

MINUTES

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

March 20, 2012
4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Jane Waite, Acting Chair; Beth Gerot, Andy Gottesman, Matt Hayes, Melly Holloway, Jett Johnson, Misa Joo, Joel Lavin, John Lockhart, Ayanna Moriguchi, Guadalupe Quinn, Kori Rodley, Linda Smart, Larry Soberman, Brianna Stiller, Juan Carlos Valle, members; Superintendent Sheldon Berman, Carmen Urbina, Tibor Bessko, staff..

I. Welcome and Introductions

Acting Chair Jane Waite called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m. Those present introduced themselves.

Superintendent Berman welcomed everyone. He said that he would need to leave the meeting at 5:30 to take his son to practice. Reviewing the agenda, Dr. Berman noted that Jon Saphier would speak at the April 17 meeting. Mr. Saphier was a noted expert and Dr. Berman encouraged attendance and participation in an important conversation about evaluations.

Linda Smart arrived at the meeting at 4:39 p.m.

Ms. Urbina briefly discussed the application process for the restructured Equity Committee and encouraged current members to apply. All members had received an e-mail that outlined the process and the application form was online. In the first week, 12 applications had been submitted. Ms. Urbina asked members to help by sending the application information to their organizations and to individuals who might be interested. The 4J Board of Directors would review applications in April and depending on the number of applicants, decide whether it would interview all or some of the applicants at its May 2 meeting.

Responding to a question from Ms. Stiller about ex officio members, Dr. Berman said that ex officio members would not apply for positions on the committee but would be selected by the district. He would discuss these appointments with current ex officio members at a soon-to-be scheduled meeting.

Ms. Moriguchi pointed out that e-mails from the district intended for her were actually going to her mother's e-mail address. Ms. Urbina said she would be sure that Ms. Moriguchi's e-mail address was corrected.

Ms. Waite strongly encouraged committee members to take advantage of the opportunity to hear Jon Saphier and suggested that they visit his website to become acquainted with his research.

II. Public Comment

No members of the public asked to speak.

III. Equity Data Review (Matt Hayes) and Small Group Conversation

Superintendent Berman reminded committee members that they had seen the data previously. The data showed a sudden decline in reading and math scores for minority students between 4th and 5th grades and 5th and 6th grades. Dr. Berman asked committee members to focus on this and to share their ideas about what might be happening during these years to cause this decline.

Guadalupe Quinn arrived 4:43 p.m.

Ms. Urbina informed committee members that she would send them copies of Mr. Hayes' PowerPoint presentation via e-mail.

Mr. Hayes reviewed the data, pointing out that non-white students were overrepresented in the student population that qualified for free and reduced (F/R) price lunch. One of the graphs showed that 42 percent of district students qualified for F/R, but Latino or African American students were twice as likely to receive F/R as were white students. Mr. Hayes estimated that there were between 70 and 100 students at every high school who qualified for F/R but did not apply for it.

Looking at graphs showing the achievement gap, Mr. Hayes observed that at every grade level, F/R qualifying students were less successful in reading and math. The gap became wider at the higher grade levels. Although a decline might be expected between 5th and 6th grades when students were transitioning to middle school, the dramatic decline actually was occurring between 4th and 5th grades.

Mr. Valle suggested considering the life events that happened to students outside the classroom to better understand the reasons for the sudden decline.

Ms. Joo wondered if homework became more important at the upper elementary levels and postulated that teachers' attitudes toward homework and student experiences with homework and the help available to them at home might come into play at this stage. She

was aware of a cultural expectation that children were expected to take on more responsibilities at home at an earlier age than their white counterparts.

Ms. Waite opined that the data suggested that something was happening district-wide that impacted the performance of minority students.

Mr. Lockhart asked whether state-wide test scores showed the same pattern as 4J's. Mr. Hayes responded that it was possible to look at the state's data by ethnicity or by economic disadvantage but not by both together.

Mr. Lavin hypothesized that while it would not explain the gap in math achievement, at the point of the decline in reading achievement, students were being challenged to use their reading skills more to learn and many students were not well prepared for this. Mr. Hayes observed that there tended to be a larger drop in math than in reading for economically disadvantaged students. This could be related to the ability of parents to help children with their math homework which affected the ability to succeed in math and thus the educational attainment of parents could be an influencing factor.

Mr. Hayes suggested that for some students growing up in non-professional homes, parents did not bring work home but came home from work to rest and relax and so were unable to provide a model for their children that working at home was the norm.

Mr. Valle reported that his experience working with families supported Mr. Hayes' observation that children whose parents had less education were less likely to have support at home for completing homework. In his work with Latino families, he said that part of helping children succeed was helping their parents learn about the system and what their children were learning.

Ms. Joo recalled that in her teaching experience, children taking the math test complained that it was hard because there was so much reading involved and she concurred with Mr. Lavin's earlier comments.

Ms. Holloway's research indicated that interventions became more structured at the upper elementary level and that there was more personalized support available.

Ms. Stiller conjectured that at the 4th grade level, reading comprehension demands became more difficult and children with reading vocabulary deficits were at a huge disadvantage. Echoing the theme of Mr. Lavin's comments, she described math as not being just math but also being about reading.

Dr. Berman stated that at this stage 4J's math curriculum turned from number formulas to conceptual understanding and he wondered whether students were thinking conceptually or were focusing on procedures.

Mr. Valle referred to the Springfield school district and said that it had found that students who had had experienced certain things could read and comprehend information about those subjects more easily than those students who had not had the experiences.

Ms. Waite asserted that there was a significant factor invisible to the dominant culture that was disengaging many students. She said that elements of the curriculum were misaligned to children from nondominant cultures. Tools used for the delivery of some material may be offensive to those students and it impacted their engagement in learning.

Dr. Berman called attention to an achievement gap graph for Hispanic students which comprised the largest group of non-white students in the district. He pointed out that for non-F/R Hispanic students, the achievement gap was smaller by the high school level but for F/R Hispanic students the gap did not close. He cited a problem with participation levels and testing for Latino students in the 11th grade and said that the drop-out rate at that level was also high. Mr. Hayes commented that the stigma that it was unacceptable to graduate as a 5th year student put so much pressure on students that many chose to leave school instead of continuing and graduating after that 5th year.

Mr. Hayes told the committee that the majority of non-white students who passed the benchmark met but did not exceed it. Research showed that those students who scored close to passing had a lower chance of passing in a subsequent year. Therefore, he said that when the state moved the benchmarks, it would disproportionately affect non-white students.

Ms. Smart expressed concern about inaccuracies in the ethnic identification of students in the district.

Mr. Valle left the meeting at 5:20 pm

Dr. Berman noted that multi-ethnicity represented ten percent of students. Mr. Hayes explained that under new federal guidelines, when students self-identified as being of two ethnicities they were reported as multi-ethnic unless one of those ethnicities was listed by the student as Hispanic in which case the student would be automatically identified as Hispanic and not multi-ethnic. He said that many Native students were now classified as multi-ethnic or Hispanic because of this and that many members of Southwest tribes were now classified as Hispanic even though they considered themselves primarily Native.

Ms. Waite objected to Mr. Hayes remarks about Southwest tribes and said that the enrollment was different for Puebla tribes.

Ms. Joo acknowledged that students dropped out of high school, many of them because they preferred getting a job. To her the remedy was to reach them before they dropped out by supporting a school that met their needs.

Sara Cramer arrived at the meeting at 5:25 p.m. Dr. Berman left the meeting at 5:27 p.m. and Mr. Soberman left at 5:28 p.m.

Ms. Stiller wondered how many of the students who were not meeting benchmarks were enrolled in 4J schools for more than a few months. Mr. Hayes said that this information could be extracted from the data and said that at some of the lower achieving schools, mobility rates were extremely high and those students were getting a less consistent level of instruction, particularly if they were moving between districts.

Ms. Urbina spoke about the process of cultural identity development for students of color and internalized oppression, exclusion, and marginalization. She said that around 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, students of color internalized the belief that academic success was not for non-white students. In addition, the desire to assimilate became stronger around 5th grade. Ms. Urbina asked how this process could be approached holistically and the system constructed by Eugene's dominant culture deconstructed and infused with a different reality.

Ms. Joo had experienced a school where everyone had worth and all cultures were accepted and this empowered the students.

Ms. Urbina cited a curriculum example as a unit about whitewater rafting when some students had no idea what whitewater rafting was and felt they were the only ones who lacked that familiarity. She said there had to be an environment that made it comfortable for a student to ask questions. She said that when a student was the only one of color in a class it made it less likely that the student would call attention to himself by asking such questions. Ms. Waite added that it was important to think what this type of situation meant for the teacher and for the system as well.

Ms. Urbina asked the committee to consider, based on their experiences, what events happened at the end of elementary school that could impact achievement, what strategies could make an impact on what was happening, and what advice could they give the district.

Ms. Waite summarized the earlier discussion by saying that homework being introduced at the 3-4-5 grade level, the content of the tests themselves, the appropriateness of interventions, home culture that modeled homework being normal or important, issues around reading comprehension and the focus on comprehension strategies.

Ms. Joo shared several things that she believed could make a difference. First she said that young people at the upper elementary level wanted to belong. Next she said that everyone saw themselves as cultural beings who came from generations that stood for certain things. The correct way to share culture was with respect and appreciation. Everyone had different perspectives on such concepts as what constituted beauty, family, or normal activities. Ms. Joo continued by saying that everyone had responsibility for disrespect and harassment. She maintained that people learned in many ways, through head, hands, or heart and that teaching must be done through consideration of all three ways. Children should be taught to be citizens of wherever they went. When all these

factors were recognized, she said that children felt powerful and knew that other cultures added to their own worlds.

Ms. Stiller observed that the number of instructional minutes devoted to social, emotional, and cultural content became fewer as students got older. Such things as courageous conversations and class meetings were not systemic and teachers received little guidance in how to teach this type of content. She believed that the system was set up to treat middle and high school students the same way as college students were treated with no time set aside to meet the substantial emotional needs of these young people.

Ms. Waite argued that the emotional needs of middle and high school students could not be separated from their academic needs.

Ms. Holloway concurred with Ms. Stiller and Ms. Waite's comments and she advocated for a systemic, identifiable approach that recognized that everyone had a culture and learning could be expressed in a number of ways. She said that it was important for teachers to be sure all students had experiences that related to whatever tool was being used to deliver the curriculum, (whitewater rafting, jump roping were examples).

Mr. Lockhart found the conversation somewhat ironic. He said that the OAKS test data reduced everyone's experience to a narrow range of what was considered right or good. He believed that the committee had identified many reasons why the achievement decline existed at a certain grade level but he doubted that the reasons could be realistically addressed when the primary focus was on this particular test. He stated that when all emphasis was on a test score, there was little reason for teachers to seek out different ways of teaching.

Ms. Quinn questioned whether teachers were being adequately prepared to teach populations that would be different than they had been in the past.

Ms. Cramer left the meeting at 6 p.m. and Mr. Hayes left shortly thereafter.

Ms. Joo commented that the April 17 discussion of evaluations with Mr. Saphier would be a step toward improving teachers' ability to teach students effectively.

Ms. Moriguchi distributed copies of the "Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage." She mentioned that as a teacher, her education had prepared her to build meaningful relationships with students but had not prepared her for the required curriculum that left little time for building those relationships. .

Mr. Hayes returned to the meeting briefly and said that he needed to take his ill daughter home. Ms. Waite apologized for cutting him off when he was speaking about Southwest tribes earlier. Ms. Urbina thanked Mr. Hayes for using the eyes of equity when bringing forth the stories of 4J students.

IV. Bullying and Harassment District Alignment Update (Brianna Stiller)

Ms. Stiller distributed the “Bullying and Harassment in the 4J School District Report for 2010-2011 School Year.” She said that the survey had been developed three years previously and that for the past two years it had included 32 questions and had been administered at all middle and high schools. Next year the Options East alternative program would also participate. Approximately 4,000 students had taken the survey this year. Ms. Stiller reviewed the demographics of survey respondents.

Ms. Stiller then reviewed the climate survey portion that asked questions about students’ feelings of safety and respect, For the first time in the district, schools were being asked to develop action plans to address school climate.

Ms. Stiller pointed out the difference between harassment and bullying, was that harassment was based on someone’s membership in a particular class while bullying was not. The most frequent method of bullying was verbal while using technology to bully may be more damaging.

Ms. Stiller explained that the bullied, the bullier and the bystander were not individual people but roles and that the perpetrator one hour may become the recipient the next. Roles were fluid and it was not simply a matter of there being some kids who were just bullies.

Ms. Stiller noted that harassment on the basis of sexual orientation had decreased over the past year while harassment on the basis of race had remained constant. However, harassment on the basis of religion had increased which Ms. Stiller suggested may be due to the political environment.

Most bullying occurred during school, with an alarming 21 percent occurring in classrooms. Ms. Stiller commented that students were highly skilled at bullying, even in well managed classrooms. In her opinion, the key to changing this behavior was in students owning it and taking control of their environment. She reported that teachers were being asked to interrupt inappropriate language even if it was not directed at a particular person and that staff was receiving a clear message from the district that this type of language was not supposed to happen.

Ms. Smart reported that all of her students reported hearing inappropriate language daily (such as use of the “n” word) but failed to understand that this language constituted a racial slur.

Ms. Stiller said that she would send the survey to Ms. Urbina for distribution to the committee.

The fact that 48 percent of respondents said that they would talk to a staff member for help if they were being bullied defied a common belief of teachers that students would not talk to them.

Ms. Stiller observed that while bystanders were not likely to join in the bullying or harassing behavior, it was disappointing that they were more likely to walk away without intervening.

Ms. Stiller concluded by saying that while bullying and harassment had both decreased slightly, she was hoping to see bigger gains in reducing the problem this year.

Ms. Stiller informed the committee that the University of Oregon had done some analysis looking across racial categories and responses. The resulting graph was difficult to follow and she said that she would provide the narrative version of the analysis for committee members' information.

Ms. Urbina believed that the Equity Committee needed to be united on the issues of bullying and harassment. She said that schools were where all communities came together and either collided or lived well together, with the school reflecting a microcosmic version of the community.

Mr. Johnson and Ms. Moriguchi left the meeting at 6:25 pm.

Committee members commented on the report.

At Ms. Joo's request, Mr. Lavin shared a story about Roosevelt's hosting of the Sprout Film Festival. The Look Me in the Eye campaign also took place simultaneously. He spoke about an assembly at which a song was sung by 200 students as well as about a film created by students in a social justice class in which they interviewed members of the Roosevelt school community who were gay or had parents who were gay. At the conclusion, three or four students led an allied pledge about the LGBT community at Roosevelt. There was enormous participation and everyone felt they were a part of the school and belonged there.

Ms. Waite thanked Mr. Levin for sharing such a positive story and for supporting the creation of such a positive event.

Ms. Waite asked committee members to submit their comments or questions about the bullying and harassment report to Ms. Urbina and she would then provide the committee's feedback to the district.

V. Review Calendar

The next meeting was scheduled for April 17, 2012. Agenda items would include: Teacher and Administrator Evaluation Conversation with Jon Saphier and Celia Feres-Johnson, Bridges to the Community, and Closing Reflections.

There would not be a committee meeting in May. On June 6 a reception and dinner to thank the Equity Committee would be held (catered by South or North students) at 6 p.m.

Ms. Waite asked Ms. Urbina to send members the link to Mr. Saphier's website.

Ms. Waite reminded committee members to submit their applications for appointment to the restructured committee.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

(Recorded by Mary Feldman)