

Thursday, June 4, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AD HOC COMMITTEE OF GREAT CITY SCHOOLS/MALES OF COLOR OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 4, 2020, by video and audio conference, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:47 p.m. Present were Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Sauda Baraka, John Ramos Jr., Albert Benejan, Natasha Noel, JoAnn Kennedy, Dr. Sheila Kearney, Amina Brown, and Dr. Carmen McPherson-Varner

Ms. Baraka moved to approve the committee's minutes of February 26, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Dr. Jenkins said she provided the updated version of the white paper to the committee. She said she has started formatting for completion.

Dr. Jenkins said today she worked on revising the introduction and provided background on the adoption of the Great City Schools Males of Color position statement. She said the adoption was to address the needs of males of color in the district and to understand the effects of systemic racism and institutional inequities on the education of males of color.

Dr. Jenkins summarized portions of the introduction and said the ad hoc committee was formed in 2016 to research, understand, and propose solutions. She said the effort is argue for overt structural support for males of color and to

argue for the systemic practice of equity audits for children. She quoted from *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. She added the white paper does not seek to compare the achievement of males of color to anything other than the standard of excellence that has been created for all children.

Dr. Jenkins said the ultimate goal of the white paper is to argue for formalized mentoring programs, provide young men of color with strategies, interventions and experiences that will inspire them to make positive choices that ensure positive outcomes during their school career and beyond.

Dr. Jenkins said there will be a section on that data that will summarize systemic challenges males of color have experienced. There will be a summary of voices of the community and the call to action, which creates an argument for mentoring.

Dr. Jenkins discussed the equity audit and the ways the Organization for Economic Co-operation defines dimensions of equity and recommends ten steps to equity in education.

Dr. Jenkins said more data needs to be added to the paper, along with text revisions, and the creation of some summary paragraphs and transitions between sections.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was very impressed, particularly since Dr. Jenkins has so much on her plate. He said he believed it captured the work of the committee and was a great starting point for the work that must continue.

Ms. Baraka thanked Dr. Jenkins for an phenomenal job. She suggested adding a reference to the *Crompton vs. Chop* case because it was a local case. Dr. Jenkins said the original intent was to have a person who has personal

experience write that section, but she has that material and a link of the case. Ms. Baraka offered to prepare this section to show the action that was taking place in the city at the time and send it to Dr. Jenkins.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to present something to the board on Monday. Ms. Baraka said the final document has to hit on every aspect of what is going on in our city, along the recommendations.

Ms. Noel said she would send her section on mentoring to Dr. Jenkins again.

The next agenda item was on mentoring programs. Mr. Sokolovic noted mentoring programs are running through the Males of Color Committee.

Mr. Ramos said he has checked in with students in his mentoring group for one-on-one discussions, although group sessions have not worked out.

Dr. Jenkins said the district was planning on three potential models for reopening in the fall. She noted budgets for mentoring would have to include personal protective equipment. She added that the budget process can often be slow and requires gathering legitimate price quotes, while receiving stipends involves W-2s. She said those working on the budgets for the mentoring programs should begin the process early.

Dr. Jenkins said the overall mentoring budget for this was about \$23,000. Mr. Sokolovic said there was talk on social media about a group getting \$40,000, which is not the case.

Ms. Noel said the middle-school program is designed to be group-based mentoring, with breakouts into small groups. Since the shutdown the mentees have been assigned to a mentor. She said the program contacts the mentors to make sure they have been in touch with the boys. Guidance and a small stipend has been provided to the mentors. Mentors have been asked to touch base with mentees at least every two weeks.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the committee meet during the summer to review the mentorship programs.

Dr. McPherson-Varner said the Central High mentoring program held about six sessions prior to closure, consisting of every-other-week meetings. She said it was group mentoring. Work on a project was just about to begin before the closure.

Dr. McPherson-Varner said she had touched base with some of the young men through Teams. She said there have been sessions with Central students to discuss their thoughts about what has been happening around the murder of George Floyd, and she would like to do something similar with the young men in the mentoring program.

Dr. Jenkins said she shared the budget template to Mr. Brockenberry, Mr. Ramos, Ms. Noel, and Dr. McPherson-Varner.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said she did not know if all the budgeted amounts for monitoring that were not spent by May can be rolled over to next year. Mr. Sokolovic said he believed Title I deadlines had been paused. He said he would look into the matter via e-mail.

Dr. Jenkins said she shared information about mentoring to the committee from the National Equity Foundation's website. Mr. Sokolovic said this seemed like a natural area for the committee to move into following the white paper.

Dr. Jenkins said the National Mentoring Partnership created a guide for boys and young men of color. She said the guide references the work of My Brother's Keeper.

Dr. Jenkins said creating a formal structure for mentoring is in the white paper's call to action. She said Ms. Shah recommended the equity audit, which would also look at hiring practices.

Ms. Baraka said she supported moving on listening to the boys and young men who have told us what they need to move forward with high standards as long as we're not comparing Bridgeport to other communities. She said that was her reservation about the equity concept.

Dr. McPherson-Varner said she supported moving forward in terms of equity. She added the state also uses an equity lens to enable access to education.

Dr. Jenkins said she would be adding notations to the parts of the white paper contributed by Dr. McPherson.

Mr. Ramos also supported using the equity lens.

The next agenda item was on COVID inequities and males of color. Mr. Sokolovic said the situation had shined a bright spotlight on inequities in education on communities of color, including the lack of devices and connectivity. He said there may be a silver lining because communities are horrified that the inequities exist.

Ms. Baraka said we should consider the mental health and social-emotional health of young men due to COVID and the tragic events of the country. She said we should look at how to support young men with generational trauma and trauma in general. She added many young men may not feel supported academically.

Dr. Jenkins suggested school leaders develop a plan around using mentoring to provide more social-emotional support for males of color. She said the theme of wellness could be a theme for next year's mentoring.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod