

MINUTES

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

January 24, 2012
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Marshall Peter, Chair; Michael Carrigan, Andy Gottesman, Matt Hayes, Melly Holloway, Misa Joo, Sarah Lauer, Joel Lavin, Arbrella Luvert, Charles Martinez, Ayanna Moriguchi, Linda Smart, Larry Soberman, Brianna Stiller, Peter Tromba, Jane Waite, members; Superintendent Sheldon Berman, Carmen Urbina, Laurie Moses, Tibor Bessko, Sarah Cramer, staff; Alicia Hays, 4J School Board Chair; Korie Rodley, CALC, guest.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Marshall Peter called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m. Those present introduced themselves.

II. Public Comment

No members of the public asked to speak.

III. Review District Initiatives (Dr. Berman)

Superintendent Berman called attention to various maps on the walls and provided an overview of the data displayed in the maps. He said that the district had worked with Lane Council of Governments to begin the process of looking at the community and assessing its demographics and areas of needs. The board's goal of funding schools differentially based on needs, required establishing an equitable needs index that would allow the district to design a more consistent system that would fund higher needs schools at a higher rate. At this point, the district was looking at a pilot proposal for Buena Vista that would be presented to the board at its February 1 meeting and represented a fairly significant departure from what had been done in the past. The district was also looking at magnet programs.

Dr. Berman explained that while working in Kentucky, he had been challenged to find a new way to desegregate schools in the Louisville system. Research had found that three factors were most critical in influencing student achievement: household income, educational achievement of the parents or adults, and minority status.

The needs assessment developed by Matt Hayes looked at the demographic characteristics of a particular school area. Looking at each of the categories and how they blended in a school, Dr. Berman used Spring Creek and Edison as interesting examples: Spring Creek was one of the areas with the highest white non-Hispanic population, it had median income, and was among the lowest level of educational attainment. Edison on the other hand had very high educational attainment, very low household income, and was fairly diverse racially. Pie charts of which minorities or racial groups made up each of those school attendance areas would lead to a different kind of analysis in creating a class composite chart.

Dr. Berman described another analysis that looked at free and reduced lunch, special needs, mobility, and LEP to arrive at the needs index for the school. Under- and over- performance in math, reading, and writing were also analyzed. Interestingly, some high needs indexed schools could be expected to have low performance while others with lower needs would be expected to achieve at a higher level, but this was not always true since some performed higher than expected and others performed lower than expected. The superintendent noted that test scores were from last year's OAKS tests while other data on students was derived from students in the schools now.

Answering a question from Mr. Martinez about standard error being computed on regression, Dr. Berman said that it was dependent on weightings from prior research in a different district and the district needed to see how it worked in terms of 4J. He said that the class composite and needs index had been fairly close.

Mr. Peter noted that the committee had requested data to help make decisions about the allocation of resources based on need for a long time and that the research being presented seemed like a quantum leap in the district's ability to do that.

Dr. Berman observed that this data helped the district understand where the problems were and to target particular groups and needs. He said that looking at how each minority group performed in terms of the achievement gap had not been sufficient and that it was important to compare groups in terms of the other factors such as free and reduced lunch. At the recent board retreat, there had been discussion of whether race and ethnicity or income mattered most in determining school performance.

Dr. Berman handed out another set of charts that illustrated the achievement gaps in reading and math for economically disadvantaged students, native students, black students, Hispanic students, Asian students, multi-ethnic students, and white students. He pointed out that a performance change occurred across all groups between fourth and sixth grades regardless of economic disadvantage and said that the district needed to figure out what produced that change. Mr. Hayes added that Latino students made up less than 13 percent of the students in the district but represented more than 20 percent of the free and reduced lunch students, with 68 percent of Latino students receiving free or reduced lunch. Dr. Berman said this type of data required careful consideration.

Ms. Waite inquired whether the district was also looking at current research being conducted elsewhere that was looking at culture and class as well as race. She said that it was important to be mindful of how race and class intersected in the community and that the committee's job was to remind the district that it could not focus exclusively on economics and not talk about race.

Mr. Martinez concurred with Ms. Waite and said that national findings supported the conclusion that disparity by race was greater if one added in socio-economic class.

Dr. Berman said that the data posed more questions than answered and that it was critical to try to discover what was causing the outcomes indicated by the data.

Ms. Joo observed that there were problems with the way systems collected data on Asian populations because it failed to look at whether families with children were recent immigrants, were refugee families, or were international student families. When the focus was all placed on the Japanese, Chinese, or Korean populations, Pacific Islanders were left out.

Mr. Hayes agreed that it was frustrating that the data failed to differentiate among Asians. Dr. Berman noted that because the group was so small, it would be possible to look at the individual fifth graders to learn what Asian groups were represented. He added that he had suggested that Oregon use the data system differently than it was presently.

Ms. Cramer and Ms. Moses were taking the data to 4J principals in the near future.

Ms. Hays and Mr. Tromba arrived at the meeting at 5:28 p.m.

Dr. Berman announced that the Budget Committee would meet February 8 and members of the committee would have an opportunity to provide comments there before the district moved forward with differentiated funding for schools.

Regarding the development of magnet programs, Dr. Berman said that Louisville had placed strong magnet programs in the highest needs areas and had attracted students from suburban areas to those schools. He said that the district would look at its alternative schools and noted that some alternative schools had a low needs index but others like Corridor and Yujin Gakuen had higher needs because they drew from less economically advantaged populations in north Eugene. The pilot at Buena Vista would involve a dual immersion program instead of strictly Spanish immersion. The possibility of bus transportation also needed to be considered.

Ms. Cramer arrived at the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Ms. Joo recalled Alfonso Cabrera's advocacy for locating Buena Vista where Latino families would be able to get their children to the school. Dr. Berman said that the Buena Vista pilot would allow collaboration with River Road, that providing bus transportation to create diversity was a difficult topic, and that the board had felt that giving priority to ESL and FRL students to achieve a 30 percent diversity index was worth the risk.

Mr. Martinez commented that there was a risk in focusing on the demographics of a school in that it made it appear that the goal was diversity for its own sake when diversity was really a

means to an end that was important to the education of students. He believed it was important to emphasize that the goal was actually what diversity invited in terms of student achievement and the engagement of families. Dr. Berman added that this goal had been a key to the success of the diversity and desegregation plan in Louisville.

Ms. Luvert observed that the ultimate goal was to create a culture that would accept kids and was one in which they would graduate. She asked whether creating equity in the high schools was also a goal. Dr. Berman responded that analysis was underway on some exciting projects such as common scheduling to allow sharing of resources and magnet programs at the high school level. He said it was also important to focus on middle schools. In addition, the facilities evaluation underway in the district would result in the district replacing and renovating some schools and siting decisions could be made that would create a greater experience of diversity for students.

Ms. Moriguchi supported having a dual immersion program at Buena Vista and said that getting information to all parents, including Headstart families, would be critical. Dr. Berman said that this comment led to the discussion on the next agenda item.

IV. Proposal: Reformulation of the Equity Committee (Dr. Berman)

Dr. Berman considered the work of the Equity Committee vitally important. He said that he had used information from the recent survey and had talked with the 4J board to arrive at the proposal to elevate the Equity Committee to a committee that was advisory to the 4J School Board.

Ms. Hays recalled that one of her first board assignments had been to the Equity Committee and that she had also served on the Eugene Human Rights Commission. She believed that staff support, where a committee was placed within an organization and its reporting structure, were important factors in its success and that by reporting to the board, a stronger partnership between the board and the committee would be possible.

A document titled “Equity Committee Proposed Guiding and Operating Principles Eugene School District 4J January 2012” was distributed and board members reviewed it. Ms. Hays announced that the proposal would be an action item on the board’s February 15 agenda and she invited committee members to provide testimony. The board likely would vote on it on March 7.

Mr. Martinez supported the change and said that it could move the committee closer to accomplishing its goals.

Ms. Moriguchi raised the issue of committee membership and whether 4J staff members could be among the 12 members of the committee or would be ex officio only. Ms. Hays pointed out that staff could not apply to be members of the Budget Committee but it might be possible for a staff person to apply for committee membership.

Some committee members felt that the 12 positions should reflect the broader community rather than the 4J community. Committee members' ability to connect with segments of the community and to disseminate information broadly was identified as important criteria for membership.

Mr. Gottesman noticed that the proposal did not define how the committee would make decisions, nor what issues it would address by voting. Because the committee presently was so large, quorums had not been considered important and work had been done cooperatively with decisions made by consensus. With seven members to be required for a quorum, it would be possible for four people to make important decisions.

Dr. Berman said that the proposal was conceptual only and that bylaws may be needed to define such matters more fully.

It would be a major change for committee members to no longer represent specific organizations. Mr. Gottesman was concerned that if a group was not officially represented, the committee may not hear from the group when there was a problem. Dr. Berman noted that people would represent communities and that individuals could work on behalf of constituent groups. He expected that members would have ties to a large number of organizations and would bring those connections to their work with the district. Ms. Joo emphasized the importance of committee members being connected to their communities.

Mr. Tromba noticed that the mission and purpose statements referred to students from several different groups but failed to mention sexual orientation or identification and although sexual orientation was mentioned in the committee selection criteria, it should also be referenced in the mission and purpose.

The selection criteria gave a preference to district residents, but not to parents of district students. Many district stakeholders paid taxes, but did not have children in the system currently. Having children in the district might be a positive consideration.

Ms. Lauer noted that she was a district employee but served on the committee as a representative of PFLAG. She hoped that one's employment status with the district would not be an automatic disqualifier for someone with strong community connections. .

Because of the reporting relationship to the board, two board members would attend the new committee meetings

Addressing Mr. Carrigan's concern, Superintendent Berman said that subcommittees and ad hoc groups could be formed that would include members not on the Equity Committee. Forming such committees would be consistent with the survey results that indicated committee members wanted to do more focused work on a committee level.

Ms. Holloway supported having the committee report to the board as a way to have a larger influence on the direction of the district. She appreciated the clarity the document brought to the committee's work.

Ms. Luvert wondered about the role of staff on the committee and said that staff participation had been vital to the committee's work. Dr. Berman responded that the intent was that district staff would both provide operational support and would serve as ex officio members of the committee.

Mr. Martinez said that because not everyone currently on the committee would be serving under the new structure, it was important for current members to decide whether they wanted to apply to the committee or if they had done their duty.

Mr. Hayes suggested having student representation from the high schools, possibly on a rotating basis or as non-voting members. Mr. Carrigan wondered about parent representation.

Ms. Hays said that she did not envision specific slots but when applicants spoke about what they would bring to the committee, the board would be interested in the perspective of a parent.

The committee briefly discussed the pros and cons of having students serve on the committee. Members recognized the value of the student voice and hoped that some connection with students would be developed. The Superintendent's Advisory Committee was cited as an example of useful and successful student involvement in district business.

Mr. Lavin expressed concern about the document's focus on achievement. Mr. Martinez proposed that student success be emphasized.

Ms. Hays addressed the issue of the student voice by telling about a student representative's report to the board in which he described a painful and racially charged incident and the board did not react immediately. Ms. Hays had later stopped the meeting and acknowledged what he had said. This illustrated the importance of going beyond inviting students to the table and actually listening to and thinking about what they had to say.

Ms. Hays again invited committee members to attend the board meeting on February 15 when the proposal would be under consideration.

Dr. Berman summarized that the following areas required further work before the committee proposal could be considered final:

- "improving achievement" should be reframed as "student success";
- the role of communication back to the community needed to be defined;
- clarification was needed as to whether district employees could serve as members of the committee;
- sexual orientation/identification needed to be mentioned in the mission and purpose along with other descriptors of groups of students;
- the decision-making process needed to be more clear
- the issue of student representation needed to be resolved.

V. Next Steps

Dr. Berman said that he appreciated the patience of the committee during the process and that the committee would continue meeting during the transition. He also encouraged committee members to apply for appointment to the new committee.

Mr. Peter commended Dr. Berman for bringing change to the district, especially for his use of data to move the district in the direction the committee had been hoping to see.

Ms. Waite also commended the superintendent and the board for recognizing and honoring the work of the committee.

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

(Recorded by Mary Feldman)