

Monday, November 16, 2020

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held November 16, 2020, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:11 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, and Bobbi Brown. Board members Albert Benejan and Sybil Allen were present.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the committee's minutes of October 19, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on future committee actions. Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to work off the base of the data available today on proportions and ratio of students. He said he wanted to look at everything and how it is distributed, including magnet schools, gift and talented, dropout rates, SAT outcomes, and discipline. He said perhaps some of the work could be farmed out to other board committees.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee could also look at the racial makeup of parent leaders and involved parents. He said the committee would find things it could not solve, but if we look at the root causes we can have some impact.

Ms. Brown said the committee would touch every area of the Board of Education. Mr. Benejan said there are often language and communication issues with parents.

The next agenda item was discussion and analysis of student, principal, and staff demographic ratios.

Dr. Carmen McPherson discussed the data displayed on the PowerPoint related to the race and ethnicity of students and staff. She said it was a comparison between educators and students for 2019-20 district data that was submitted to the state, which was retrieved from state Department of Education's website.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the number of Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino educators could be lower in the classroom that students are seeing because it includes all certified staff.

Dr. McPherson said 74 percent of educators are white; 12 percent of students are white; 12 percent of educators are black; while 32 percent of our students are black; 11 percent of our educators are Hispanic/Latino and 51 percent of students are Hispanic/Latino.

Dr. McPherson said the greatest gap is within the Hispanic population. Mr. Sokolovic said we want to move these percentages and hopefully one day in a perfect world they would be relatively even. Dr. McPherson noted the ratio of the Asian population was even

Mr. Sokolovic said the amount of white educators works in favor of the 12 percent of white students, but it shortchanges the other 88 percent of students. He said he was not knocking Caucasian educators.

Dr. McPherson said with most of the data – such as dropout data or SAT outcomes – the demographics that tend to fare

better – in all urban centers across the nation – are the white students. She noted there are many variables that impact this.

Mr. Sokolovic said students perform better when somebody in front of them looks like them and relates to them.

Mr. Sokolovic said the district data provided was from last year. Dr. McPherson said it still gives an overall picture of what is going on.

Ms. Allen noted the disparity between African-American educators and the student body. She asked if there is a concerted effort to seek out minority teachers and educators. Dr. McPherson said the same disparity exists with Hispanic/Latino, and she said the district in the past went to the South and Puerto Rico to recruit. She said recommendations from this committee can address some of these issues.

Ms. Allen said she believed there was a consistent pattern of not hiring black and African-American teachers in the system. She said there should be a concerted recruitment effort.

Dr. McPherson said the focus should be on black and Hispanic students. Mr. Sokolovic suggested addressing it as students of color. He said these were going to be uncomfortable conversations and he would sometimes trip on his words.

Dr. McPherson said there are three Hispanic principals, three Hispanic assistant principals, and five black principals.

Mr. Sokolovic said the way the data was presented by Dr. McPherson was awesome and exactly what he was looking for.

Mr. Sokolovic said the percentage of administrators to total administrators by race indicates 58 percent of the administrators are Caucasian and 30 percent are African-American, which is almost in line with the students, and 9 percent are Hispanic/Latino, which is a greater disparity. He said that shows there may have been some intentionality on the administrative level for the African-American population.

Ms. Brown said the data was very interesting and she was interested in the recruitment measures that have been taken. She said she would like to hear about teacher career paths for current students.

Mr. Sokolovic said more information was needed from the HR department. He said administrators are typically recruited from teachers, so we would have to increase the number of teachers to increase the number of administrators. He said we have a very vicious cycle – too few educators of color and a large amount of children of color. He said students are not seeing enough role models.

Mr. Sokolovic said the teacher hiring is done at the building level. He said he was not knocking any principals, but he wondered if subconscious bias was taking place. Dr. McPherson said we need to be intentional about this and an expectation that is driven from a district standpoint. She said she understood there were intentional recruiting efforts after the 1970s in the district and she wondered if the district has been intentional about pursuing this and understanding the impact teachers who look like the students they teach can have. She said this may involve coming out of our comfort

zone to do that. She said suburban districts are intentionally hiring teachers of color.

Ms. Allen said there should be a concerted effort to hire teachers that represent our student population. Mr. Sokolovic, Mr. Benejan, and Ms. Brown said they agreed. Ms. Brown said when she attended Harding it seemed the amount of teachers who looked like her was increasing. She said she wondered if the Latino population was not going into the teaching profession in great numbers compared to other employment.

Dr. McPherson said an organization called Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers has been around for quite a while and is working in Central now. The concept is to start working with students of color starting in the 9th grade.

Ms. Brown said the committee could look at what is holding back people from pursuing education to become a teacher or to become an administrator.

Dr. McPherson said with some of the hirings at Central High this year there were intentional actions, which led to the hiring of two Central High graduates. She said Dr. Graf gets it. She said good people were sought, without lowering standards.

Ms. Allen described her experiences as a student in Prospect School in Bridgeport as deplorable, which included segregation in the classroom. She suggested there be visits to the classrooms.

Mr. Sokolovic said next month's agenda would include historical data, information about past recruiting practices,

and hiring practices. He said it would be beneficial to have someone from human resources discuss this.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said she believed the BEA had a committee on equity and diversity. Ms. Brown said she would like to hear from the BEA on this. Mr. Sokolovic noted sometimes diversity initiatives tend to go contrary to unions' interest, such as alternative routes to certification. Dr. McPherson said Ms. Batista put on a workshop on an equity agenda and noted the NEA nationally has an equity agenda.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would take care of reaching out to Ms. Batista.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod