

Board of Education
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Sub-Committee
May 10, 2022
10am
BOE Conference Room
3 Primrose Street Newtown, CT 06470
Minutes

1. Call to Order - 10am
Present: Board members: Don Ramsey, Dan Cruson, Rebekah Harriman, DEI Coordinator Wesley Johnson, 3 members of the public
2. Public Participation
Kersti Ferguson, 60 Taunton Hill Road, Newtown
From NYC in 2011, son at HOM in 2nd grade, saw a concerning social media post so wanted to come and listen to the meeting.
3. Approval of Minutes of 3/11/22 -
Mr. Cruson makes a motion to approve the minutes of 3/11/22. Ms. Harriman seconds.
Mr. Ramsey makes a motion to amend the minutes “instead of Mr. Cruson noted a board level retreat - change to “a “to any” - motion fails 2-1 with Mr. Ramsey voting in favor.
Motion by Don amend the minutes to include that DEI training should be on a volunteer basis.
Motion passes unanimously.
Amended motion passes unanimously.
4. Discussion on Training for DEI Subcommittee Members

Concern from Mr. Cruson that we only offer training to subcommittee members, should be the entire board. Ms. Harriman agrees that training should start with subcommittee and move to entire board. Mr. Ramsey also that we should start at the subcommittee level and move to the rest of the board. Mr. Ramsey wants to “totally validate” the work of Mr. Johnson, asks to see the syllabus and references. Also notes that we are all trying to do the same thing, but he has a different approach – there are quite a few different approaches. Would encourage us to seek out alternative approaches – would rather use the term symposium training.

Mr. Johnson believes that when you share ideas you have a greater opportunity for that idea to be pushed through because you then have buy in. Hopes the subcommittee and the board at large have trust in him. We all desire to reach the same goal, hopes there would be a level of trust in how we arrive there.

Mr. Ramsey trusts Mr. Johnson’s character, but he does not have trust in a monopoly on wisdom. The request for trust is well taken, other people have told him Mr. Johnson is a nice person, but to ask folks to have total trust borders on “not arrogance”, but there should not be a monopoly on trust.

Mr. Cruson asked if Mr. Johnson is willing/able to provide training. Mr. Johnson noted that he would provide some opportunities and also bring in outside resources.

Ms. Harriman asks that we refer to it as Professional Development - consistent language for staff
Mr. Ramsey would like to use the term symposium and that training for the committee be voluntary. He reserves the right to volunteer to participate in whatever we decide to call it.

Ms. Harriman noted that as board members we need to lean into the uncomfortable to enhance our learning and asks that Mr. Ramsey keep an open mind to the learning and difficult conversations.

Mr. Johnson discussed the planning of any Professional Development –noted that before developing a training, we need to collectively answer the question “What does this subcommittee feel like we need?”

Mr. Ramsey noted that unity and diversity go hand in hand. Will not agree to professional development without first seeing a syllabus with resources outlined.

Ms. Harriman agreed with Mr. Johnson that the first step is to ask ourselves the question about what we want to learn and suggested the subcommittee create a shared google doc to brainstorm ideas, needs, and wants. Mr. Ramsey noted that he will not ask those questions first. He wants to see the syllabus first. He went on to explain that as a prerequisite for providing information or questions on a google doc regarding DEI training, he needs to have a syllabus and a list of resources by Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Cruson disagrees with Mr. Ramsey, feels we need to do the document first to inform the syllabus.

Motion - Ms. Harriman makes a motion to create a google doc to inform the Professional Development for the Subcommittee around DEI.

Seconded by Mr. Cruson. Passes 2-1 with Mr. Ramsey opposed.

5. Discussion on Equity Sustainability Planning

Ms. Harriman wondered if we are in a place where we can even have this discussion. Resolution is a great public statement of support, but they do not ultimately move the transformation.

Mr. Johnson noted that if the ideas in the resolution are going to move to fruition, we need to keep having the conversation. We need it to become the fabric of the culture. Next steps - present this team with a copy of a draft of a plan – very skeletal plan that will need a lot of work to be filled in. Essentially, the plan would want to ensure that this work is a part of the district. Southington, Stratford and Southbury have them locally. Looking at those as a starting point. Different based on what this district needs and wants, but were developed from a place of intentionality.

Mr. Ramsey said that the resolution itself is a backdrop, but at the last meeting Ms. Harriman indicated that we had a policy that codified it. Mr. Ramsey asked to see that policy. He went on to note that some of these things can be modified, as he has concerns about uniformity, which that can lead to indoctrination. The resolution could be modified, and the policy could be rescinded – not that we would want to do that.

Ms. Harriman asked that Mr. Johnson send examples of a plan for the committee to review prior to the next meeting for discussion.

6. Update from Staff

Mr. Johnson: Feedback from the staff on the recent training was well received, both in writing and verbally. Training allowed for exploration and conversation. Framed it that there was no right or wrong. An opportunity to explore, learn and grow.

Adding more depth to school based teams with the exception of the HS, which has its own DEI committee (teachers and students). Every level under the HS, DEI is a part of the Safe School Climate Committee. A fluid document has been created so that each school can come up with a structure that is best for their individual school. Looking to identify 2 persons per school who will receive training, leveraging the outside resources. CAPS has a Diversity Director that has pulled together the 33 DEI staff around the state.

Mr Ramsey suggested Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism and asked if Mr. Johnson had looked at it. Mr. Johnson affirmed that he has, but feels it is in our best interest to stay away from organizations that have political personalities in a leadership position. The intent of the organization is good.

Mr. Johnson thinks that this work is really important that we are doing. Any time we are engaging in this kind of work, it can be messy, but tension is good, as long as the intent is right.

Some of the conversations that he is entrusted to have with people, suggest even more that this work is important. When you have little kids that are making blatant and intentional comments about race, we have a problem. Some of the things he is hearing, that are not officially reported, are a cause for concern. The reality of it is that these things exist here.

We have a wonderful opportunity to allow kids to have conversations with intentionality, with integrity, we need to engage staff to facilitate these conversations.

The world is becoming more diverse, we need to equip our kids to have success in an increasingly diverse world.

Mr. Ramsey noted that he wanted to validate and add to what Mr. Johnson says. These individual things that occur with kids is tragic. His concern is that 9 out of 10 times the problem is the adults not the kids. With kids, we need to be sure not to cast dispersions on an entire population. Not to undermine the incidents, they are real, and they have to be addressed. We need to be careful in our own sphere of influence that people of good intentions, in good faith always seek the truth. We may see things differently, but if our intentions are in good faith, we can work through those. We need to encourage adults. The public discourse has not been great. We need to encourage people to be more measured in the manner that we express ourselves.

7. Meeting Schedule

The committee agreed that meetings would be monthly going forward - 2nd Tuesday of the month - 9:30am.

8. Public Participation

Doug Lord - Town Librarian - 58 Venice Drive, Burlington, CT

Organization is interested in helping this effort, can't pretend to be able to solve it for us, he can help with K-12, but can also help with education for grownups – ages 0-110. Topics on DEI generally, about schools and boards of education. He sees a lot of concern in the community about what the schools are doing/not doing. He would be happy facilitate those discussions. A healthy library depends on a healthy community. That means lots of conversations/lots of

learning. Small actions rooted in what matters to Newtown are where something starts. There needs to be a calm chain reaction. Consider them to be a partner – motivated to help out.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Cruson and seconded by Mr. Ramsey. Motion passes unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 11:03am.