrusive advising. Mr. New responded that that objective had been prescribed for early college and high school level students as part of concerted motivational training efforts performed in conjunction with 4J counselors.

Ms. Urbina commented that the intrusive advising objectives had been very empowering to students who had previously not believed they could be successful 4J students.

Ms. Cramer arrived to the meeting at 5:03 p.m.

Mr. New confirmed that the EEO program was capable of sufficiently staffing for its intrusive advising objectives at LCC. He further noted that approximately three hours per term were devoted to each student for intrusive advising.

Mr. New, responding to a question from Mr. Johnson, discussed how those students subject to intrusive advising strategies as part of the EEO were encouraged to recognize their own individual talents.

Ms. Waite believed that the EEO program was very exciting and asked what steps had been taken to make the program more inclusive for 4J students. Mr. New responded that the efforts to make the EEO program more inclusive were highly documented and specific to each student who had expressed interest in the program. Mr. New also described how one of the night schools under the EEO program that had been located near South Eugene High School had ultimately been dismantled because it had serviced primarily South Eugene students.

Mr. New, responding to a question from Ms. Waite regarding the curriculum pedagogical elements of the EEO program, described the EEO's systemic efforts to increase comprehensive efforts to respond to the needs of struggling students throughout the District.

Ms. Waite hoped that further information regarding the systemic pedagogical approaches of the EEO initiative might be provided.

Mr. New, responding to a question from Ms. Thomas, briefly described how parents had been involved in the intrusive advising strategies used as part of the EEO program. He further described how various mentor-teachers and counselors were also used as part of the intrusive advising strategies.

Ms. Thomas encouraged Mr. New and his colleagues to continue to find new ways in which to involve parents in all aspects of the EEO initiative.

Mr. New, responding to a question from Ms. Hamilton, described the funding mechanisms that had been used to develop the online charter school associated with the EEO program.

Ms. Stiller discussed her experiences with training for appropriate adult behaviors with respect to 4J students.

Mr. Peter thanked Mr. New for his EEO presentation.

IV. Update - Student Survey - Harassment and Bullying Review

Ms. Stiller distributed copies of the survey materials and provided a brief overview of the development process that had been used for the bullying and harassment behaviors survey.

Ms. Stiller noted that the survey was part of an action plan that she, Ms. Urbina and Mr. Bessko had developed at the direction of Assistant Superintendent Carl Hermanns. Ms. Stiller noted that the action plan had been presented to the District's middle and high school principals and had received near-unanimous support.

Ms. Urbina stated that the parent outreach portion of the bullying and harassment behaviors action plan would be included in a later iteration of the plan.

Ms. Joo commented that student orientation was a very important component of the action plan and cautioned that the plan might fall apart if careful student orientation strategies were not successfully implemented.

Ms. Stiller agreed with Ms. Joo's comment and noted that it was critical that each element of the bullying and harassment action plan be executed each year in order to be successful. Ms. Joo agreed with Ms. Stiller's comment.

Mr. Peter noted it would be important to carefully articulate the distinction between intimidation and bullying with respect to the survey component of the bullying and harassment action plan. Ms. Stiller responded to Mr. Peter's comment and noted that, with respect to the survey and subsequent data collection, bullying was defined as any act of social aggression carried out against another individual.

Ms. Stiller noted that the distinction between harassment and bullying had been made in the District's adopted policies regarding those matters.

Ms. Geller noted that the information sheet distributed by Ms. Stiller regarding the bullying and harassment action plan did not cover all of the behavior elements of the statutory definitions used by the District with respect to bullying and harassment definitions.

Ms. Cramer suggested that middle and high school students might become more involved in the processes by which District teachers and staff were trained with respect to the action plan. Ms. Stiller responded that such involvement might be incorporated into staff and student orientation and lesson plan materials.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a question from Ms. Thomas, stated that the statistical information included in the proposal drafted by Ms. Urbina, Ms. Stiller and Mr. Bessko had been generated from the District's school climate survey from the previous year. Ms. Stiller further noted that the school climate survey had not included separate questions to address discrimination issues.

Ms. Joo believed that the use of the phrase "unwanted behavior" in the definition of the term harassment might empower students to become more proactive in their responses to incidents of bullying and harassment.

Ms. Holloway asked how District principals and staff would evaluate the effectiveness of the bullying and harassment intervention plan described in the proposal. Ms. Stiller answered that analysis of the annual school climate survey data would reveal the intervention plan's effectiveness in the District's secondary schools.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a question from Ms. Holloway, noted that previous reporting efforts regarding incidents of bullying and harassment in the District had been inconsistent. Ms. Stiller further discussed how more consistent reporting methods in the District might be implemented.

Mr. Peter stated that he had been attempting for several years to collect dependable data regarding the frequency of bullying and harassment behaviors in the 4J secondary schools.

Ms. Quinn responded to Mr. Peter's comment and noted that previous efforts to develop a tracking system for bullying and harassment incidents had been unsuccessful.

Laurie (last name not provided) commented that the systemic approach described by the proposal represented an opportunity to develop much more effective strategies to address bullying and harassment behaviors in the District. Ms. Urbina stated that the proposal provided for greater levels of accountability that had previously been incorporated.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a question from Mr. Johnson, discussed how administrative support in the District would be vital to encouraging teachers and staff to adopt the recommendations contained in the proposal. He noted that the level of support for the proposal among principals at the District's school was very high.

Ms. Cosio excused herself from the meeting at 5:46 p.m.

Mr. Lavin commented that the provisions of the proposal might allow students to become more empowered to effectively deal with any occurrences of harassment.

Ms. Urbina commented that bullying and harassment incidents had become a national issue and that the level of response to those incidents had encouraged students to act more proactively.

Mr. Lavin commented it was important for students to feel there was an adult they could speak to regarding bullying and harassment problems.

Ms. Thomas commented that it was important to carefully track the nature and frequency of harassment and bullying incidents so that response policies could be drafted in an equitable manner.

Ms. Waite noted that she had been asked to join the Equity Committee with a charge to help align the legal statutes of harassment incidents with the District's policies.

Ms. Waite commented that there existed a need to empower both students and teachers with respect to harassment incidents.

Ms. Quinn briefly discussed how District policies for bullying and harassment had evolved in the past several years and noted how Eugene police officers were now used to maintain safety at certain schools.

Ms. Thomas hoped that Oregon State statutes would be carefully reviewed to determine how the District's bullying and harassment policies could be implemented more effectively. Ms. Urbina agreed with Ms. Thomas' comment.

Ms. Cramer noted that previous efforts to develop methods to track bullying and harassment occurrences had been unsuccessful and hoped that improved data collection methods might be implemented in the future.

Ms. Geller excused herself from the meeting at 5:59 p.m.

Ms. Joo hoped that parents could become better educated as to their children's rights with respect to incidents of harassment.

Ms. Thomas believed that there existed problems with police officers in District schools who unfairly targeted certain students.

Mr. Peter assumed that there supporting documentation existed regarding police interaction with students at District schools. Ms. Quinn responded that she could not confirm Mr. Peter's assumption.

Mr. Lavin confirmed that police officers at District schools could interview students without their parents present but only after reasonable attempts had been made to contact parents. Mr. Lavin further discussed the civil and criminal processes that sometimes governed student and police interactions.

Mr. Peter interpreted the Committee's discussion to suggest that there existed a disproportionate likelihood that minority students in the District had been negatively engaged with police.

Ms. Thomas suggested that the District schools should be able to report on the nature and frequency of police interactions with students on a monthly basis. Ms. Urbina noted that she would coordinate with District staff regarding Ms. Thomas' suggestion and noted that further discussion of the matter might be placed as a discussion item on a future Equity Committee meeting agenda.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a question from Mr. Peter, confirmed that the District would most likely incorporate an open comments field for the school climate survey.

Ms. Waite commended the efforts of Ms. Stiller, Ms. Urbina and Mr. Bessko for their work on the bullying and harassment proposal.

Mr. Peter noted that it was undetermined whether certain questions asked in the climate survey at the high school level would also be asked at the middle school levels. Mr. Peter noted that the Committee had strongly urged that the questions be asked at the middle school levels.

Mr. Johnson hoped that a climate could be created for the District's teachers whereby they could contribute positively to harassment response practices.

Ms. Waite suggested that the District's harassment policies would not positively benefit the students if they did not also positively benefit adults.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a question from Ms. Halloway, noted that the climate surveys would be administered through survey monkey. She further described how the survey would be administered using both online and paper resources.

Ms. Joo suggested revisions to question no. 26 of the climate survey so that it might be perceived as more inclusive for students.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a question from Mr. Gottesman, noted that a staff version of the climate survey had not yet been developed. Mr. Gottesman suggested that the same climate survey might simply be used for staff as well as the students. Ms. Stiller noted that there might not be sufficient time in which to administer the current climate survey to staff in addition to students.

Ms. Stiller, responding to a comment from Mr. Urbina, noted that a revised version of the climate version might be developed for elementary school students.

V. Presentation to the Board Sub-Committee - Recommendations

Mr. Peter noted that he had recently met with Mr. Hermmans and Ms. Urbina to discuss the subcommittee recommendations.

Mr. Peter noted that the Equity Committee's work session meeting with the 4J Board was scheduled for April 20. He briefly outlined how the Equity Committee might present its recommendations to the 4J Board during that meeting.

Mr. Peter believed that the Equity Committee needed to strongly encourage the 4J board and the EEA to work together to resolve various hiring, layoff and retention matters.

Mr. Peter perceived that the Equity Committee had not yet developed a coherent plan to set goals and recommendations related to various data sets. He believed that the Committee needed to develop a working document that described in detail the various activities that had been recommended.

Ms. Joo responded to Mr. Peter's comment and suggested that the EEA might be approached to develop a system whereby teachers would be aggressively reprimanded for their poor performance. She believed that there were various teachers in the District who were unsuitable.

Mr. Peter responded to Ms. Joo's comment and believed that the EEA was as committed as the 4J Board to having the best teachers possible.

Mr. Lavin excused himself from the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Ms. Joo believed that the irresponsibility and unprofessionalism exhibited by certain teachers had negatively affected students' education in the District.

Ms. Smart cautioned that the Equity Committee needed to be extremely careful in how it addressed any performance issues with District teachers.

The Equity Committee members and support staff held a brief discussion regarding how performance issues for District teachers and staff might have been addressed in the past and how such practices might be improved.

Ms. Smart stated that District teachers were supposed to be evaluated every two years but also noted that those reviews did not always occur on schedule.

Mr. Hermanns suggested that the Equity Committee further discuss the matter of teacher performance at a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Hermanns noted that the District was limited in many ways as to how it might currently address systemic problems that influenced the overall performance of teacher and the quality of instruction that was provided by them. Mr. Hermanns suggested that additional conversations in that regard might be held at the upcoming 4J Board retreat.

Mr. Hermanns did not believe it was in the Equity Committee's purview to attempt to specifically dictate policy with respect to any strategies designed to address teacher performance.

Mr. Peter hoped that the Equity Committee and the community at large would work to support the joint efforts of the 4J Board and the EEA.

Ms. Urbina stated that volunteers were needed to serve on the Equity Committee's recommendation subcommittee. She stated that Mr. Lavin, Raquel Wells, Ms. Waite, Mr. Peter, and Ms. Halloway had already volunteered.

Mr. Bessko informed the Committee members that the four Gay Straight Alliance groups for the 4J high schools would be holding their joint Pink Prom event on May 15 at the Hilton in downtown Eugene.

Mr. Carrigan noted that the Strong Schools Eugene organization was seeking volunteers to support the upcoming city income tax ballot measure.

Ms. Urbina stated that she would coordinate with Mr. Peter to develop a work schedule for the recommendation subcommittee.

Mr. Peter adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

(Recorded by Wade Hicks)