

Monday, October 19, 2020

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 19, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Hernan Illingworth, and Bobbi Brown. Board members Albert Benejan and Sybil Allen were also present. John Weldon joined subsequently as noted.

The first agenda item was committee goals and objectives. Mr. Sokolovic suggested as the committee's goals and objectives: To use data-driven information to apply an equity lens to the entire Bridgeport Public School system and to identify any and all policies, procedures, services and programs that are disparately impacting any distinct group of students and/or staff. The committee will seek to rectify any issues found through committee discussions, research, and will also make referrals to other committees, create focus groups and/or make referrals to the full board for further action. It will also seek to promote initiatives and activities that promote unity amongst the Bridgeport Public Schools' diverse student body, staff, and the Greater Bridgeport public school community.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the committee goals for the remainder of the year of 2020 is to establish a standard of

data presentation for ease of use and to map out issues to consider in 2021 and beyond.

Mr. Illingworth, Ms. Brown, Mr. Benejan, and Ms. Allen said they were in general agreement.

Dr. Carmen McPherson said she would like to see the verbiage in writing. Dr. Selena Morgan said the goals should be challenging and she hoped equity in terms of females was included. Mr. Sokolovic said he left things vague with “any distinct group” to encompass anyone.

Mr. Weldon joined the meeting.

Dr. Victor Black said he believed ultimately the idea is about coming up with resolutions or proposals to address the concerns.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee will not be able to do its work without support of the broader Bridgeport school community, staff, and the Board of Education.

Mr. Weldon said the committee goals sounded like a good basic foundation.

The next agenda item was on a baseline of student and staff demographics by cohort and job title. Mr. Sokolovic said data breaking employees by race was received.

The racial survey by school was put on the screen. Mr. Sokolovic said looking at this much data is always clumsy. He said he would prefer to see the data presented in bar charts.

Dr. Morgan said the data Mr. Sokolovic was looking at might be on Edsight website in graph form. Dr. McPherson said if the data is in Excel she would attempt to put the data in graphs.

Mr. Weldon said it sounds like this is information that would be on the district's EEO-1 form that public entities are required to file. He said the racial data could also be compared to the composition of the city and also the county, where the hiring pool is located.

Mr. Sokolovic said the further out you go from Bridgeport the ratios would change, so white employees might be underrepresented when compared to the makeup of the state as a whole.

Mr. Sokolovic said he did not think it was good enough for the district to do slightly better than Fairfield, Westport, Stamford in racial breakdown and distribution of jobs.

Dr. McPherson said there were fewer black and brown educators in Bridgeport, New Haven, and Bridgeport in relation to the student body, which has been the case consistently. She said comparing Bridgeport to Fairfield County is apples and oranges.

Mr. Weldon said the EEO-1 data would be broken down by race and type of employee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the work of the committee would be a multiheaded monster and it would take a while to formulate the right questions. He said little pieces should be attacked as part of a big problem.

The next agenda item was on a top-down approach to uncovering unintentional biases. Mr. Sokolovic said this is a tough one because it involves challenging ourselves and because it is a 400-year-old problem. He said unintentional biases had to be uncovered. He said perhaps the board and the upper administration needed cultural sensitivity training. He noted these are sensitive subjects. He said when the board discussed the dress code there was a reference to women in heels rather than just heel size. He said the board had to be careful with language. He said just because he had a brown child and a brown wife did not mean he was not susceptible to cultural and unintentional biases.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to explore such training for the board. Ms. Brown said she was in favor given the climate the world was in now. Mr. Illingworth said he believed the training should be provided someone from outside of the district.

Mr. Weldon said he was in support of the idea, which could include a quick RFP for diversity and inclusion training to see what comes back. He said the cost might require an RFP and this would open it up to different firms and what they can offer. He said the matter could go through the Contracts Committee to the full board.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to commit the committee to action as soon as possible, although we cannot solve every problem.

Mr. Sokolovic said Supt. Testani and the staff were on board with the committee's efforts. He said this was a serious issue and the time is now.

Ms. Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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