



APPROVED BY THE BOARD JANUARY 10, 2017

**BURLINGTON BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
DIVERSITY & EQUITY COMMITTEE MINUTES
January 3, 2017**

Attending Board Members: Stephanie Seguino, Lauren Berrizbeitia, Miriam Stoll, Anne Judson, Kathy Olwell, Mark Porter

Administration: Yaw Obeng, Laura Nugent, David Fitzpatrick, Liane Couture and Melissa Hathaway Danielle Brigham, and Cara Gleason Krebs

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:08p.m.
2. Approval of Agenda
 - A. *Motion to approve agenda (Berrizbeitia /Stoll)*
3. Special Education in BSD:

Presentation given by Laura Nugent and Yaw Obeng with input from staff who attended
See slides on Board Docs for this meeting.

4. Public Comment:
 - A. Comments and Questions from the Public

Chair Seguino noted that any questions that were asked that were not responded to tonight would be responded to in writing by the administration.

Karen Neuman – Asked about the JAG program at Hunt and sheltered classrooms; would like more information.

Suzy Comerford—Noted the need for systemic changes rather than piecemeal changes. Offers to sit and talk with groups of concerned parents or do anything else that is needed to help facilitate system change.

Eva Edwards-Stoll – 11th grade student at BHS who is on an IEP. Emphasized the need to have quality special educators and to make sure that students are placed with special educators that are a good match. Has had good and bad experiences with different special educators and some are just not that competent. Currently has a really good special educator and that makes all the difference. She is having a good year because of it.

Kate Stein – Very appreciative of all things that have happened and are happening in the District now regarding Special Education. Would encourage adding more SLPs to BHS as current online support is not sufficient; in person support is critical.

Jill Bordeaux –Calls for more flexibility in SOAR if we move in that direction.

Shelly Waterman - It would make things better if at all levels, in the schools and in planning, we could talk and think about disability as part of our District culture and diversity.

Eva Edwards-Stoll –suggested that there needs to be more awareness of disability, perhaps a Disability Awareness day in our schools once a year similar to the day of silence for GLBTQ people. Curriculum – for example in social studies -- does not often include people with disabilities and when she has asked teachers they say that there is no time to include it. People need to understand that we are here and have a voice.

Yaw responded to public comments noting that the District is now developing as part of its strategic plan a systemic approach to improving special education and this year's budget that is being worked on includes addition of resources (bus driver, social workers, speech and language pathologists, etc.) that will support special education needs. A more in depth planning process with public input specifically on support services and special education is planned for this spring and/or summer. Invitations to this will be sent out next month. He said systems and planning processes are being designed so that the needs of children on IEP's and other support plans are not an afterthought but are considered upfront in all initiatives throughout the district and especially in all equity and inclusion efforts. Laura identified that some of the Districts specific goals are to move to a model in which utilizes fewer special education para-educators and instead increases co-teaching and other more

inclusive models, to ensure that there is more oversight regarding paperwork so that financially the District is getting the maximum reimbursement for special education costs, and to put in place inclusive practices wherever possible such as integrating ESY services (summer services for kids whose IEP's specify them) and the regular education summer SOAR program, increasing social inclusion activities such as Reading for Inclusion and Unified Sports, and providing professional development to teachers.

5. Board discussion of Special Ed report

Board members thanked people for their public comments, noting that listening to parents' and students' personal experiences was very valuable. Board members commented that they were pleased that Special Education concerns are being considered in the Diversity and Equity committee. Board members identified some additional areas that were not addressed in the presentation that were of concern: Transitions between grade levels for children on IEP's and 504 plans, consistency of IEP quality and scope of services across schools and grades, social inclusion efforts, and the need to include regular education teachers in training around differentiation and special education and change their mindset, not just focus on special education and support staff.

The range of needs for kids is great, and knowing what is needed for one child with a certain disability may not apply at all to another child with a different disability. The District must have a means to hear from all parents and students who want to give input, which likely means a different type of system than works for other groups.

Parents want to give input to the Superintendent during planning and public input sessions but also feel that it is important to educate Board members as they are decision makers.

The District has made considerable progress in recognizing the need to view disability as integral to diversity and equity efforts in the district rather than viewing it in its own silo as has been done in the past. However, the experiences of parents suggest that what is happening in the schools often does not reflect this new understanding nor does what is happening consistently embrace a mindset of inclusion and/or belonging. There was acknowledgement that to get to this point is a process that will take time and will likely happen in "layers", and that this will require patience and commitment from all parties involved.

Some guidance counselors in the District have identified and would like to purchase a specific program/curriculum to be used in classroom instruction that supports building a culture of inclusion if money could be found.

6. Action items/decisions:

The Diversity and Equity Committee agreed to devote time at each meeting to Special Education issues related to Equity and inclusion.

Yaw and Laura will be inviting community members to a public input process this Spring that will be geared to improvements in the special education and support services offered by the District

Commissioner Stoll offered to coordinate communication between participants in today's meeting and the administration in order to promote a dialogue to determine how participants can continue to give input and maintain a dialogue with Yaw and the Board regarding improving the District's ability to serve children with special needs in an effective, equitable and inclusive manner.

7. Review of Suspension Data: Tabled until next month.

8. Adjournment

A. *Motion (Stoll /Berrizbeitia) to adjourn at 8:45 p.m.*