

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 22, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Bobbi Brown, and Erika Castillo. Board member Albert Benejan\* was present remotely at the beginning of the meeting and subsequently arrived in person.

(\*remote participation and in-person participation as noted)

Dr. Carmen McPherson was present.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of January 31, 2022. The motion was seconded by Ms. Castillo and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on free antiracism training for board members and other elected officials to take place in a district location. Gemeem Davis and Callie Heilmann of Bridgeport Generation Now were present.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had attended antiracism meetings with the group, and he thought it would be a good idea to lend our facilities to the antiracism training being offered to the board and the City Council.

Ms. Davis said the organization was a grassroots nonprofit, which uses community organizing, policy research and civic education to dismantle the root causes of the problems here in Bridgeport. They have a partnered with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond for the last four local

workshops on racism. The workshop last two and a half days. She described prior workshops at the Discovery Museum, at the Burroughs Community Center and the University of Bridgeport, with about 130 people trained so far.

Ms. Davis said the purpose is to create a community of leaders in Bridgeport committed to the practice of antiracism. She said the People's Institute has been around since 1980 and has trained over two million people.

Ms. Davis said the institute provides free trainers for up to forty people, which is the maximum amount that can be accommodated.

Ms. Heilmann said we are always open to further training going forward for more people.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said attendees have to commit to attending all three days.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said the majority of the time during the sessions is spent in the same room, so a room that can accommodate forty people is needed.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said the prior workshops had been very well received. She said everyone had a responsibility had to undo pervasive racism in the country. She said the People's Institute has indicated it has gotten much busier since 2020 and George Floyd's death. She said the best thing about the workshops is that people who are there want to be there, unlike some types of HR training.

Mr. Benejan arrived in person at the meeting.

In response to a question, Ms. Davis said the aim is to get city officials and community leaders in the room. Ms. Heilmann described monthly meetings of those who have undergone the training.

Mr. Sokolovic said the results of the training could not really be measured in metrics. He said his views were changed by being exposed to different ideas and different values. He said he believed a lot of the things we're doing are like building bridges to the future and the results may not be seen in our lifetimes.

Mr. Benejan suggested the training be provided to PAC leaders in the future. He said when that training is offered, he would like to bring the matter to the Students & Families Committee.

Ms. Brown moved *"to move this to the full board for approval of providing the space and to encourage board members to attend the free antiracism training being sponsored by Bridgeport Generation Now."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Castillo and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on disaggregated data on student participation in AP courses data compared to the overall student demographics.

Dr. McPherson said one document highlights all the high schools and the AP courses that are offered, along with the racial breakdown of all the students taking the course. As an example, there are more male students taking AP courses at the Aerospace School than female students, while it is the opposite at Bridgeport Military Academy and the Biotech

School. The IT School has more male than female students in AP courses.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said courses are advertised to students through guidance counselors and teacher recommendations. Ms. Brown said when she was at Harding AP courses were recommended based on the track she was on.

Dr. McPherson displayed a document which summarized by percentages. At Aerospace, of students take two or more AP classes, 39 percent are Hispanic; 29 percent are black; and 21 percent are white. She noted the numbers of native Americans and Asians are low, but that is based on enrollment numbers at the school.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson suggested revisiting the data after the committee studies it.

Mr. Sokolovic said he noted enrollment numbers at one school with 162 males compared to 75 females. Dr, McPherson said across the district there are 627 Hispanic students taking one or more AP classes; nine American Indians; 76 Asians; 362 African Americans; nine Islanders; 176 white students; and eight who identify as being of two or more races. There are 716 females taking one or more AP classes and 561 male students.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said the classes had capacity for additional students, but they are challenging courses and sometimes children enroll and then leave. She said typically students take AP courses beginning in Grade 11.

Ms. Brown moved “*to table the rest of this until the next meeting.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Castillo and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on paraprofessional employee demographic data.

Dr. McPherson said there are 300 paraprofessionals in the district; 84 percent are females. Racial breakdowns are 1 American Indian, 2 Asians, 3 black-and-white non-Hispanic; 97 black; 84 are Hispanic/Latino; one native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander 1; two or more races four; unknown, 7; and white, 100.

Dr. McPherson said four percent of the paraprofessionals have 60 or more college credits, which was a requirement in the past; 106 have an associate’s degrees; 87 have a bachelor’s degree; three have high school diplomas; eight have master’s degrees; 71 have a para assessment certificate. She described the racial breakdown of these groups.

Mr. Sokolovic said he brought this item forward because he had described the situation as a giant jigsaw puzzle. He said there was still an imbalance, but the numbers are closer to where they should be. He said noted Caucasians are not the majority when you add together all the people of color as opposed to the district’s teachers.

Ms. Brown said it can be asked what the district is willing to do to meet the paraprofessionals halfway to become certified teachers. Dr. McPherson said we would have to determine how many would like to become certified. She said over the years there have been programs for paraprofessionals to become certified.

Mr. Sokolovic said he has heard a major sticking point to certification is the student teaching required and going without a paycheck while becoming certified. He said the state is going to have change something due to the coming deficit in teachers.

Mr. Benejan said he was very happy this item was brought forward. He said we have a lot of amazing people who stay because they want the best education for our children.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was still a disparity compared to Hispanic student enrollment. He said this was something to look at in recruitment.

The next agenda item was on a districtwide diversity celebration. Mr. Sokolovic said the work here is extremely hard and a thankless task, and 95 percent of it would be self-criticism of the board and the city. He said he would like to have an outlet to celebrate the diversity in the district and what we're doing right.

Ms. Brown said it was worth doing and it should be more than just a cultural day. Ms. Castillo said there is a lot that falls under the umbrella of diversity.

She asked if there was any districtwide standardization of celebration of holidays and heroes. She said a diversity calendar might be provided to the schools as guidance.

Ms. Brown said it should be more than just people showing up with flags and we should think about what we're trying to accomplish.

Mr. Sokolovic said breakout sessions, similar to those in the parent convention, could be considered.

Mr. Sokolovic said he has spoken to some teachers who won't do special lessons for Black History month because they interweave it throughout the whole history curriculum. He said this is where we need to get to as a society by having everything integrated.

Ms. Brown said Black History Month was about more than just being black. It also involves the history of those who paved the way and their education and training. She said this educates the community about how we can fix things. Mr. Sokolovic said he supported exposing students to people who look like them such as doctors and lawyers.

Ms. Castillo discussed the concept of stages of multicultural curricular transformation, which is an assessment of where you are in terms of embracing diversity in stages. She described the stages that comprise the stages. She said she would share the link on the concept.

The committee members said they would like to work on the matter further before sending it to the full board.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod