

**Newtown Board of Education**  
**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee**

BOE Conference Room  
August 24, 2023, 6:00 pm

3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT 06470

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Dan Cruson (acting chair), Deb Zukowski (member), Chris Melillo (superintendent), Jana Briggs (6:25 pm, Nixon & Co.), two members of the public.

**Absent:** Alison Plante

**Call to Order**

Mr. Cruson called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

**1. Public Participation**

None.

**2. Approval of minutes from June 1, 2023 Meeting**

Mr. Cruson moved to approve the minutes from the June 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. Ms. Zukowski seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

**3. Update on Summer Work (including Administrators' Retreat)**

Mr. Melillo noted that the District's Strategic Plan includes a focus on DEI, and he stated that the Administrators' Retreat included identifying actionable items and structures for implementing the Strategic Plan. The District (C-Suite) and every school is now working to fully define school success plans. The District is scheduled to present its plan during the Sept. 21<sup>st</sup> A-Team meeting and the schools' presentations are scheduled for Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Melillo added that he had met with Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs earlier, focusing on building capacity within the schools. They prepared an Equity Leader Role Description, shown in Appendix A, in which the equity leaders will work together with their administrators to help roll out District initiatives in their respective schools. DEI initiatives will be embedded throughout curriculum and other core programs, and outreach to parents ala a "Parent University" model will be provided to ensure that parents are more fully informed. There will also be Board workshops to ensure that members of the Board are also fully aware of what DEI looks like in Newtown.

Mr. Cruson asked how many members will be seated on school-based equity teams. Mr. Melillo responded that there would be 4-5 members on the K-8 teams. The existing high school team structure will continue as is.

Ms. Zukowski asked if additional budgeting was needed to provide stipends for such work. Mr. Melillo answered that the work will be done through existing professional development. If needed, grant money can be used for additional work.

Mr. Cruson asked if school administrators already have people in mind to fill the equity leadership roles. Mr. Melillo answered yes.

#### **4. Look Ahead: Plans for Upcoming Work**

Ms. Biggs said that Kellen & Co. representatives met with Mr. Melillo, Ms. Uberti, and Ms. DiBartolo in July, and said that they heard “loud and clear” that the work for the upcoming year should focus on communication, both internal and external, as well as equity team leadership that focuses on the leadership-level prior to the teachers. A document listing the Kellen & Co. work plan goals addressing the upcoming work is available in Appendix B. There is an in-person visit planned for September that will focus on messaging and finishing a first semester plan of work.

Ms. Zukowski asked about better understanding what the District’s base-line performance is. She noted that the Board still does not have information about representation and success in academic programs. Ms. Briggs responded that such data already exists. The metrics alluded to in the work plan goals will be ones that are specific to measuring the success of attaining the objectives noted in the plan.

Mr. Cruson asked about the upcoming visit. Ms. Briggs replied that they will be discussing more about what metrics are needed to measure the overall success of the plan.

Mr. Melillo stated that the A-Team will share read-outs of the progress and related data to regularly understand what is working and what isn’t. EduCLIMBER data will also be reviewed and discussed. Again, DEI is embedded within Strategic Plan efforts. Professional development will be provided to administrators. Teachers will be included once the administrators and equity leaders are on board. We are moving to a good place. We also need to bring families in.

Mr. Cruson noted that “Parent University” style communication is important so that parents do not feel like things are happening behind closed doors. Mr. Melillo added that parents even should be involved in planning parent-based seminars. The next A-Team meeting will discuss potential scheduling, frequency, and other logistics as well as methods for better understanding family participation preferences. Mr. Cruson agreed that it is important to have parents engaged to ensure that the DEI work is more fully transparent.

#### **5. Public Participation**

None.

## **6. Adjournment**

Ms. Zukowski moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 pm, seconded by Mr. Cruson. Motion passed unanimously.

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

## **Appendix A**



## Equity Leader Role Description

Newtown Public Schools is committed to addressing diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion across the district. We understand that in order to make a lasting impact around our DEAI work, it must live at all levels of the district - including the schools. We are revising our Equity Leader role to serve as the first line of capacity building within the district.

Equity Leaders will support school administrators in rolling out district initiatives at the school level. They will receive professional learning opportunities alongside their administrators and will work with their administrators to plan, organize and implement a school-based equity team as a sub team of their school's Safe School Climate Committee (with exception of the high school). Equity Leaders will support the deployment of the DEAI work into classrooms.

This year's work will focus on understanding Dimensions of Diversity and building communities of practice that foster a culture of collaboration and support the creation of safe spaces where space is held to practice having necessary, and sometimes difficult, conversations.

Careful consideration should be given when accepting this role. Your commitment to this means that you will support Newtown's DEAI Commitment and its tenets:

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are words that, when used together, describe policies and programs that promote the representations, participation and contributions of different groups of individuals as set forth in Policy 0523 Equity and Diversity including but not limited to people of different race, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, sexual orientation, or gender expression or identity.

More specifically:

- Schools should be welcoming and supportive spaces for our students.
- Our curriculum should be infused with materials that include diverse authors, protagonists, heroes and historical figures.
- When studying topics in our classroom, our students will learn through multiple lenses and points of view.
- Schools should embrace kindness and diversity. Any form of harassment or bullying based on personal characteristics, as enumerated above, will not be tolerated.
- As educators, we need to provide various perspectives on topics and remain apolitical. To encourage critical thinking, we need to develop learning environments that allow students to identify and understand perspectives provided in the material and related discussions, and to draw their own informed conclusions. That is where true learning occurs.

## Appendix B



**Project: Newtown Public School District (NPSD)  
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives; DEAI  
Work Plan Goals for District, Board + Equity Team  
Messaging + Capacity Building**

### **SUMMARY OF SERVICES**

Building on the district's current priorities and the recommendations of Newtown Public Schools' Superintendent and leadership team, Nixon & Co. Consulting Group shall act as Project & Lead Facilitator for continued development of NPS's DEAI Key Values and Initiatives, specifically focused on increasing student achievement and engagement. These proposed activities reflect the priorities and tactics set forth in the DEAI Work Plan that was developed as part of the Current State Assessment completed in Spring 2023. The Group will work with Superintendent Chris Melillo and identified members to support the following goals, outlined in the Work Plan:

#### **Goal 2: District Leadership will advocate for and support district-wide DEAI efforts**

Timeline: Fall 2023 - Spring 2024

30 hours per month of in-person and virtual support

- Internal and external messaging of DEAI efforts
  - Level-setting
- Assessing Org Capacity for DEAI work
- Professional Learning in coordination w/ BoE
- Measuring Impact: Goals and Metrics
- Board Engagement

Reporting

- Board reporting
- DEAI committee meetings

#### **Goal 4: Build capacity to operationalize DEAI work within Newtown Public Schools**

Timeline: Fall '23 - Spring '24

Facilitate necessary professional learning:

- Creating Welcoming and Supportive Spaces
- Understanding Dimensions of Diversity
- Holding Space for Necessary Conversations
- Creating Interpersonal Group Dynamics
- Culture of Collaboration

