

MINUTES

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

April 16, 2013
4:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Rita Radostitz, co-Chair; Malvina Holloway, Anne Marie Levis, Eileen Nittler, Herb Pendleton, Suzy Price, Ana Quintero-Arias, Jane Waite, members; Superintendent Sheldon Berman; Carmen Urbina, staff.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Radostitz called the meeting to order at 4:06 p.m. She announced that Ms. Holloway would be late and the group would achieve a quorum once she arrived.

II. Public Comment

No members of the public asked to speak.

III. Review Agenda

Ms. Radostitz announced that Andy Gottesman had resigned because he moved and Kori Rodley and Laurie Trieger both had accepted new jobs that made it difficult to attend the meetings. Ms. Rodley had indicated that she wanted to continue being involved in subcommittee work.

Ms. Urbina said that she had sent Ms. Trieger and Ms. Rodley e-mails asking whether they could continue on the committee if it met at a different time and she was waiting to hear back from them.

IV. Review of Work Plan

Ms. Radostitz explained that in discussing the work plan with Ms. Urbina and Ms. Waite, the idea of creating subcommittees to work on specific aspects of the plan had come up.

Mr. Lavin, Ms. Gerot, and Dr. Berman arrived at the meeting at 4:08 pm.

The group already had spent considerable time on the first goal of educating themselves so Ms. Radostitz wanted to concentrate on the second and third goals.

The group discussed their sense that the committee was not moving forward primarily because with monthly meetings momentum was difficult to sustain. Working in subcommittees between full committee meetings and then reporting back might offer an opportunity to take on tasks, be more active, and accomplish more.

Ms. Radostitz emphasized that ideas for subcommittee actions needed to relate back to the work plan and should be fairly specific.

Dr. Berman commented that Goal #1 was about gaining understanding, Goal #2 was about content that built on that knowledge, and Goal #3 was structuring how, where, and to whom that content was delivered. He noted that there would be a meeting the following day at which Charles Martinez would present to the superintendents from Springfield, Bethel, and Eugene a plan for a project on how districts supported families,

Ms. Urbina observed that creating an agenda for moving toward the Goal #3 objective of increasing the percentage of underrepresented parents involved in individual school Parent Councils by 25 percent by the end of the 2013-14 school year would be a powerful accomplishment.

Ms. Radostitz described goals #2 and #3 as intersecting and suggested merging them and thinking about strategies that effectively increased parent involvement elsewhere.

Ms. Waite recounted her experiences as a 4J parent when she attended parent council meetings in the past. She had felt alienated and uncomfortable, therefore chose not to participate but now was serving on the parent council at South Eugene. She viewed parent councils as bastions of the dominant culture whose primary function was fundraising and which were not aligned with the values and perspectives of Equity Committee members.

Dr. Berman said that the key was to engage parents in education and concerns beyond those of support and fundraising. The question was to identify vehicles for parental participation and engagement in the issues of concern to the committee.

Ms. Nittler commented that workshops for parents were included in the committee's goals.

Ms. Radostitz asked the committee to divide into two groups and spend about 30 minutes discussing action steps for accomplishing goals #2 and #3.

Mr. Lavin pointed out that an annual parent survey was underway in several schools and the data from it could be valuable in helping the committee identify what parents valued and what would motivate them to be more engaged in the schools. He said that he had found that some parents participated in parent councils and fundraising while other

families participated by working in the schools. That second type of engagement was significant but was not currently quantified in data.

Ms. Urbina saw the need to identify those different ways of participating. Ms. Price wanted to capitalize on the things that brought many parents to schools and figure out how to educate them about equity concerns when they were participating in furthering their children's education.

Ms. Urbina advised that as the committee developed action items, it needed to consider all grade levels and acknowledge that parental involvement shifted dramatically at the upper grade levels.

Ms. Waite emphasized the importance of finding ways to make parents comfortable in the classroom and feel that they provided value. She noted that it was sometimes difficult for overworked and stressed teachers to welcome parents into the classroom at all times. Ms. Radostitz added that some 4J schools were doing this well and the group needed to look at those schools for best practices. Mr. Lavin commented on the importance of finding out what skills parents offered and providing opportunities to utilize those skills.

Ms. Price said that questions on the parent survey helped identify parent skills and interests. Schools could create opportunities for involvement based on that input and could look at parents as educational partners. The survey would be completed May 10. At Ms. Waite's request, she agreed to provide data from the survey to the committee that directly related to the goals.

At 4:31 the group broke into groups to discuss the goals and strategies.

Ms. Holloway arrived at the meeting at 4:34 p.m. and Ms. Price left at 4:52 p.m.

The committee reconvened as one at 5:25 p.m.

Reporting on her group's discussion of creating a communication plan, Ms. Radostitz said that the process included identifying the goals, creating key messages for each goal, figuring out a distribution process, being consistent with the message, and creating "evangelists" who could help get the message out.

One goal was communicating the mission and work of the Equity Committee within the district. Another goal was informing and inspiring the community that equity issues impacted all students in the district. The group thought it was important to do outreach to those who could be inspired by the equity mission but were unaware of it or did not fully understand the language in which it was communicated.

Information should be gathered from students, specifically the Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee and a wide range of different interest groups at the high schools. The committee would need to work with Ms. Urbina to determine how best to gather input from elementary and middle schools students. Parental input could come from

parents through the survey mentioned by Ms. Price and by members attending various meetings of parents. Ms. Radostitz suggested listening carefully to responses from parents who may not be natural allies when equity issues came up to identify what messages resonated with those parents. Communication also needed to occur with students and families who were not succeeding in the system to determine what resonated with them.

Ms. Radostitz continued by saying that messaging needed to be tested before determining the most deliberate and intentional way for distribution. She suggested venues such as union meetings, school-wide meetings, and different activities attended by parents, such as the large auction held by South Eugene in which the Equity Committee could host an information table.

Ms. Radostitz agreed to write up her notes and sent them to the committee for further input.

Ms. Waite reported on behalf of the group that discussed embedding equity in the schools. She observed that site councils were not a perfect vehicle for parent involvement and the group had focused on parent councils and how to set expectations around equity and inclusion within them. She said that because these groups often were focused on raising funds and had a specific culture and ways of operating it would be necessary to reset their expectations of what a parent council was and what it did.

Dr. Berman had suggested convening quarterly meetings of a “super group” composed of the leadership of all parent councils. He could provide them with data that highlighted the inclusion of equity.

Ms. Waite suggested gathering best practices around building community within schools and distributing them to schools for action. Dr. Berman referred to effort-based ability and said this was a mode under which teachers and parents were now operating. Instead of the old model in which natural intelligence was emphasized this involved saying that intelligence was not being born smart but that effort created intelligence and teachers and schools would never give up on a student who was putting out effort. The challenge was to communicate that message to parents so they would join in its continuous communication to students that they mattered and that adults believed in them and would never give up on them.

Mr. Lavin commented that in some schools communication was primarily one-way and although he did not know the entire solution, it was important to increase two- or three-way communication among teachers, parents, and principals.

Ms. Waite concluded by saying that she had agreed to compile her group’s discussion for distribution and she asked that committee members consider strategies that had not been discussed and how to turn them into action.

Ms. Urbina said that she would resend the list of committee members and their individual e-mail addresses to facilitate easier communication.

V. Creating Sub-Committee Working Group

Suggested subgroups included communications planning, teacher support, student and parent engagement. The first and last of these had been addressed during the preceding agenda item and the others could be addressed at a later time.

VI. Next Steps

1. Equity Committee Presentation to the Board May 1, 2013

Staff proposed providing a report about the committee's work over the past year at the board's May 1 meeting. Members indicated that they preferred waiting longer to give that report. Neither Ms. Urbina nor Mr. Martinez could be present on May 1. Dr. Berman suggested waiting until June for the presentation.

Ms. Urbina commented that while some committee members did not feel they had accomplished much, a significant amount of work had actually been done, especially around Goal #1 and members' education about achievement gap issues and best equity practices.

2. Equity Committee Appointments/Reappointments and Schedule

Ms. Urbina reviewed a hand-out that listed the expiring terms and resignations of members and proposed a process and schedule for consideration by board leadership on April 22. She said that the remainder of the terms of Mr. Gottesman, Ms. Rodley, and Ms. Trieger would need to be filled through recruitment, interviews, and board appointment. Ms. Waite, Ms. DeSpain, Mr. Pendleton, and Ms. Radostitz were eligible for reappointment and the board could opt to reappoint those interested without an application process. Ms. Urbina anticipated completion of the process by June 5.

3. Other

Dr. Berman passed out data prepared by Mr. Loureiro on the intersection of ethnicity, race, and economic disadvantage and changes over the past four years. Previous data had not included Free and Reduced Price lunch program participation.

Dr. Berman pointed out that the data indicated that the percentage of 4J students who were economically disadvantaged was trending upward and that there were large differences across ethnicities/races in the percentage of

students who were economically disadvantaged. Over the four years the percentage of 4J Latino students who were economically disadvantaged had been 31 points higher than the proportion of 4J White students who were economically disadvantaged. He added that many students were confronting multiple issues and the district had to figure out how deal with not only issues of disparity based on race and ethnicity but also on economic disadvantage.

Dr. Berman indicated that it would be possible to do a multiple regression analysis and he would ask Mr. Loureiro to do so. .

The next meeting was scheduled for May 21.

The meeting adjourned at 5:44 p.m.

(Recorded by Mary Feldman)