

Tuesday, June 11, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AD HOC COMMITTEE OF GREAT CITY SCHOOLS/MALES OF COLOR OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 11, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. Present were Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Sauda Baraka, Terry Walden, Dr. Carmen McPherson, Eric Alicea, JoAnn Kennedy, Natasha Noel and Sana Shah.

There was a discussion of the recent Males of Color community forum. Dr. McPherson said she was happy with the way it was put together, although it would have been nice to have more young men. She said she did not see a lot of district staff at the meeting.

Ms. Baraka said she thought the committee achieved its goal of giving the community an update. She said the video was excellent and a good selling piece, which tells the story of the committee.

Ms. Kennedy said she was disappointed that more staff did not attend.

There was a discussion of distributing QR codes to teachers to have them identify students. Ms. Kennedy said the goal is to identify students from 3rd grade all the way up to high school who want to become teachers.

Dr. Jenkins said there were six responses to the call for action.

There was a discussion of referrals of adult black males who want to become teachers. Ms. Baraka said it was directed at people who have bachelor's degrees who can gain their teaching certification.

Ms. Kennedy said she has heard of African-Americans who applied for teaching jobs in the district but were never called in for an interview. Ms. Baraka suggested reaching out to Mr. Chester.

Ms. Baraka said the barrier to greater teacher recruitment of African-Americans are the state requirements. She said Connecticut did not have reciprocity with other states.

Dr. McPherson said this year was the first year that there has not been open recruitment session for teachers. She said the applicants apply on Applitrack and the applications remain on file.

Ms. Baraka noted a lot of young people need coaching and preparation for interviews. Dr. Jenkins said she believed 48 percent of new hires were of color. She said the district was number one in the state in this category.

Ms. Shah said the union is the most powerful voice at the table when it comes to changing certification. She said she was certified in Texas and everything transferred when she went to New York, but Connecticut won't take her certification. She said she would be making less in Connecticut than in Houston.

Dr. McPherson and Mr. Alicea said union members who are of color are among the barriers to certification of teachers. Mr. Walden said community pressure was needed on them.

Ms. Shah said an affordable housing bill which could have made teaching more attractive to people of color did not go through the Legislature. She said retention was equally important as recruitment. She said she a lot of teachers of color leave Bridgeport and work in other communities for more money.

Dr. McPherson suggested a mandate for Connecticut teacher to take courses in race and issues of equity. She said that could lead to uncovering conscious and unconscious biases. She suggested teachers taking the walk from a student's home to a school to give them an idea of what students face. Ms. Baraka said things like this could be embedded as part of the interview process.

Ms. Shah said our school system is a reflection of white middle class values, and that is not reflective of the community. She said ultimately it was about shifting power to the community.

Mr. Walden suggested recruiting folks who attended both forums to take on some role, including lobbying. He said as a small group we can't do it all.

Dr. Jenkins said the mentees who are being mentored should be engaged in conversations about being teachers. She said in addition to providing content, teaching is a helping profession

Ms. Shah said people are being deterred from helping, which involves a larger equity conversation founded in capitalism.

She said students should understand that they have a responsibility to their community.

Ms. Baraka said the Call Me Mister program that was started at Clemson and a lot of men who go through the program end up in administration quickly and they don't stay in the classroom.

Dr. McPherson described an occasion when young black males reacted positively to a male figure in front of them sharing knowledge.

Ms. Shah said we have to fundamentally change what the teaching looks like from memorizing and high-stakes testing to creativity and innovation and making it exciting to teach.

Ms. Baraka said there was state legislation proposed that would erase felony convictions, which would create more opportunities.

Mr. Walden noted the education system has been Eurocentric-driven, and it has to be more relevant culturally. Ms. Shah said tasking people to be teachers right now is to asking them to be perpetrators of whiteness.

Dr. Jenkins said Ms. Lambeck is planning to release a new article on the new mandated courses in the district on race. She noted they were only half year courses. Ms. Baraka said a full year course would require additional funding and staff. They are supposed to be expanded to middle school, with additional electives added at the high school level.

Dr. McPherson described a Caribbean literature course that her son took in Westport public schools about 18 years ago, which gave information and covered topics that Bridgeport

students were not getting. Mr. Walden said African-American literature is offered at Housatonic Community College for only one semester. An African-American history course was eliminated due to lack of enrollment.

Ms. Shah recommended the book *Radical Hope*. She suggested a writing project where males of color write letters to younger peers.

There was a discussion of an individual at the forum who does prison ministry. Ms. Noel said he has found that family structure is often the root cause for young men's difficulties. Ms. Baraka that is a form of implicit bias when the puzzle goes back generations. She said trauma repair was needed. She said the gentleman was blaming a bunch of people who don't have control over their own environment.

Mr. Alicea moved to collect data from teachers on recommendations of students who could be future teachers in Bridgeport. The motion was seconded by Ms. Kennedy and unanimously approved

The discussion turned to the white paper.

Dr. Jenkins said the first question posed is, What do you think are the most pressing issues facing our males of color in the education system?

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said she did not think that populations get pushed out of the district's high schools so graduation rates will not be low.

Mr. Alicea said we have to get our teachers out of the mindset that they're just here for insurance. He said the vast

majority of our teachers are white females between 25 and 35 who are here because their husbands are contractors or carpenters. He said he learned this from talking to former Classical Studies teachers.

Ms. Baraka said once a teacher reaches tenure in the district they generally stay. She added a lot of teachers really like working with our kids. She said things like the idea of teachers walking in the neighborhoods discussed earlier would be effective. She described the approach Jettie Tisdale used as a principal. She said if the children think they care about you, they will love you.

Dr. Jenkins said we know we have a lot of children who do not read. She said Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote in *Dreamkeepers* about not only connecting with children culturally, but providing hard academic skills.

Ms Baraka said there is an evaluation tool that principals are supposed to be using to determine if learning is going on in a classroom.

Mr. Alicea said the breakout group for Grades 7 and 8 consisted of two educators, a pastor, a probation officer and himself.

Ms. Noel suggested discussing asked what were the top two of three things facing the boys of color according to the responses.

Dr. Jenkins said parent involvement and understand who were teaching has been discussed.

Ms. Noel said there was common discussion of lack of innovation.

Mr. Walden said the committee might be able to re-engage teachers when school is back in session. He said we have to clear through some of these challenging, difficult issues.

Dr. McPherson suggested inviting someone from the BEA to appear before the committee in the fall.

Ms. Baraka said drawing on other cities' work as part of the Council of Great City Schools could be effective. She said some cities had a separate office devoted to this work.

The second question under discussion was, What do you think helps to enhance the educational success of males of color?

Ms. Shah said some of the responses were very teacher-centric. Mr. Alicea said teachers facilitated that discussion.

The third question was, Is the community's responsibility to impact change for our males of color?

It was noted human capital was a theme. Ms. Baraka said the original concept of Lighthouse from New York was adults using skill sets to engage children after school. She noted the new schools, Harding and Claytor, were designed to engage the community and the neighborhoods.

Ms. Baraka said if we don't do this work, the brainpower that young people have is going to get used somewhere else.

Dr. Jenkins says often the school system says we want community involvement and the money from the community is used to buy a program, but we don't use the program, and

when we wonder why the community doesn't give more money.

Ms. Baraka said the level of engagement is often determined by how effective the building leadership is.

Ms. Kennedy described the Hall School community that appeared before the board where the students and staff described the family atmosphere and sense of belonging at the school.

Dr. Jenkins said one theme for the white paper was sharing human capital, with bullet points regarding coming into the school, committing time, creating a brain trust, critical thinking, young people with energy, and provides resources and opportunities. A second bullet is around community schools .

Mr. Walden said everything can't be sports-focused. There was a discussion of a Saturday program for young men.

There was a discussion of issues involved with BEA members volunteering their time. Dr. Jenkins noted the teachers' strike in Bridgeport set the precedent for the country in binding arbitration following the historic strike.

Dr. Jenkins said the topic of the paper was going to revolve on equity. The second section would be a review of data to talk about the pain points associated with males of color. The third section will talk about the history of racism and oppression, including *Brown vs. Board of Education*, *Crumpton vs. Chop* and the *Sheff* court cases. Other possible areas of discussion are the history of Bassick High documented in the *Atlantic Magazine*, the institution of white middle class values, redlining, Laurayne Farrar-James and

Geraldine Johnson, and the pros and cons of magnet schools.

Dr. Jenkins said the third area of the paper would include discussion of solutions to the challenge, synthesize the response to three questions, and enhancing the educational success of males of color.

Dr. Jenkins said the fourth section of the white paper would discuss pressing issues and community responsibility.

Dr. Jenkins said the final section will deal with a call to action and what we want the reader to do next in regards to equity. Suggestions include an equity audit agenda with mentoring, annual forums, and teacher summits.

Ms. Shah said one suggestion is any stakeholder that interacts with kids be required to go through trainings on bias and white supremacy, including board members.

Dr. Jenkins said she was thinking the white paper would be about ten pages. She said she hoped to have a draft by next week. She said it should be available to the superintendent's office by June 20th to make the agenda of the last board meeting of the year.

Mr. Walden moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Dr. Jenkins and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on September 24, 2019.*