



Approved on October 10, 2017

**BURLINGTON BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS  
DIVERSITY & EQUITY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
Edmunds Middle School Library  
August 1, 2017  
7 PM**

Attending Board Members: Lauren Berrizbeita (committee chair), Susanmarie Harrington, Kat Kleman, Kathy Olwell, Stephanie Seguino

Other Board: Mark Barlow, Jeff Wick

Administration: Yaw Obeng, Superintendent,  
Henri Sparks, Director of Equity and Safe Inclusive Schools,  
Victor Prussack, Assistant Director of Curriculum

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.
2. *Approval of Agenda:* the agenda as organized in these minutes was unanimously approved.
3. *Public Comment:*
  - A. *Comments and Questions from the Public:* Clare Wool introduced Larissa Urban, Patty Wesley and Yvette Ambrose (all former members of the BHS guidance department) and requested that district administration inquire into the reasons why there has been so much recent turnover in the BHS guidance department, linking her concerns to the fulfillment of the district's equity mission and development of strategic planning objectives. Shireen Park raised concerns regarding poor pronunciation of names at the BHS academic achievement awards.
  - B. *Board Reflections:* Jeff Wick and Kathy Olwell echoed Clare Wool's concerns. Lauren Berrizbeita and Stephanie Seguino thanked those who spoke and noted that the commissioners are taking in the comments and considering them.
4. *Closing the Achievement Gap:* Victor Prussack reported on the 10 person team experience from the Harvard University's Achievement Gap Institute's 2017 Summer Institute. Participants reported an excellent experience. Some take-aways: the district needs to define what it means by *achievement gap* and needs to articulate *why* it is important that we address it (Victor calls it a moral imperative). Hardest thing is to figure out *how* to address

it, which includes refining what data we will use to measure progress. That can include data that we can count (e.g. test scores, retention); hear (e.g. student surveys); and see (e.g. building leader perspectives). Plans need to consider teachers (including looking at where we see strong teaching strategies already in place; considering peer perceptions of each other and how peers influence each other; family engagement and strategies for helping families support students). Discussion of strategies for helping families understand not only *how* but *why* supporting student work is important. Commissioners very interested in and supportive of other strategies for reframing engagement strategies and interested in whether we are connecting with other institutions (e.g. King Street, Boys & Girls Club) with related missions. Research and experience at other districts suggests that addressing achievement gaps will help all students be more successful. Institute opened by refuting the myth that attention to the achievement gap takes something away from high performing students. Victor noted that we have many of the right structures in place in our district (e.g. Professional Learning Communities; faculty meetings) we are not yet using those structures as effectively as we can. Stephanie Seguino noted that there are other districts--such as the Harlem Children's Zone--that have closed the achievement gap without changing the socioeconomic conditions of the students. She urged administrators not to spend a lot of time inventing metrics when other districts' rich experience have already developed measures we could use. Board interest is in monitoring and being able to budget for needed activities. Victor noted that the group that attended the Institute definitely feels a sense of urgency for moving forward. Yaw Obeng noted the importance of a strategic, district-wide approach; we need to move beyond small groups of teachers and/or administrators having training and conversation.

5. *Development of Community Outreach Plan.* The committee returned to the earlier discussion of possible community forums. Discussion about how and why to pursue these forums. Susanmarie Harrington reminded the committee about the broader policy governing this work, which is Policy 4.2 (Board Job Description), one portion of which notes the board's responsibility to:

2. Create and maintain the linkage between the community and the District Administration to represent the informed voice of the community. This linkage will include:
  - a. Seeking input regarding community values on issues of Ends and ethics.
  - b. Educating the community on issues impacting the district.
  - c. Reporting to the community on district performance.

The committee had previously recommended that community outreach focus on New American families and Special Education. Yaw Obeng reported that some senior directors are ready to support the committee's efforts. Kat Kleman and Susanmarie Harrington volunteered to work on the special education forum; Lauren Berrizbeitia and Kathy Olwell volunteered to work on the New American forum/effort, and Jeff Wick is considering involvement. Lauren Berrizbeitia will invite other board members to join these working groups when she reports to the full board in August.

Discussion of timing: some sentiment that we do the New American effort first (in October), although concerns expressed that we may need additional time to figure out how to do this work. General consensus was that the working group should meet and then propose a time frame.

Other possible topics could include forums on oppression and an educational forum on why include equity in the curriculum.

6. *Presentation of suspension data discussion:* Yaw Obeng and Henri Sparks presented on suspension data. Yaw Obeng noted that he would like to present the Equity and Inclusion Report in conjunction with annual monitoring. Will continue to present school-level reports so that the committee can see some of the deeper pieces, while also presenting higher-level views of data.

Henri Sparks said that monthly and yearly data will be presented in the Equity and Inclusion Report. The district will move to School-Wide Information System (SWIS) (currently used K-5) which permits principals to look at what is going on hourly in terms of suspensions and discipline. Customizable reports are a powerful tool for principals. The district will also implement PBIS more consistently district-wide (it is the current policy but it is not consistently implemented). Aligning Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices is important. In the past week, the district has had training on this point. District is looking at reducing criteria for out-of-school suspension; out-of-school suspension separates students from the possibility of education.

Discussion of how teachers will be supported and mentored in implementing new practices. Henri Sparks noted that the district has sometimes struggled in how to support the implementation of new initiatives. There will be monthly meetings to provide ongoing support for those trained this year, so that they are supported in developing and implementing plans to spread training throughout the district. District aspiration is to eliminate suspensions; no intention to force disruptive students to simply stay in class, but the intention is to ensure that policies are consistent across buildings and classrooms and to keep students connected to their education. Important to use language that reflects our interest in keeping students in class (e.g., discuss Student Support Centers, not suspension or planning rooms in a disciplinary context).

Policies 2.6 and 2.7 will have monitoring reports that include suspension data. Stephanie Seguino commended the systemic approach that has been described. Issues of implicit bias require self-awareness to overcome. The Oakland School District has basically ended suspension by successfully implementing restorative practices (John Kidder, who worked extensively with Oakland, is consulting with us this year.). It is possible to make major changes. District needs to support teachers to keep students in school; our student body is changing and is definitely more stressed than it used to be (e.g., higher rates of poverty; opioid epidemic).

7. Student/staff icons and electronic media use: Yaw Obeng described the consultation process that is working out various technological changes coming to the district. With the roll out of the new website and other systems, there is a natural moment to make some changes. Icons will not be personalizable in the new system. There will be a new logo in use.
8. Meeting adjourned at 8:43.

Respectfully submitted by Susanmarie Harrington