



APPROVED BY BOARD ON MARCH 21, 2017

**BURLINGTON BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS  
DIVERSITY & EQUITY COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Ira Allen Board Room**

**March 8, 2017**

**7 PM**

Attending Board Members: Commissioner Miriam Stoll (chair); Commissioners Lauren Berrizbeita, Brian Cina, and Kat Kleman

Other Board: Commissioners Jake Bucci (student representative), Susanmarie Harrington, and Kathy Olwell

Administration: Yaw Obeng, Superintendent; Miriam Ehtesham-Cating, Director of English Learners; Laura Nugent, Director of Student Support Services; Henri Sparks, Director of Equity and Safe Inclusive Schools

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.
2. Approval of Agenda:
  - A. *Motion to approve agenda, with discussion of the public statement moved ahead of items on student support, (Berrizbeita/Kleman) passed unanimously*
3. Public Comment:
  - A. Comments and Questions from the Public: None. The committee welcomed a trio of visiting students from UVM
4. Review of Suspension Data: Henri Sparks reviewed suspension data. Points of interest regarding restorative practices:
  - Some categories seem repetitive and ill defined (what is fighting? If most fights involve only 2 people, perhaps there are other issues at play)
  - Use of “unknown” category should be ended. We should not be suspending students for unknown reasons.
  - Need to define verbal/physical disrespect. Students should not be suspended for talking back to teachers. Can do more professional development around restorative practices to keep students in class. Teachers need alternatives to suspensions.
  - Want to continue to see suspension numbers get lower and lower

- Looking at creation of suspension intake referral forms and suspension review teams, to create uniformity across the district, and to create review of conditions to prevent suspensions

Questions and discussion included:

- How will categories be refined? What efforts made to define “unknown”?
  - School cultures are important. There can be pressure to be tough. How do we educate about alternatives to suspension: suspension doesn’t change students’ behavior in ways we want. There can be some resistance from staff and parents who see “tough love” as important; there needs to be alternatives. Students also need spaces to cool out without losing face.
  - Sparks recounted a successful use of an restorative practice for an incident that would have typically resulted in a two-day out of school suspension; restorative practice resulted in one day in-school suspension which was satisfactory to all parties, including the teacher involved.
  - Need to have rapid response ability to address situations as they emerge.
  - Goal is still to make suspensions very very rare in our district.
  - Disparity between IEP and non-IEP students has steadily widened; Sparks is in contact with Laura Nugent to better understand this. Is behavior sometimes a manifestation of a disability? And are teachers sometimes unaware of a student’s disability? Efforts continue to address this trend.
  - Same question about disparities for African-American students. Currently numbers reflect multiple infractions by a small number of students. More support systems are being put in place for African-American female students.
  - Twice as many suspensions this February vs. last February? Likely a combination of the above factors; to bring numbers down need to move towards restorative justice as well as address some of the issues discussed above.
5. Discussion of the motion noted in agenda to recommend to the full Board to adopt a public statement that reaffirms the District's current practices regarding inclusion and equity for all students regardless of immigration status

Miriam Stoll thanked the superintendent for developing the draft statement in response to last month’s committee discussion. Committee reviewed the current draft and had a rich discussion about it. Miriam Stoll will coordinate follow up revisions on a few points.

Miriam Ehtesham-Cating reported that the students who designed the All Are Welcome logo have been to Montpelier to discuss their work, and are preparing a community dinner and forum. A document explaining the new executive order on immigration has been prepared and translated into many of the languages that students use and speak at home.

Discussion of how the statement can be circulated:

- Post it in each school (with a prominent design/location)
- Sent to all families
- Translate the document to make it available in all the languages used in the district; make use of our multicultural liaisons to get message out
- Discussion of how we do not use Braille.
- Can also be a press release.
- Direct to students: via email, BHS Register, announcement
- Video
- Need to make sure a board member champions its circulation

*Motion on the wording of the motion to bring to the full board unanimously passes. The language that was unanimously agreed to is:*

Motion: The Diversity and Equity Committee unanimously brings forth a recommendation that a) the Board reaffirm its commitment to equity and inclusion in the form of a public statement (see below) and b) the statement be widely distributed to ensure that it reaches all District and community stakeholders.

## 6. Update on Student Support Services- Mental Health, Special Education

The superintendent noted that the department of student support services includes more than special ed. Senior Director Laura Nugent presented on other aspects of the department's work. Schools on average have .4-.5 FTE social workers. Only BHS currently has a full-time social worker. The budget for next year provides funding for 2 additional FTE social workers. Assignment of social workers doesn't necessarily fix anything; additional supports are seeking to provide systemic assistance. Commissioners Cina and Olwell noted that more supports are needed in the face of existing need. Commissioner Stoll noted that community-based therapists who take Medicaid could be based in schools. We already make this possible. Laura Nugent noted that the district is working on maximizing its Medicaid reimbursement funds.

Mental health committee meets monthly. Its 13 members represent most schools and roles (general education, special education, guidance, social services, psychologists). It develops plans for use of current resources. Later this month will hold a forum for staff (more than 70 people requested to join it).

Middle and high schools are exploring student study teams. This could permit evaluations, IEPs and 504 plans to be developed with greater consistency; would enhance equity of access for students and provide more consistency with requests for evaluations.

NFI works with the district to provide training in trauma-informed practices. Since the August district-wide training, cohorts from each school have continued to learn about trauma-informed practices and will bring information back to their colleagues. In FY 18 two designated schools will receive focused supports to increase staff skills and capacity.

Behavior interventions: in the coming year Howard Services will provide technical supports to implement a behavior interventionist program. 40 hours of high quality training will be provided to about 22 paraeducator staff. This involves no new hires. The goals are to reduce use of restraints and seclusion in our schools, and to reduce the use of Howard inclusion and independent school placements. Discussion of whether committee had ever looked at data on restraints; some committee members remembered such review, while others did not. Most use of restraints happens in independent schools, where we have no control over. Sense of committee to look at data on restraints and seclusion.

7. Adjournment

*A. Motion to adjourn passed unanimously at 8:20 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

Susanmarie Harrington