Newtown Board of Education
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee
BOE Conference Room
February 23, 2023, 6:00 pm

3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT 06470

MINUTES

Present: Alison Plante (chair), Dan Cruson (member), Deb Zukowski (member), Chris Melillo (Superintendent), Anne Uberti (Assistant Superintendent), Kellen Nixon (remote), and Jana Briggs (remote). No members of the public.

1. Call to Order

Ms. Plante called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. Public Participation

None.

3. Approval of minutes from January 12, 2023 Meeting

Mr. Cruson moved to approve the minutes from the January 12th meeting. Ms. Plante seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

4. Update on Nixon & Co. Current State Assessment

Ms. Zukowski moved to table the "Update on Nixon & Co. Current State Assessment." Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously. Discussion begins on agenda item 5, but shortly thereafter the remote participants join the meeting. Ms. Zukowski moves to untable the discussion. Mr. Cruson seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

Ms. Plante welcomes Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs, representatives of Nixon & Co., and asks three questions to kickoff the discussion: 1) how is it going, 2) what is complete so far, and 3) do you need anything. Ms. Briggs responds that there is a preliminary 60-Day plan that focuses on needs assessment by connecting with the DEI community and better understanding current school climates by observing classroom instruction along with talking with stakeholders including district/school leadership, staff, and students. Afterwards, recommendations will be shared, including potential areas for professional development. An initial in-person visit is planned for March 8-10, during which the team is planning to visit all schools in the District. The team will be developing the schedule in the days leading up to the visit.

Mr. Cruson, referring to Ms. Plante's question #3, added that the visit will likely help identify additional needs that the company may have. Ms. Briggs added that it would be good to join some Board meetings.

Mr. Melillo said that the Nixon & Co. team will be visiting with PEAC and district DEI committees as well as meeting with other stakeholders and joining other meetings.

Mr. Nixon mentioned that PEAC had questions about district professional development. Mr. Melillo and Mr. Nixon agreed to keep PEAC abreast of the of the plan and overall goals of the effort.

Mr. Cruson asked if Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs might contribute input to the District's Strategic Plan effort. Mr. Melillo responded yes, but not yet. Dr. George Coleman has also provided input given his familiarity with the District.

Mr. Melillo said that he will soon share the 60-day plan, first with his A-team and then with the DEI committee. He commented that the plan includes no preconceived notions of what our needs are for better supporting an inclusive learning environment. Instead, it provides a means to uncover them. Ms. Plante asked Mr. Nixon's classroom observations will be structured similarly to the District's Learning Walks. Mr. Melillo responded that they would be, and that Learning Walks also help gauge the classroom climate.

Mr. Nixon added that the plan prioritizes overall climate. It is meant to identify opportunities. It is not punitive, transactional, or highly prescriptive. While it won't be an immediate cure, it will set the foundations for a journey that will build an inclusive culture for all students across all schools. That said, we need to ensure that our the journey provides for flexibility (i.e., we need to be able to be nimble) in the face of change.

Mr. Melillo mentioned that currently we are celebrating Black History Month and have equity lessons. But, these are siloed types of learning. Instead, our everyday lessons should be inclusive of all students.

Ms. Zukowski added her concern that the Board needs visibility of the process. We need to ensure that other members do not feel left out of the loop. Ms. Plante said that, similar to other Board committees, we communicate via committee reports in full Board meetings. Ms. Briggs added that there needs to be a communication protocol that ensures all are involved. Mr. Nixon asked how the DEI committee is reporting out to the Board? He would like to understand the current communication and potentially help strengthen it. Mr. Cruson explained the current standing committee communication process. Ms. Zukowski suggested that we provide Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs with links to the video, including timestamps for the DEI reporting.

Mr. Nixon said that he is looking forward to the visit. "The more proximate we are to you, the better we can serve."

5. Overview of Curriculum Review through DEI Lens

Ms. Uberti gave a presentation on the District's ongoing efforts to review curriculum through the lens of DEI and the culturally responsive classroom. Before beginning the effort, Ms. Uberti reached out to other districts to learn how they reviewed their curriculum. Many of these districts had consultants review specific pieces of curriculum and then create reports with suggestions or things to consider. These efforts can cost tens of thousands of dollars, and don't provide full coverage across the full scope of a district's curricula. Instead, she wanted something that was more specific to our district and also

helped build the expertise within our district. She chose to work with EdAdvance, our Regional Educational Service Center, to run a Professional Development workshop.

Prior to the workshop, Ms. Uberti selected specific curricula, including NMS and NHS history, and forwarded them to EdAdvance. Four curriculum teams, that together represented every educational level, were invited to share their current and past experiences writing curriculum. The teams reviewed the selected works using the rubric provided in Appendix A. During the exercise, they experienced many "AHA moments," seeing things they missed and noting times when "invisible curriculum" (i.e., aspects of curriculum that are typically delivered but not formalized in the curriculum documents) were key to ensuring the curriculum was responsive. EdAdvance called out patterns, which Ms. Uberti read from her notes, provided in Appendix B. The overall effort lasted for three days and Ms. Uberti shared that she thought it was among the best professional development she's ever been a part of.

Future goals include:
- Expanding writing responsive curriculum is an on-going process,
- Updating resources and libraries to represent students
- Ensuring more uniformity of quality, noting that there are differences in curriculum across the different teams, by training curriculum writers ala the manner that was done when instituting Concept-Based Curriculum,
- Developing and providing professional development for teachers to help them with instructional practices.

Mr. Melillo said that recommendations from Mr. Nixon include involving families and giving students choice and voice. He continued by sharing personal experience from his family, noting that students who learn differently may not be engaged when standard instructional processes are used.

Ms. Uberti suggested that a review of the curriculum process be added to a future Board agenda. She added that every March an internal review of the prior year's progress is conducted to continuously improve how training is provided that supports the Curriculum Development Council's initiatives. The current curriculum template needs revision that will possibly lead to updated training in some areas. For change, the most effective process is to first train teacher leaders who then are an example and mentor to and trainer for the rest of the teachers. This process takes time.

Mr. Melillo used co-taught classes as an example of the need for teacher training. Such classes have two teachers, each with complementary skills at engaging students. If the teachers take turns teaching, the students do not necessarily benefit from content being delivered in multi-accessible manners. Training needs to help teachers simultaneously teach the class.

Ms. Uberti added that ELL is another example where multi-accessible methods improve engagement, especially if done in a way that reaches both students and their families.

Ms. Plante noted that the approach of using standardized templates and rubrics is a step towards systematizing curriculum review (i.e., that the questions or prompts in the template are being consistently asked instead of depending on the curriculum writer to remember them). Training the

teachers in this practice makes the effort sustainable over time and does not depend on a consultant to review specific curriculua.

Mr. Cruson appreciates the time and effort needed to train the curriculum writers and the staff. He asked if the intent is to go back over all of the curriculum to ensure that it conforms to the updated rubric. Ms. Uberti responded that the key areas are English language arts and social studies. We can make progress in those areas by reviewing texts and ensuring more diversity and choice of materials. In addition, we need to be alert for "troublesome" curriculum and address that more quickly than the review cycle calls for. Part of this will include using labels provided in Rubicon that show the status of the revision to help document the overall revision process.

Mr. Melillo shared that "you can do everything right and still have things go wrong", and that effective engagement in the classroom depends on both curriculum itself and the delivery of that curriculum. He also added that there is a fine line between academic freedom and district-based curriculum. In the past, Newtown had a school-centric mindset. We need to work on how to enable academic freedom in the context of a such a district-wide approach to curriculum.

6. Public Participation

None.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Cruson moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:29 pm, seconded by Ms. Zukowski. Motion passed unanimously.

THESE ARE DRAFT MINUTES AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE BOE DEI COMMITTEE.

Appendix A

Culturally Responsive and Equitable Teaching Practices & Universal Design for Learning

Culturally Responsive and Equitable Teaching Practices Rubric Collection Form

Materials should be culturally responsive and include a variety of student experiences and representations to avoid bias and promote equity. Curricular support materials, across the range of resources, meet the following criteria:

Indicator look-fors to find evidence of criteria in the indicators. This list is not intended to be exhaustive or restrictive.

- Language or images that reinforce stereotypes, misrepresentations, etc.
- Discussion prompts in lessons, activities, and textbook sidebars
- Discussion prompts for students to share their experiences as they relate to real-world contexts
- Discussion prompts that encourage students to make connections to their own life and to share their experiences with others
- Suggestions for the teacher in teacher resource materials
- Additional materials and readings, sidebars, and links to online resources, particularly those that promote diversity and diverse voices, etc.
- Additional resources and links to information that provide relevant background knowledge for learners who may not be familiar.

Rubric Indicators	*Evidence and Comments*
Are free from stereotypes, generalizations, misrepresentations, or negative portrayals of any group (e.g., based on culture, nationality, language, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identification, disability, socioeconomic status, or religion, etc.)	
Provide opportunities for students to share or learn about each other's differences.	
Present opportunities to recognize and value di!erences between the home cultures of students and the culture of the classroom or school.	
Promote diverse voices and perspectives of different groups.	
Provide relevant background knowledge when needed and/or opportunities to research aspects of a culture to learn more.	

Universal Design for Learning Evidence Collection Form

These guidelines offer a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities. Reference the UDL Guidelines Chart links for more information.

Domain: Engagement

Indicators for **Recruiting Interest**	Evidence and Comments
7.1 Optimize individual choice and autonomy	
7.2 Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity	
7.3 Minimize threats and distractions	
Indicators for **Sustaining Effort and Persistence**	Evidence and Comments
8.1 Heighten salience of goals and objectives	
8.2 Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge	
8.3 Foster collaboration and community	
8.4 Increase mastery-oriented feedback	
Indicators for **Self-Regulation**	Evidence and Comments
9.1 Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation	
9.2 Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies	
9.3 Develop self-assessment and reflection	

Domain: Representation

Indicators for **Perception**	Evidence and Comments
1.1 Offer ways of customizing the displays of information	
1.2 Offer alternatives for auditory information	
1.3 Offer alternatives for visual information	
Indicators for **Language and Symbols**	Evidence and Comments
2.1 Clarify vocabulary and symbols	
2.2 Clarifying syntax and structure	
2.3 Support decoding texts, mathematical notations, and symbols.	
2.4 Promote understanding across languages.	
2.5 Illustrate through multiple media	
Indicators for **Comprehension**	Evidence and Comments
3.1 Activate or Supply Background Knowledge	
3.2 Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships	
3.3. Guide information processing and visualization. 3.4 Maximize transfer and generalization	

Domain: Action & Expression

Indicators for **Physical Action**	Evidence and Comments
4.1 Vary the methods for response and navigation	
4.2 Optimize access to tools and assistive technology	
Indicators for **Expression and Communication**	Evidence and Comments
5.1 Use multiple media for communication	
5.2 Use multiple tools for construction and composition	
5.3 Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance	
Indicators for **Executive Function**	Evidence and Comments
6.1 Guide appropriate goal settings	
6.2 Support planning and strategy development	
6.3 Facilitate managing information and resources	
6.4 Enhance capacity for monitoring progress	

Evidence and Comments:

Adapted from West Ed's Culturally Responsive and Equitable Teaching Practices Rubric and CAST's Universal Design for Learning materials.

Appendix B

Ms. Uberti's notes from EdAdvance Professional Development

Some patterns noted:

- There is not yet evidence that the sample units provide an opportunity for students to share and learn about each other.
- It is not yet evident that attention is consistently paid to the inclusivity of all learning styles and using multiple modalities.
- Based on what the reviewer could access, the selected materials are free from stereotypes and negative portrayals; however there are limited opportunities for students to engage in resources containing multiple perspectives.
- There is not yet evidence that the sample units present opportunities to recognize and value differences between the home culture of students and the culture of the classroom or school.
- There is limited evidence that the sample units promote diverse voices and perspectives of different groups.
- There is not yet evidence that the sample units provide relevant background knowledge when needed and/or opportunities to research aspects of a culture to learn more.
- There is not yet evidence that the sample units are culturally responsive in terms of representation and/or social justice orientation
- Teachers' materials contain evidence of an extensive collection of resources from diverse authors. This includes several primary source documents.

Recommendations:

- Consider differentiating instructional strategies to allow for increased student voice and choice, connecting learning to students' real-life experiences and interests.
- Provide guidance and opportunities for students to share their own identities, experiences, and learn about each other's differences.
- Include guidance and opportunities for students to make connections between their own lives and the topics studied and to share these experiences with others.
- Offer guidance within the unit documents to give students opportunities to contribute their prior knowledge and experience with a topic.
- Provide guidance for teachers to use the unit to develop culturally responsive and equitable lesson plans.
- Consider enhancing guiding questions to explicitly name culture, students' cultures, and/or the ways they support a more robust understanding of the topic studied.

- Include more texts with historical figures/authors of diverse cultural backgrounds across the curriculum.
- Include more texts that represent LGBTQ issues, gender diversity, people of color, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.
- Include additional materials, readings, and links to electronic resources that promote diverse voices and perspectives of different cultures, including asset-based perspectives of diverse populations through their strengths, talents, and knowledge.
- Provide additional opportunities/guidance for students to understand alternative points of view, including considering different points of view on the same event or experience, especially points of view from marginalized people/communities.
- Consider including guidance for engaging students' families to enhance learning.
- Provide resources to assist educators in being aware of their own biases and gaps between their own culture and students' cultures.
- Provide guidance to support student-led discourse and questioning, including discussion prompts and question stems that encourage students to celebrate diversity and/or discuss diversity or the lack thereof.
- Continue identifying opportunities to make real-life connections between academic content and the local community, culture, environment, and resources; encourage students to connect learning to real life and take meaningful action.
- Consider providing guidance to support the selection and use of high-quality diverse texts and the curation of culturally responsive and diverse classroom libraries.
- Consider providing guidance to support teachers in developing positive relationships with students and classroom cultures of high achievement.
- Provide opportunities for students to connect to experiences beyond their own and to examine their own perspectives.