

MINUTES

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

May 24, 2011
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Carl Hermanns, Co-chair; Shauna Sedgewick Butler, Michael Carrigan, Jennifer Geller, Andy Gottesman, Linda Hamilton, Melly Holloway, Misa Joo, Sarah Lauer, Joel Lavin, Guadalupe Quinn, Larry Soberman, Brie Stiller, Surendra Subramani, Maria Thomas, Peter Tromba, Jane Waite, members; Tibor Bessko, Sara Cramer, Carmen Urbina, 4J staff;

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter convened the meeting at 4:35 p.m. and those present introduced themselves.

Committee and Public Comment

Ms. Hamilton requested that the committee establish a regular meeting date. Because several members needed to leave early, Mr. Peter asked that the group determine its next meeting date immediately and continue the discussion around attendance and participation later under the scheduled agenda item.

While June 14 was the next regularly scheduled meeting, Mr. Peter asked the committee to consider postponing its June meeting to June 30. This would allow the group to review the draft Equity and Diversity Plan and would also be Mr. Hermann's last day on the job.

Ms. Cramer pointed out that the principals' contract ended June 28 so some administrators likely would not be in attendance on June 30.

By consensus, the committee agreed to cancel its June 14 meeting and schedule an extended meeting for June 30 from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Subramani said that while he worked for the University of Oregon College of Education, he also made numerous presentations to schools on issues of race, ethnicity, and the achievement gap. When he had recently presented at North Eugene, the entire student body had been present and the material was well received by both students and teachers.

A few weeks prior he had been invited to present to students at Churchill High School. The session was scheduled between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m., with regular classes beginning at 9:30 a.m. Mr. Subramani reported that attendance was poor and few faculty members were present. Superintendent Russell was one of the presenters, several students spoke, and gospel singers performed. At 9:20 a.m., Mr. Subramani was given the opportunity to speak but students and the principal were walking out because classes were starting.

Mr. Subramani had several concerns about this situation. He felt disrespected because the principal had failed to properly introduce herself to him; he said he found the timing a clear indication of the

principal's lack of commitment to addressing student concerns; by leaving when he was beginning to speak he believed the principal sent a clear message to the students that it was OK to leave when minority issues were being addressed. He believed that administrators were not providing an environment in which students could progress and that this was part of the reason for the achievement gap. By scheduling the event outside regular school hours, African American students had been marginalized.

At this point, Mr. Hermanns said that it was vital for the committee to hear how the District was dealing with equity issues in the schools and that overall school climate had been a topic of committee discussion for more than two years. However, he added that there was a separate process for handling specific complaints about individual staff members. He thanked Mr. Subramani for bringing the matter to the committee and accepted responsibility for looking into it.

Ms. Hamilton commented that what Mr. Subramani described was an ongoing problem. She reported that at a May 3rd Black Achievement Education Panel at the University of Oregon, Ms. Urbina had said that racism was the reason the achievement gap was widening.

Ms. Quinn appreciated what Mr. Subramani had brought to the committee and asked whether the Equity Committee could draft a letter in response and send it to the individual administrator or the school. She believed that someone at Churchill needed to hear what had happened to Mr. Subramani.

Mr. Marshall suggested that the committee entrust Mr. Hermanns to follow up and if Mr. Subramani was not satisfied with that follow up, he would bring the issue back to the committee's next meeting.

Ms. Quinn felt it was important for the Equity Committee to address Churchill directly.

Mr. Tromba proposed sending a letter to all four high schools using Mr. Subramani's experience at North Eugene as an example of what worked well in creating a compassionate culture and spotlighting an issue. He said that the District's mechanism for addressing personnel complaints involved meeting with the individual first and then moving up the chain of command as necessary. He volunteered to accompany Mr. Subramani to such a meeting.

Mr. Peter observed that there was broad committee support for Mr. Subramani having raised the issues and for addressing the situation correctly. He asked whether the committee supported sending a letter to all four high school principals as Mr. Tromba suggested and also asking that the personnel issue be tracked according to the established procedure for such matters.

Ms. Thomas asked what the Equity Committee should do to ensure such issues were dealt with and to support those bringing such issues to the committee's attention.

Ms. Joo agreed with Mr. Tromba, and said that the most powerful action would be to begin with a meeting with the principal. Saying she was looking for change, Ms. Joo believed it was always better to work within the established process if possible.

Mr. Peter added that it would be up to Mr. Subramani whether he met with the principal alone or with the support of a third person.

Mr. Subramani emphasized that his objective was to do what would benefit students at the school and he did not think it was appropriate to put the burden on him to deal with the situation.

Ms. Waite supported writing the letter to the four principals specifically highlighting the positive as

well as following the established process for dealing with individual complaints. She recommended that someone embedded within the school system provide support to Mr. Subramani in participating in that process.

Mr. Hermanns suggested that it would be appropriate and helpful for the Equity Committee to write a letter to Superintendent Russell and him about its concern, and to outline the specific issues relating to personnel.

If the committee sent a letter to the four high schools about best practices and impacts on students, Ms. Cramer asked that it be expanded to include middle and elementary schools as well. She hoped that this would be a learning opportunity for administrators to study what sorts of things happened within the District and in other districts and to think about what messages they wanted students to receive from any given assembly or classroom opportunity.

Ms. Urbina observed that what had happened to Mr. Subramani were a micro insult and a micro assault. The committee appeared to be telling him there was a process and a system, but she said that for people of color, such a process often reignited the micro aggression and insult they had experienced. She said she often saw similar situations in which a parent, specifically a parent of color, was asked to confront the person causing a problem. She believed there needed to be other ways of dealing with these types of situations.

Ms. Quinn said that she understood the process but felt that a letter to all principals would water things down and would not address the particular school and responsible individuals.

Ms. Cramer added that she preferred the letter to principals be tied to a meeting of all principals where it could be discussed.

Mr. Peter summarized his understanding of how the committee would proceed and requested volunteers to work on each component: A “best practices” around student engagement communication piece would be developed by Ms. Cramer, Mr. Bessko, Mr. Peter, and Ms. Urbina and circulated to members for input prior to its being sent to administrators. Mr. Peter agreed to draft a short letter from the committee to Mr. Russell and Mr. Hermanns about the committee’s reaction to what Mr. Subramani had brought to its attention. He would forward his draft to Ms. Joo, Ms. Thomas, and Ms. Quinn for their feedback. Mr. Tromba volunteered to work with Mr. Subramani to draft a letter to Mr. Russell and Mr. Hermanns about the specific issues and personnel.

Ms. Waite noted that the behavior Mr. Subramani had witnessed at Churchill was consistent with a pattern that had been observed at that school in its behavior toward African American and other students of color.

Ms. Hamilton left the meeting at 5:10 p.m.

Update on election Results-Budget Impact

Mr. Hermanns told the committee that with the passage of the bond measure, approximately \$1 million in facility support that was to be paid from the general fund would instead be shifted to the bond. He had met with instruction directors on May 19 and with that group, resource principals, and Human Resources on May 23 to discuss how to best use the newly available \$1 million in the general fund. The guiding principle around using the funds was how it would best support students and teachers in schools with the greatest number of students facing challenges.

The Budget Committee had met the previous evening and approved \$800,000 to be focused directly to support teachers and students in the highest impacted elementary and secondary schools. \$500,000 of that was to provide about 5.5 FTE teachers and \$300,000 would be used for 6 FTE classified instructional aides in classrooms. The mechanics of that allocation were being worked out within contractual constraints.

Of the remaining \$200,000, half would be allocated for equity support, with \$50,000 for the Quick Base Data System that provided information about students who were struggling. \$30,000 was to be used to offset the additional fees to be charged for extra-curricular activities for children and families for whom the fees increase would be a burden. The remaining \$20,000 would be used to support the AVID pilot program and allow the Arts and Technology Academy to be added to AVID as a middle school feeder to Churchill where the program was already in place.

The final \$100,000 would be divided equally between Human Resources and Finance because both departments had increased requirements and were under-resourced.

Mr. Hermanns reported that there had been a good discussion around equity at the Budget Committee and he was encouraged because the Board and the Budget Committee were pushing the District and staff on equity issues.

Ms. Geller commented that the Board recognized that there were goals around equity and that it was necessary to spend money to achieve them. She believed the additional funds would be well used.

Mr. Hermanns said that some community members mistakenly assumed that the \$1 million would solve the District's financial problems. There were many competing priorities for the funds and many popular and important programs had to be cut despite the success of the bond measure.

Mr. Peter appreciated that the District appeared to be following the committee's direction to allocate resources where they were most needed. He said he still did not fully understand the resource allocation process but what Mr. Hermanns had described was a positive step.

Ms. Cramer observed that this had been the first time that she could recall staff not having to urge resource reallocation and that people seemed to be looking at the real needs in the District and to be willing to work together.

Answering a question from Ms. Thomas, Mr. Hermanns said that 64 certified FTE were being cut, but this involved more than 64 teachers.

Update on Student Survey/Harassment and Bullying Review

Ms. Stiller handed out a May 5, 2011 version of the "District 4J Proposal for Reduction of bullying and Harassment Behaviors." Ms. Stiller said that the 2010-11 School Climate Survey would be administered before the end of the school year in the eight middle schools and four high schools. There was some interest among elementary principals in creating a survey for that level and a committee would work on that. She reported that this year's survey included what the committee had wanted: a field for comments was added, the GLBTQ question was expanded to middle school, and a variety of other suggestions had been embraced.

Mr. Hermanns had asked Ms. Stiller and Ms. Urbina to create a District-wide action plan to develop consistency across staff and schools in how socially aggressive behavior was addressed. Ms. Urbina, Ms. Stiller, and Mr. Bessko had worked on the document before the committee since

mid-year. Ms. Stiller said that all the principal groups had reviewed and supported the plan.

Each school was to send a team to a September in-service training that was to be conducted by Ms. Stiller, Ms. Urbina, and Mr. Bessko. Ms. Stiller said the training would focus on staff alignment and how to partner better with families. It would involve identifying the types of behaviors that occurred at schools and considering which should be ignored, which should be interrupted, and which should be written up as an office discipline referral. The school teams would receive tool kits to use to train staff in their buildings. They also would have the option of requesting that Ms. Stiller, Ms. Urbina, and Mr. Bessko deliver that training to building staff. There would also be a lesson plan to deliver to students. Schools would be expected to implement intervention, create an action plan identifying what they had done, look at their data and analyze how well the plan was working. Secondary schools would be asked to use school climate survey data and elementary schools would look at office discipline referrals since no survey would be in place yet.

Ms. Stiller described the plan as more systematic than what had been done in the past, noting that while most schools were doing pieces of the plan, there was no current reporting expectation, no monitoring process or way to highlight successes. She said that all the middle schools were implementing anti-bullying and harassment programs.

Mr. Peter inquired about how reporters of bullying and harassment were to be encouraged and supported. Ms. Stiller responded that a large part of the training would focus on how adults should accept reports from students and strategies would be in place for checking back in.

Mr. Subramani left the meeting at 5:35 p.m.

Mr. Peter asked whether witness reports that led to suspension would be anonymous and protected. Ms. Stiller said that was a complex question. School teams would be encouraged to consider a variety of interventions and suspension would not be the most typical consequence. She said she often recommended mediation but the decision to use it depended on the dynamics between the involved children. If the perpetrator was involved in such events frequently, that child might need a behavior support plan to teach more appropriate social skills. She emphasized that safety planning for the reporting child was a big deal.

Ms. Thomas wondered whether the plan included advice about legal rights and filing charges against a student for harassment. Ms. Stiller said that the plan had not been reviewed by an attorney and that a decision to file charges typically was not made by school personnel. Mr. Tromba and Ms. Quinn voiced their support for addressing the issue of legal rights, providing more information to parents, and ensuring that administrators were better informed about the law in this area.

Mr. Tromba observed that it would take years to change the middle school culture and that despite the effort to provide protection, students who reported incidents were not safe and were often subjected to additional bullying. He said it was a racist, sexist world where bullies ruled in many cases.

Ms. Urbina said that it was important to be consistent around the message and that parents were confused about the consequences for behavior. The plan allowed for some discretion but also added some non-negotiables and uniformity and clarity to what parents were being told. Information about legal rights could be added to the tool kit.

Ms. Joo added that some parents did not believe they had legal rights or the right to advocate for their children so it was important that everyone was educated.

Ms. Waite commented that an important goal was to provide a consistent adult response to both children and parents and the plan should hold the school accountable for giving all parents equitable treatment and information about their options.

Mr. Hermanns said that the vital importance of an aligned, systematic approach was highlighted in a recent study in which a Columbia University researcher had looked at Oregon data and found that for gay and lesbian children, there was a statistically significant difference in suicide attempts between supportive and non-supportive environments. He believed the plan was a step toward creating a more supportive environment.

Ms. Lauer celebrated the District for allowing middle school students to self- identify as GLBTQ.

Ms. Holloway added that what staff modeled was important and that a supportive environment was also necessary for staff.

Ms. Quinn said that a tone around respect should be set for every building and that expected behaviors should be known by staff, students, and parents.

Mr. Lavin suggested incorporating the language in the plan in the *Student's Rights and Responsibilities Handbook*. He said that most middle schools had planners and it would be powerful to ensure there was consistent language across all planners and other organization tools.

Mr. Tromba reported that at a recent University of Oregon "Teach Out" event supporting gay and lesbian teachers, he and other participants had discussed the problems of teachers being out and concluded that the incoming 4J superintendent and possibly the Board should issue a statement supporting staff members who were out.

Mr. Bessko suggested that there should be a simple climate survey for staff, possibly as part of the training and tool kit.

Ms. Stiller noted that the training should address the issue of modeling. She said that students respect those who respect them and that if children lacked GLBTQ or African American (or other groups that have traditionally been marginalized) adult models, they were unable to treat members of those groups as anything more than abstract concepts.

Ms. Joo remarked that she felt safer after she retired than she had when she was teaching because there was more normalcy around being GLBTQ outside the schools. She believed it was important to teach acceptance of normalcy at every level, not just at higher grade levels.

Mr. Peter said he appreciated all the work that had gone into the plan and that would continue as it was implemented.

Mr. Hermanns asked for a time check and determination of whether the items remaining on the agenda could be covered within the remaining time scheduled for the meeting. There was general agreement that it was possible.

Update on Presentation to the Board

Ms. Stiller observed that the presentation had produced good discussion, had focused on what needed to be done, and did not get lost in the data. Ms. Urbina added that the Board had been prepared.

Update on Equity and Diversity Plan

Ms. Urbina reviewed a hand-out of the 4J Equity and Diversity Plan Development and Implementation Timeline, which consisted of eleven steps that would take place over the next year. Most of what Abrella Luvert had put in place prior to Ms. Urbina's assumption of her role were being done. Ms. Urbina noted that Bethel, Lane ESD, and 4J each defined equity and diversity differently and she was working to create form and language alignment and consistency among the districts.

Ms. Urbina expected a draft plan to be completed by June 15. The internal Equity Committee would then hold a retreat to review the draft and it would be presented to the Equity Committee by June 30. During July, August, and September, the plan would be presented to principals and other stakeholders for their input prior to an August Equity Committee meeting to review an updated version. Ms. Urbina hoped to schedule a presentation to the 4J Board of Directors in October, after which she expected implementation to take the rest of the school year. Three evaluation points were scheduled in December, March, and June at which times the **internal Equity Committee and Equity Committee would have opportunities to see how the plan was working.**

Answering a question from Ms. Thomas, Ms. Urbina said that the new superintendent had asked to see the timeline and she would meet with him sometime after his May 31 arrival.

Equity Committee Membership and Attendance

Mr. Peter said there had been a request to clarify who was on the committee and the expectations around attendance. He noted that he had not seen some of the people included on the membership list in the past six months to a year.

Ms. Thomas said she had raised the issue because meetings had been set, then canceled and rescheduled when some people were not available at the agreed-upon time. She believed that meetings needed to be consistent and that members needed to make a commitment to attend regularly.

Ms. Urbina responded that she had spoken with the organizations and members who had been absent for the past few months. She said that some of the member organizations had multiple representatives to ensure that at least one could attend. Most of those she had spoken with had indicated interest in continuing on the committee or sending a representative.

Ms. Urbina apologized to Centro Latino for a miscommunication because Centro was a superintendent-approved member but she had not been informed of that. Ms. Sedgewick Butler said that Centro would send a rotating representative: herself, Juan Carlos Valle, or Marcella Mendoza.

Mr. Peter observed that the committee and community were best served when the same person attended regularly. Ms. Quinn agreed and added that it was important that alternate representatives relay information to their organizations about the agenda and changes of times and places of meetings. She indicated that it may not be necessary that groups who regularly failed to send a representative continue as members. She also mentioned that leaving early or arriving late consistently may be a problem.

Ms. Cramer encouraged the committee to revisit the group agreements and the issue of attendance. She suggested that those who were unable to meet the agreements should be replaced.

Ms. Waite identified a potential problem with rotating representatives from an agency if they lacked knowledge of what the committee had been doing and took committee time to get up to speed.

Ms. Geller left the meeting at 6:12 p.m.

Ms. Urbina described the Equity Committee as a community voice and said that accessibility and inclusion required some flexibility in expectations. She said calling people who were unable to attend and briefing them on the committee's work would be helpful.

Ms. Stiller reminded the committee that members were volunteers and that while no attendance at all was a problem, 100-percent attendance was not realistic.

Ms. Joo said members representing organizations with multiple members should accept the burden of contacting their colleagues to inform them about the committee's work.

Mr. Hermanns apologized on behalf of the District for the meeting changes of the past month. He said the Equity Committee was hugely important to the District but the previous month had been exceptional and there had been unanticipated demands on staff that made scheduling meetings impossible.

Equity Activities Update

Ms. Urbina distributed a written "4J Equity Department Update – 5.24.11" for members' review.

Ms. Waite informed the committee that she had learned that Oregon State University was dismantling its Ethnic Studies Department and turning it into a program. She invited members to contact the OSU President's office with their input on that change or to provide feedback to her to be passed along.

Mr. Tromba reported that the "Expect Respect" curriculum was being implemented at Monroe Middle School. A component included a classroom simulation in which bullying was interrupted by a bystander. The targets of the bullying wore GSA t-shirts but were not members of the GSA. They had been told they were selected by their teachers as leaders who could handle bullying and harassment in the simulation. He was pleased that this raised the profile of the GSA and had received no complaints.

Ms. Waite said that the simulation had also been used in Lane ESD's life skills class at Monroe.

Ms. Joo stated that people did not need to be called heroes if a place was safe to report because students were empowered and felt like leaders. She described a situation in which a student who was known as a bully had changed when he saw such a simulation and recognized himself.

Mr. Hermanns shared a situation in which parents met with him about their high school child who felt uncomfortable at a certain school and the parents wanted to transfer him to a school in which he felt safer. The parents had said that they were less worried about what happened in the school than what went on in the parking lot or at a game with the adults. This illustrated the need to expand respect and the prevention of bullying and harassment beyond the schools to the entire community.

Mr. Bessko had attended a presentation at Howard Elementary in which 5th grade students were on a panel sharing personal stories. One child had spoken of being told he was "acting gay" and how this had made him feel. Later a second grader asked what kind of "gay" he had meant. The teacher had interjected that using the word in a negative way was what people did not like.

Ms. Stiller said she had a story she would tell later.

Ms. Urbina offered kudos to North Eugene for its 100 Latino home visits that would touch nearly 280 kids and would culminate June 4 with a Latino Parent Conference. The data coming from these visits indicated that parents needed information about available programs. The University of Oregon and Springfield had developed an educational partnership opportunities mapping that mapped out the different things available to parents and kids around mentoring and tutoring. 4J would add to that and make it available on the website and would also make the information building-specific.

Ms. Stiller said that two years ago, a middle school had prepared a survey around harassment and bullying. The student body had been asked to identify the bullies by name. A “grandmotherly” support staff member had asked each of the six or eight identified bullies to come talk to her individually. When she asked them who they thought had been named, they each identified the others but not themselves. When she told them their names had come up, each of them broke down in tears. To Ms. Stiller, this indicated that there was hope and that the proper intervention supported the bully, the bystander, and the victim.

Mr. Peter adjourned the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

(Recorded by Mary Feldman)